The debate in England on the progress and regress of music, 1888–1907

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Thesis submitted for PhD degree
Declaration of Authorship

I, John Francis Ling, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Date:

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I wish to express my most sincere thanks to my supervisor, Paul Harper-Scott, for guidance that has been both encouraging and challenging in equal measure. I have also benefited greatly from the regular seminars that Paul has organised for his PhD students, whose helpful comments are gratefully acknowledged (Annika Forkert, Michael Graham, Nathan Mercieca, Sarah Moynihan, Chris Tarrant, Jess Williams). I would also like to thank my adviser, Stephen Rose, and friends Rachel Moore and Leanne Langley for their encouragement. I have also benefited enormously from the intellectually stimulating and friendly atmosphere of the Royal Holloway Music Department. Finally I must thank my wife, Mary, for her interest and support over the time since I became a student again.

Abstract

Drawing on a very extensive survey of English periodicals, specialist and non-specialist, this thesis examines the critical commentary on composition – foreign and native – and on the level of public interest in serious music during the twenty-year period from 1888 to 1907. A preoccupation in existing scholarship with the polarised descriptors of ‘das Land ohne Musik’ and ‘English Musical Renaissance’ has narrowed the account of the debate. Critical opinion was wide-ranging and diverse, even on the question of the relationship between music and ethics. Most critics saw music as a cosmopolitan field, and the thesis adds substantially to scholarship by analysing the critical commentary on new foreign music. It demonstrates that the topic of programme music, raised to prominence by the music of Richard Strauss, attracted as much critical attention as the development of native music. Opinion on the latter was far more diverse than its portrayal in the ‘renaissance’ narrative, and did not, as some scholars claim, reflect
anxiety about the growing political and economic power of Germany. Some critics regarded the expression of national identity in music as irrelevant, whilst others tried to formulate ethical desiderata for English music. The thesis also examines the commentary on the level of demand for and supply of serious music – foreign and native. The Queen’s Hall Proms did most to popularise serious music, but with the exception of Elgar, native music was unpopular and an effort to boost it by means of a national festival failed. Contemporaries were less inclined than some scholars to acquit England completely of the ‘ohne Musik’ charge, as in their view commerce prevailed over art, state aid was unforthcoming, provincial festivals and music colleges came in for much criticism and the appearance of flourishing concert life was deceptive, although there was no denying the growth in amateur participation.
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1 Introduction

1.1 Topic

‘Anyone who looks closely at the social history of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain cannot but be struck by the immensely varied, contradictory, and fissiparous quality of many of the movements, values, and institutions there encountered. Preconceived “Victorian” and “Edwardian” archetypes rapidly dissolve in the face of a riotous pluralism of human experience embracing government, religion, work, family, moral attitudes, popular culture, and sexual relationships’.¹ José Harris goes on to describe Britain during this period as ‘a ramshackle and amorphous society, characterised by myriad contradictory trends and opinions, and capable of evolving contingently in many different ways’.² Bernard Porter makes a similar point: ‘Britain in the nineteenth century, and for some way beyond, comprised not one but a number of “societies”, each with its own value system and characteristic “discourse”’.³

If the depiction above applied just as much to music, then one would expect to find great diversity of opinion in this field too. In accounts of the development of music during the period the impression is given of a dominant narrative of an ‘English Musical Renaissance’ (EMR). In what might be termed its ‘strong’ form, this is a narrative about composition. First sketched by the critic J.A. Fuller Maitland in 1897 and formulated more explicitly in 1902, it asserts that English music had been under the foreign domination of, first, Handel and then Mendelssohn until about 1880, when there was a step-change in the quality of English composition in the works of Parry, Stanford, Mackenzie and others. The most recent full-length study of the EMR by Hughes and Stradling (2001) depicts it as a politically motivated enterprise to found a national music.⁴ The weaker form of the ‘renaissance’ narrative is the assertion that, whatever view is taken of composition, interest in music and the scale of musical activity advanced significantly during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.⁵

¹ Harris 1993: 2
² Ibid.: 3
³ Porter 2004: 22–3
⁴ Hughes and Stradling 2001
⁵ See, for example, Eatock 2010, discussed below, p. 223.
By examining a very wide range of critical opinion this thesis will show that both EMR narratives were but strands – controversial strands – in a broader debate about the progress or regress of music, a debate initially sparked off by Wagner’s music. In the 1870s the English music community had been riven by the impact of Wagner, whose theory about the relationship between words and music divided opinion amongst English music critics as never before. Antagonism later softened – and for the concert-going public Wagner became hugely popular – but the issues that his music had raised did not die down completely and rather continued as a strand in a more wide-ranging and ethically loaded debate amongst English critics as to whether music was progressing or regressing. This debate forms the topic of this thesis. Critics were concerned about the direction in which composition appeared to be moving. They were also concerned about the level of public taste in England, as indicated by the extent of interest in, and appreciation of, art music. Diversity of opinion abounded: even the belief in the ethical power of music – a belief implicit in much of the effort to promote music – was felt to need justification, or even called into question. Nationalistic calls for English music to express a distinctively English character were as often opposed as put forward, and such calls actually fell off during a period when, according to one theory of the musical renaissance – that it represented a response to Britain’s loss of dominance in international politics and trade – they should have been gaining ground. Critics were as much interested in foreign composition as in native, and the music of Strauss, in particular, stimulated more critical debate than any other topic.

The focus throughout is on art music, which even when based on a ‘sacred’ text was performed under concert conditions. Church music is excluded, although the occasional commentator suggested that this was where one should look for English prowess. Although critics appraised music of all kinds, the debate about musical progress was

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6 The press reception of Wagner during the period 1873–1900 was the subject of my MMus dissertation (Royal Holloway, 2006). Exemplar texts are (1) anti-Wagner: ER1876.01, MT1876.11; (2) pro-Wagner: Hueffer 1874; Ac1874.02.

7 Belief in the morally elevating power of music underpinned the Tonic Sol-fa movement (McGuire 2009).

8 Temperley 1999, Hughes and Stradling 2001

9 The Anglican liturgy being entirely specific to England (and the British Empire), church music was unable to make any impact on the continent.
dominated by the large-scale genres of choral music, orchestral music and opera; for this reason little space is devoted to chamber music, piano music or songs.

The period under examination is from 1888 to 1907. A period of twenty years was chosen to enable significant changes to be detected. The year 1907 was chosen as endpoint because the following year Elgar’s First Symphony appeared and to cover its reception would have required a considerable extension. The starting date of 1888 is not claimed to have any narrative significance. It is, however, a justifiable point of entry: by 1888 Wagner had been dead for five years and both the immediate reflections after his death and the heat of the initial controversy had to a large extent abated. Moreover, the beginnings of the ‘English musical renaissance’ that a contemporary critic and more recent scholars have argued for are generally dated to around 1880 or earlier, so the period from 1888 onwards should show the extent to which belief in such a renaissance had taken root.

1.2 Existing scholarship: a brief overview

About thirty years ago historical musicology took a sociological and cultural ‘turn’ away from the study of works – especially canonical works considered as autonomous aesthetic objects – and towards studies of the manner in which musical practices were embedded in their social context. This turn has suited the study of music in nineteenth-century Britain, as there is a wide consensus, dating from the period itself, that English composition yielded few works of lasting value.

Nicholas Temperley has observed that the widespread prejudice against Victorian art music was shared by the Victorians themselves. Temperley, like many other writers, mentions the description of England as ‘das Land ohne Musik’. This was the title of a book by a German journalist, Oskar Schmitz, first published in 1904 and reissued in several editions until 1915, but, surprisingly, not noticed in the British musical press at

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10 The fact that Dahlhaus treats 1907 as the end of the ‘nineteenth century’ is coincidental (Dahlhaus 1989: 391).
11 Howes 1966 sees the revivals of Tudor music and folk music around 1840 as significant precursors.
12 Temperley 1986
the time. Schmitz alleged that England was the only civilised country to have no music of its own, except street music. But the jibe has generally been understood in a wider sense as accusing the English of a more general indifference to music. It may be understood in different ways: as a denigration of English composition, or as a comment on a supposed lack of ‘musicality’ in the English national character, or as a simple statement that music played very little part in the life of the nation. Whatever it is taken to mean, it has rankled with English writers on music and still has the power to provoke studies setting out to refute it. As Temperley says in a later essay, ‘das Land ohne Musik’ is a hackneyed but essential point of departure for a study of Britain in the nineteenth century. It has stimulated scholars to challenge it by delineating what they believe to have been the role of music in all its aspects in social and national life. Temperley has become the doyen of a group of scholars now writing extensively on the period. Ruth Solie observed in 2004 that the switch away from composition had released a flood of studies of other aspects of music. Over the past few years twenty-eight volumes in the series ‘Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain’ have been published by Ashgate.

The stimulus to present a rich account of British music and musical activity has had the effect of sidelining the impact of contemporary foreign music on British critics, especially that of Schmitz’s compatriot Strauss. This is a field largely unexplored. As will become apparent in the course of this thesis, not only did foreign music make up – as it had done for many years – the majority of the repertoire, but also foreign composition interested British critics as much as native music. At first the legacy of Wagner was a central theme of debate. Earlier critics of Wagner had seen Wagner’s

13 Schmitz 1904
14 It was used ironically in Rainbow 1967.
15 Temperley 1999
16 The North American British Music Studies Association awards a biennial Temperley Prize for a student essay.
17 Solie 2004a
18 The second of Temperley’s essays mentioned above is the opening contribution to volume 1.
19 Michael Kennedy cites a 1902 article on Strauss by Arthur Johnstone as a summing up of ‘the enlightened British attitude’ to the composer (Kennedy 1995: 40). Otherwise Strauss biographies mention the composer’s visits to London during this period but not the heated debate that his music aroused.
musical language as decadent; according to Byron Adams this continued to be a strongly held view. However, as the thesis will show, not only did appreciation grow of the organic quality of Wagner’s compositional method, but in time Strauss displaced Wagner as the centre of attention and programme music became the most debated topic. Critics’ diverse views about foreign music informed their equally diverse views about native composition, so an understanding of the latter is not complete without knowledge of the former. For this reason, an account of the extensive critical debate about foreign music – especially that of Strauss – precedes the discussion of British music in this thesis.

Some contributions to the growing area of scholarship are tightly focused microstudies of individual occasions or aspects of musical activity. On a larger scale, there are a number of accounts of the EMR, the most recent being that of Hughes and Stradling mentioned above. In a severe criticism of this account Alain Frogley notes that the authors repeat the accusation made eight years previously in the first edition (1993) that British musicologists, intent on the study of musical works and aesthetics and hostile to approaches that appeared to lessen the value of music, ignored the broader cultural and political setting of music – a charge that was hardly true at the time and was certainly out of date by 2001. In fact Frogley rightly sees Hughes and Stradling’s account of the EMR as largely accusatory, setting out to expose the venal motives of the dramatis personae whilst riding roughshod over historical accuracy – using narrative juxtaposition to suggest connections or even conspiracy, being highly selective in their use of quotations and seeing attempted ripostes as further evidence of guilt (an attitude applied to critics of their own work). Frogley’s detailed criticism is mainly focused on instances taken from the period after that covered by the present study – Vaughan Williams and Adrian Boult for example – and as a non-specialist he notes without critique the new material in the second edition, which takes the story back to 1840. He

Existing reception histories, including Eatock 2009 (on Mendelssohn) and Langley 2007b (on Berlioz) focus on composers whose output antedated the period under study. Sessa 1979 (on Wagner) is largely concerned with Wagnerism in literary and artistic circles. Adams 2004

Examples include Brightwell 2003, Scott 2006.


Frogley 2003
does not, for example, challenge the claim that H.R. Haweis’s *Music and Morals* was a key document for the EMR, signalling a shift in thinking whereby art music, previously regarded as morally suspect, was credited with moral power. This thesis will carry the critique of Hughes and Stradling back into this earlier period (§4.2.2) and in particular examine contemporary views about the relation between ethics and aesthetics in music.

Frogley observes that although nationalism is central to Hughes and Stradling’s study, the authors take little account of the growing scholarship around the topic of national identity. Frogley has pastoralism chiefly in mind; however, as this thesis will show, critics’ views during the period of this study about national identity – or rather national character, which was the term most frequently used – seldom invoked the pastoral ideal.

Frogley’s chief criticism is of Hughes and Stradling’s reductive scheme in which music has no value or significance in itself and is merely a piece in the board game of politics, represented as a conspiracy by the establishment to promote a particular group of composers and to exclude the rest. It is difficult, as Frogley notes, to argue against an out-and-out reductionist in any field. Suffice it to say that although the critics whose views are presented in this thesis occasionally criticised the privilege apparently given to certain composers of their time, their central interest was in the qualities of the music itself, whether native or foreign.

Hughes and Stradling argue that the EMR drew its impetus from the growing concern about England’s loss of dominance in international politics in the face of the commercial and geopolitical advance of Germany. It is tempting to assume that music’s ‘art world’ (to use Howard S. Becker’s useful term), embedded as it was in the wider world of national and international politics, must have been strongly influenced by the magnitude of events and issues within that wider world. But whether or not this was the case cannot be decided *a priori*: the extent to which the history of any art is affected by

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25 The terms ‘character’ and ‘identity’ are discussed below, p. 127.

26 Becker 1982. The art world of music comprised the inter-related activities of composers, mediators (impresarios, performers, publishers), critics and audiences.
its social and political setting is a matter of empirical enquiry. The evidence for a connection between music and national politics is examined in chapter 4.

Hughes and Stradling’s account of the EMR has been supplemented by a study by Hughes of the role of the press in providing support. Hughes focuses on a narrow range of sources – the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Musical Times* and *Athenæum* – that were generally supportive. The present study is based on a much wider range of sources and shows the EMR to have been one strand – and a controversial one – in a much broader debate about the development of English music. Moreover, their central concern being composition, Hughes and Stradling show little interest in the extent of demand for native music. Contemporary commentators were deeply concerned about the level of demand for art music generally and about the factors – especially the economic factors – affecting the supply. Within this general concern was a more particular concern about the extent to which native music was finding its way into the repertoire and about the public response to native composition. The critical commentary on demand and supply is the subject of chapter 5.

Other large-scale works of scholarship include studies of the careers and output of composers; studies of institutions, in particular the Tonic Sol-fa movement, provincial festivals, the Philharmonic Society, the Crystal Palace, the Proms; studies of genres of writing, including music historiography and aspects of journalism; studies of the influence of imperialism. Both small- and large-scale studies have intersected fruitfully with the work of scholars in other disciplines,

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27 For example, Michael Fried argues that church and state patronage moulded the art of the Italian Renaissance, but by the twentieth century the development of art was fuelled by artists’ responses to problems thrown up within art itself (Fried 1982).
28 Hughes 2003
30 Rodmell 2012
31 McGuire 2009
32 Drummond 2011
33 Birket Foster 1912
34 Musgrave 1995
35 Langley 2007a
36 Zon 2000
37 Solie 2004b
38 Richards 2001, Cowgill and Rushton 2006
incorporating music into the scope of work initiated in other fields, including, for example gender and the role of women in public life.\textsuperscript{39} The burgeoning of Elgar studies shows that ‘the music itself’ still has the power to set the agenda when its quality is high enough (and the composer’s personality intriguing enough).\textsuperscript{40} The present study of contemporary critics’ views on the progress or regress of music offers a different perspective on such topics. Whereas studies of particular institutions, events, composers, etc., look to the writings of journalists as a source of evidence, in this study these writings, drawn from a very wide a range of sources, are themselves the focus of interest.

The relevant scholarship is discussed in more detail within each of the following chapters. The following are the main general questions arising from the foregoing brief overview.

- How did contemporary critics view the relationship between music and ethics? Was the belief in the moral power of music, exemplified by, for example, the Tonic Sol-fa movement, generally shared? To what extent did the ethical criticism evident in the early reception of Wagner continue into the debate about the development of music?

- What views did critics express about the development of music in general, and in particular foreign music? How did views about Wagner’s compositional method and musical language develop after the initial controversy had died down? How did critics’ views about foreign music feed into appraisals of native composition?

- What part did nationalism and a concern about national identity play in critical opinion about English music?

- To what extent did the critical commentary on foreign and native music show the influence of national or international politics?

\textsuperscript{39} Gillett 2000a, Hyde 1984
• What part did the ‘English Musical Renaissance’ narrative play in the critical commentary on the development of English music? In particular does the account given by Hughes and Stradling of the aetiology of the EMR stand up to scrutiny?

• How did critics appraise the extent of the demand for and the supply of art music, foreign and native? What did they see as the main factors affecting supply and demand?

Other issues emerged from the source material itself, the most significant being the impact of Strauss and the extensive debate about programme music that dominated critics’ attention during the latter part of the period.

1.3 Methodology

Given the expectation of extreme diversity of opinion it has been necessary to examine a very wide range of sources. This study is based on a large number of weekly, monthly and quarterly specialist and non-specialist periodicals (see bibliography, p. 296ff). Periodicals have been chosen rather than daily newspapers, not only for practicality, but because contributors were able to provide a more reflective commentary. Inclusion of a variety of non-specialist periodicals is essential: although the writers were often the same specialists who wrote for the music journals, their contributions had to appeal to a general readership. In particular, non-specialist monthly and quarterly periodicals exhibit a range of topics quite different from that of other periodicals and give a clearer idea of which musical topics were judged to be of widespread interest.41 Twenty-five periodicals were surveyed in their entirety; others were consulted for additional evidence at certain points (for example, case studies). Most contemporary books on music were either textbooks, histories or ‘lives of the great composers’, but those dealing with the topic of progress and regress were reviewed and discussed in journals and enter the debate thereby.

Two important studies of opinion in other countries are, methodologically, near neighbours of this project: Katharine Ellis’s work on music criticism in nineteenth-

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41 See below, p. 19, and appendix 2 (p. 375).
century France and Sandra McColl’s work on criticism in fin-de-siècle Vienna. Both of these studies are based on comprehensive archival research, the first a diachronic study and the second a synchronic slice. Katharine Ellis looks at one highly influential specialist journal and follows it over a long period (1834–80), focussing on one important aspect of its content: criticism of musical works and the thinking underlying it. Sandra McColl examines all the available material, specialist and general, published in a short period (1896–7) and studies it from perspectives largely determined from the material itself. This thesis occupies a position between the two: it covers a period of medium length, draws from a wide range of specialist and general journals and has a broad theme whose subdivisions have been determined from the source material itself.

There are a number of potential pitfalls in this approach. One may be termed the ‘shards’ illusion, following remarks made by Bernard Porter in his study of the impact of imperialism in Britain:

In the archaeological site that is British history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there are, of course, thousands of imperial shards to be found. Dug up and piled up at the side, they can be made to look overwhelming. Studied in situ, however, one gets a different impression. They appear widely scattered, and concentrated in certain layers and at particular spots.

The need to counter this illusion is another reason for making a comprehensive survey of a large number of sources, with a view to reflecting the overall diversity of opinion. For example, gathering together the views on Brahms expressed by conservatively minded commentators can give the impression of a widespread devotion to Brahms (see below, pp. 77ff). (Hughes and Stradling present the challenge to the EMR as a binary ‘Brahms vs Wagner’, when, as chapter 4 will show, it was more complex than that.)

In the case of a topic like the progress of English music, there is also the danger of a perspective effect whereby the scholarly foregrounding of the topic makes it appear of greater interest to contemporaries than was the case. It can of course be argued that the

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42 Ellis 1995, McColl 1996
43 Porter 2004: xiii
illusion lies with the reader rather than with the writer, but the writer should take steps to counter it. I have, for example, surveyed the topics addressed in monthly and quarterly non-specialist periodicals; these show very little concern with native music, suggesting a perceived lack of interest in the subject (see p. 376). In chapter 5, I compare the levels of public interest in music and theatre, to place the former in a wider context. Another illusion relates to the idea of the ‘public domain’. By definition the public domain includes all published materials, but it does not follow that they figured in a single ‘public sphere’. The public sphere, as presented by Jürgen Habermas, was initially constituted by face-to-face dialogue in such places as coffee shops (and was more concerned with political than with cultural debate).44 However, by the late nineteenth century it had long lost this character. In its print-based successor there was, with the possible exception of parliamentary politics, a plurality of ‘public spheres’. An opinion published only in a specialist journal might be noticed only by specialists. The material in general journals can be expected to have circulated more widely, although these journals often had a political allegiance that would limit their readership. The scholarly gaze that takes in a multitude of published materials does not necessarily replicate a contemporary gaze.

‘Debate’ is thus a scholarly construct, which I have chosen as the underlying narrative form in which to present the diversity of opinion, although there are occasionally instances when the term is literally appropriate, as when an article provoked other articles or correspondence. One reason why this period is of interest is that the debate exposed not only differing judgements about music, but also differing criteria of judgement. As the aim of the study is the historical one of charting changes over time, the material is for the most part organised chronologically with the various themes emerging in the debate – often in response to particular events – being used as subheadings within a chronological framework. Although some themes persisted over a lengthy period, others were more evanescent or sporadic. In the latter case it is important to counter the ‘shards’ illusion whereby isolated remarks scattered over lengthy time periods might appear as cumulative evidence of strongly held views.

44 Habermas 1989
While examining the source material, to some extent I bracketed out narratives – ‘renaissance’, national identity, etc. – that scholars have constructed for this period. The following remarks by the intellectual historian J.W. Burrow capture the approach adopted:

The intention throughout has been an historical one: to place the reader in the position of an informed eavesdropper on the intellectual conversations of the past. The book’s obligation, that is, is not so much to what we now think important in the period as to what was then found important […] intellectual dead-ends which made a stir in the world have counted for more with me than portentous moments that were then not recognised as such. The former are part – cynics might wish to say the major part – of the texture of the intellectual life of the past.45

My intention has been to return to the bracketed-out narratives at points where my findings connected with them – whether reinforcing or calling them into question – and thereby to present a more nuanced and multi-stranded account that better reflects both the scope and the course of critical opinion during the period. (The quality of this opinion varies greatly, but in this thesis it is not intended to take sides in any of the debates of the period, nor with hindsight, and from a different era, to evaluate the qualities of the critical writings cited.)

My examination of the source material began with a survey of two specialist sources over the entire period: the Musical Times (monthly, carrying mostly short and medium length articles) and the Proceedings of the Musical Association (published annually and consisting of substantial papers given monthly from November to June). I collected material that related, in however oblique a manner, to the overall topics of the progress/regress and public appreciation of music. From this survey a number of subheadings emerged, which were then used to structure the surveys of the other sources. Although open to modification, in practice these subheadings proved robust: music and morality; the representation of music in novels, etc.; progress or degeneration in composition; the development of English music; music in society; folk music; music in relation to other arts. However, the overall scale was breaking the bounds of a single
thesis and the material on novels and on other arts was (reluctantly) set aside for possible future use and that on folk music incorporated into other sections.

Whilst working on the wider survey, I identified two issues persisting throughout the period of study: the question of England’s musicality, and the public neglect of native composition. I traced these issues back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and tracked the discussion about them in a wide range of periodicals, specialist and non-specialist, through the period 1800–87. The resulting ‘prehistory’ was too large to be incorporated into the thesis, but is briefly drawn upon in chapter 4 (§§ 4.2.2 and 4.3). Some of the most heated debates during the period 1888–1907, such as the desirability or otherwise of a national music, were prefigured in earlier decades. But views about the way in which music – English or foreign – should develop became increasingly divergent, even when the potent stimulus of Wagner had more or less run its course.

On the basis of a thorough examination of a large number of specialist and non-specialist sources I shall be arguing that the debate about the development of music was both more wide-ranging and more diverse than appears in the narrative of the English Musical Renaissance. Historical narratives are necessarily selective, but I shall argue that in this case what has been left out – especially the critical reception of foreign music and the public reception of native music – has significantly skewed the account. I aim to produce an account that more accurately represents the thinking of the period, and to identify areas where further enquiry is needed to consolidate the account.

1.4 Outline plan of the remaining chapters

It is a truism of the period that music was judged ethically as well as aesthetically. However, opinion was not as monolithic as is frequently represented. There was considerable disagreement about the relationship between music and ethics, with some critics even arguing that moral considerations were irrelevant. Chapter 2 examines this debate; as it deals with themes that appeared in the commentary on the development of music, it acts as prolegomena to chapters 3, 4 and 5.

45 Burrow 2000: x
Two components can be detected in the critical commentary on the development of composition: a debate about music in general that was largely focused on foreign composition, and a more specific debate about English composition. These form the subjects of chapters 3 and 4 respectively. Much attention is given to activity in London, as first performances occurred either there or at a provincial festival. Moreover, most of the periodical press was based in London, and critics attending the same events were in a position to exchange views. However, even here opinion did not converge on a dominant narrative.

A major concern of contemporary commentators was with the raising of the level of public taste – hence their interest in the demand for, and the supply of, art music and the factors governing demand and supply. The commentary on demand and supply is the subject of chapter 5. The focus is again largely on London, which because of its population, wealth and capital status was seen by commentators as a test case for the advancement of music.

Chapter 6 draws together the conclusions of the foregoing chapters and presents the broader narrative of the period that these conclusions entail – a narrative that reflects both the scope and the diversity of the debate in England about the development of music. This chapter also suggests areas for possible further research – in particular the class distribution of audiences, an issue arising directly from the conclusions of chapter 5.
2 Ethics and aesthetics

Scholars have drawn attention to the prevalent Victorian belief in the ethical power of music. Ruth Solie finds this belief implicit in stories and articles contributed to *Macmillan’s Magazine* and Charles McGuire shows that it underpinned the Tonic Sol-fa movement.¹ This chapter will show that this belief was called into question during the period under study. Although critics continued to judge music in ethical as well as aesthetic terms, the belief in a relationship between music and ethics that grounded this practice was felt by some to need justification, whilst others argued that there was no such relationship at all. Moreover, the evidence presented in this chapter and the next will show that the tendency to judge music ethically diminished during the period, although campaigns for music to be publicly funded continued to invoke the supposed moral power of music, and a concern with music’s effects on character formation continued in the field of education.

2.1 Background

Much of the extensive debate about the progress or regress of music between 1888 and 1907 was still reverberating from the controversy surrounding the initial reception of Wagner in England. The criticism of Wagner had long carried a strong ethical charge. Joseph Bennett, a leading anti-Wagnerian, had condemned Wagner’s music for its descent, as he saw it, from beauty to ugliness, and represented this as a manifestation of evil. After seeing the first production of the *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1876, he warned the readers of the *Musical Times* that ‘something of Milton’s Fallen Spirit surrounds Wagner with a strange mixture of attraction and repulsion. […] let us not forget that he is powerful chiefly for evil. Let us take care that neither in toad-form nor any other does he sit at the ear of the fair art-world, pouring therein sophistries to work irretrievable ruin’.² This was an extreme view, but it registers the revulsion experienced by

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¹ Solie 2004b; McGuire 2009
² *MT* 1876.11.01. ‘Toad-form’ is a reference to Alberich, the villain of the *Ring*, who could magically assume any form and who turned himself into a toad in *Das Rheingold*. ‘Sophistries’ refers to Wagner’s theory about the subordination of music to poetry. For more recent commentators, the evil that Wagner has been associated with or defended against – proto-Nazism – goes far beyond a mere outrage to the ‘fair art-world’. The *locus classicus* is Adorno 1981. See also, for example, Rose 1992, Millington 1992, Tanner 1996. See also Williams
conservative English commentators, for whom serious music, conforming to estab-
lished canons of beauty, was viewed as an agent of edification. The entire Tonic Sol-fa
movement, for example, was driven by a belief in the beneficial moral effects of
participation in the choral singing of ‘uplifting’ music. Further evidence that this view
of music was widespread at the time is demonstrated by Ruth Solie, who has surveyed
the references to music in the pages of *Macmillan’s Magazine* during the period 1868–
83. Solie observes that a belief in the moral effect of music recurs throughout the
writing and detects two aspects to this belief: first, that music affected behaviour and,
second, that it revealed character. Music was routinely credited with powers of moral
improvement, as, for example, when a harmonium player in a story manages to divert
the low musical tastes of a group of working women towards more decorous genres and
even hymns. Overall, the function of music in society, as revealed by the writing in the
magazine, could be summed up as ‘edification’. Music was represented as offering an
entry into a ‘higher life’ and as an instrument of social bonding. But music also
functioned as a diagnostic tool for judging people socially and racially by their musical
preferences, as when travellers abroad related the music they found there to supposed
racial characteristics (for example a religious preference amongst American blacks for
Methodism and its hymn-singing). A belief in racial preferences is also apparent in the
often-repeated contrast between the ‘sunny’ music of southern Europe and the more
austere music of the north.

Writing in 1868, H.R. Haweis had castigated the English for seeing in music nothing
but ‘a pleasant noise and a jingling rhythm’: they were unable to understand that music
could have a higher function, as ‘the lord and minister of feeling’. (The ethical import
is clear, and the religious overtone unsurprising in a clergyman.) Twenty years later

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3 Remarks made by Hugh Montgomery in a letter to Parry illustrate the way in which Wagner’s
compositional procedures were viewed in ethical terms: ‘a tendency to promiscuous intercourse
with all sorts of loose keys instead of that faithful cleaving to one only’, (Dibble 1992: 172).
5 Solie 2004b: 44–84
6 Ibid.: 66
7 Ibid.: 76
8 For example, MT1887.01
9 CR1868.01. This article gained wide currency through its inclusion in Haweis’s *Music and
Morals*. 

many critics still believed that music should be judged ethically as well as aesthetically. But this was not the universal view: some argued that music was akin to mathematics in having no moral dimension (see below, p. 29). The debate about the ethical dimension of music applied to art music as such (although, as will become apparent later, some critics believed that special ethical desiderata applied to English music), so this chapter precedes those dealing with the development of music.

The general scope of ethics can be succinctly summarised by the subtitle of a contemporary book about the ethical issues of the time: ‘conduct and character’. The second term is especially relevant, as commentators debated the influence of music on character and also attributed character to music itself. ‘Character’ was, as Stefan Collini notes, a central idea in the moral discourse of the period. In theory, as Collini points out, it is possible to distinguish between a descriptive use of ‘character’ to mean the distinctive mental and moral qualities of an individual, race, national group, etc., and an evaluative use, referring to the possession of highly valued ethical qualities. However, he also notes that in practice the distinction was blurred, because the possession of a settled ‘character’ could be contrasted with negative qualities of randomness, impulsiveness, fecklessness, etc., and its possessor credited with the habit of restraint over lower impulses. As will be seen below, some critics (for example, Vernon Lee) applied an analogous evaluative construct – the distinction between form and content – to music.

Writing that alluded to the ethical aspects of music may be broadly categorised into two kinds. In the first category are articles, or parts of articles, dealing explicitly with the relationship between music and ethics or morality. As noted above, the idea that music and morality were linked did not go unchallenged. Some writers attempted to give the relationship a theoretical underpinning and to clarify the scope of the moral effect. Echoes of the Wagnerian controversy abounded, as references to the composer’s works testify. In the second category are the myriad articles, reviews, etc, in which ethical

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10 Lecky 1899
11 Collini 1985: 31
12 As J.W. Burrow observes, towards the end of the century it was becoming fashionable to deny the existence of an enduring ego in the flux of consciousness, and that the notion of
language was used non-reflectively and where the ethical assumptions were implicit. (Perhaps the most blatant example of the latter was the appellation ‘the divine art’, which suggested that offences amounted to sacrilege.) In much music criticism, ethical desiderata were taken for granted, making it difficult to draw a clear distinction between ethics and aesthetics. For instance, although taste properly belongs to the sphere of aesthetics, appeals for support for efforts to elevate public taste took on an ethical character, especially where a comparison with foreign countries could be invoked. ‘Elevation’ was a favourite term amongst commentators and was clearly an ethical concern: raising peoples’ sights, giving them higher aims in life – in other words, the elevation of character – was what high class music was believed to promote (and low-class music to undermine). For example, Joseph Goddard, a prolific writer on music and music history, wrote to *Musical Opinion* in 1892 complaining, as many critics did, that music did not receive the public support given to visual art. He called for an institution that would make the greatest musical works available at very low prices. He saw the beauty and grandeur of great art as a replacement for religion: its ‘serious spirit’ would combat the dominant influence of ‘music halls, light opera, pot boiler ballads, coster songs, and what not doggerel’, which, although they might not adversely affect ‘those who can enter a higher atmosphere’ (a reference to educated writers who wrote in praise of music-hall), taken as the only diet they tended to ‘vulgarise, if not to brutalise’. He concluded that ‘the inculcation of taste and feeling for the highest forms of musical art should be included in our social policy’. A similar utilitarian argument had been presented in the Prince of Wales’s speech at the inauguration of the Royal College of Music in 1883:

> To those who are deaf to music, as practical men I would say thus much – to raise the people, you must purify their emotions and cultivate their imaginations.

> To satisfy the natural craving for excitement, you must substitute an innocent and healthy mode of acting on the passions for the fierce thirst for drink and

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‘character’ was beginning to seem naïve (Burrow 2000: 160). If this was the case, it is an indicator of the relative isolation of musicians from currents of thought outside their specialism.  

13 Examples: ‘Programme music has much to answer for. It has brought ridicule on the divine art’ (*MW*1890.08.30); ‘in an age when the divine art is too often given over to the illustration of the morbid, the horrible, and the bizarre […]’ (*Ou*1899.06.10).  

14 *MO*1892.10.01. Arthur Symons, a well-known literary and music critic, wrote in praise of music-hall in *FR*1892.05.
eager pursuit of other unworthy objects. Music acts directly on the emotions, and it cannot be abused, for no excess in music is injurious.\textsuperscript{15}

As Paula Gillett notes, some of the societies engaged in providing ‘music for the masses’ saw their activity as a war on drink, but others saw themselves as simply bringing beauty into desolate lives.\textsuperscript{16} In any case, by the end of the century many other sources of entertainment other than drink were available to the working classes: music-hall, football, seaside outings, etc.\textsuperscript{17} Other providers, such as Samuel Barnett, saw a quasi-religious missionary activity.\textsuperscript{18} In a similar vein, J.S. Shedlock, commenting on a campaign for a national opera house, believed the proposal would be accepted once it was recognised that such an institution ‘may by noble music refine, and by works of high ethical purpose elevate, the masses’.\textsuperscript{19}

An amusing indirect testimony to the strong belief of musicians in a link between music and ethics can be found in a ‘skit’ entitled ‘The Tyranny of Music’, written on behalf of people who hated music.\textsuperscript{20} The writer complained that such people had to pretend to like it in order to avoid the opprobrium of musicians, who subscribed to the ‘mistaken idea of some necessary connection between music and morals’ – an idea that could, unfortunately, be found in such authorities as Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{21}

This chapter is concerned with writing in the first category identified above, in which the relationship between music and ethics was the explicit subject of debate. The fact that it was debated shows that the belief in music’s moral power, which – as Solie and others have shown – was prevalent in earlier years, was waning. This chapter charts critics’ attempts to give some theoretical foundations to the proposition that music was a serious matter and not simply a frivolous pursuit. The terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ were used loosely and often interchangeably, but broadly speaking they corresponded to

\textsuperscript{15} Macaulay, 1889: 408. Many critics would have disagreed with the last sentence.
\textsuperscript{16} Gillett 2000a
\textsuperscript{17} Walvin 1987: 145
\textsuperscript{18} IJE1899.07.
\textsuperscript{19} Ath1902.08.09
\textsuperscript{20} The writer referred to this group ironically as 'the submerged tenth' – the term famously used by William Booth to refer to the lowest stratum of the poor. See Keating 1981: 151–8.
\textsuperscript{21} MS1892.04.23. The piece had originally appeared in the Globe.
the two areas of character and conduct respectively. For example, the prominent critic E.A. Baughan defined morality narrowly, maintaining that beauty and morality were entirely separate and that dark emotion could be rendered with perfect workmanship: ‘there is no morality in emotion; only degrees of ideality and sensuality. Morals are a matter of conduct, not of feeling’. By contrast, for Frederick Niecks, one of the principal contributors to the debate, emotion was per se a matter of ethics.

2.2 The relationship between music and ethics

Several strands can be detected in the writing; although not independent of each other, they provide a means of charting a way through the territory. Vernon Lee made a substantial contribution to the discussion about the emotional effect of music on an individual (see §2.2.1). Some topics, being of perennial interest, overlap with current discussion; however, recent scholarship on the relationship between music and emotion has been philosophical and psychological rather than historical. The historical question at issue is not so much the extent to which the beliefs of the period stand up to present-day theoretical scrutiny, but rather the part they played in the discourse of their time, which is the subject of §2.2.2.

Other writers debated the attribution of ethical ideas to music and the supposed elevating power of music (§2.2.3). Tolstoy’s essay What is Art? stimulated two very different responses, traced in §2.2.4. Frederick Niecks attempted to provide a theoretical basis for the relationship between music and ethics (§2.2.5). Other writers demonstrated a concern to boost the status of music by associating it with morality, testifying to the fact that ethics trumped aesthetics in the public mind. Still others merely sought to justify their criticisms of what they disliked.

2.2.1 The emotional effect of music

An early challenge to the conventional view of the moral influence of music was made in articles in the Musical Times in 1888–90 whose consistency suggests common

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22 MS1895.09.14b. Although unsigned, the views expressed are clearly Baughan’s.
authorship. The first was a commentary on the references to music in Vernon Lee’s essays *Juvenilia*. The author agreed with Lee’s insistence that ‘apart from appropriateness and association there is no definite and unmistakable suggestion about music any more than there is any morality in an algebraic equation.’ However, although the writer maintained this radical stance, holding in a later article that ‘music cannot demoralise or degrade any more than a proposition of Euclid can’, Lee herself did not. She described in vivid terms how, through the music of *Tristan und Isolde*, she felt she was herself entering into the lovers’ passion, to the point where everything, including herself, had seemed to disappear, leaving ‘this strange mist of passion […] swirling out of the music of Wagner as out of some magic censer, rising to our brain, to numb and intoxicate’. Lee found this experience disquieting; she did not object to the arousal of emotion as such but its arousal in such a way as to inhibit or disable critical intelligence and moral judgement. The *Musical Times* writer objected to Lee’s tendency to universalise the effects of music, which were highly subjective and could not be attributed to the music itself. (He appears to imply that Lee’s response was typically that of a woman, but given his insistence that music was amoral he could hardly endorse the view that Wagner’s music was inherently feminising.)

Lee’s other writing about music appeared in articles with a more general scope. In one of these she noted William James’s observation that music might enfeeble character by stimulating emotions without giving an outlet for activity. She agreed that music could be harmful but for a different reason. Music, or art more generally, produced not a desire for action but a mood, and although Lee adamantly rejected the idea that art should serve morality, she held that ‘if some kinds of art disorganise the soul, the less we have of them the better’. As all human beings had weaknesses, they might not be able to resist the effects of ‘unwholesome’ art. Music, having no admixture of language or reason, had the most powerful effect on the emotions and although, like all art, it

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23 ‘Vernon Lee’ was the pen-name of Violet Paget (1856–1935). She was born in Italy and spent much of her life there. For a biography see Gunn 1964.
24 *MT* 1888.02a (The writer knew that ‘Vernon Lee’ was a woman.)
25 *MT* 1889.05a
26 Ibid.: 77. See also Caballero 1992.
27 *FR* 1895.08
28 Ibid.: 257
could elevate the soul, it could also operate subliminally, arousing ‘our innermost, primaeval, chaotic self […] We are made to enjoy what we would otherwise dread’. In this way music used the charm it had acquired ‘in its more healthful and decorous days’, to destroy ‘the soul’s active structure, its bone and muscle, till there is revealed only the shapeless primaeval nudity of confused instincts, the soul’s vague viscera’.\(^29\) The reference to ‘more healthful and decorous days’ is to early music, for which Lee had a special liking. As will be seen in chapter 3, an encounter with early music (through its revival by Arnold Dolmetsch) had a deep effect on several critics, causing them to reappraise contemporary developments.

In essence, Lee was providing a theoretical underpinning of her views about Wagner, making use of the distinction between form – the source of strength that developed the ‘bone and muscle’ of the soul – and inchoate matter, represented by music in which formal beauty had been abandoned and which undermined the soul and exposed its basest element – its ‘vague viscera’. By using this term Lee associated Wagner’s music with the bodily functions least under conscious control. For Lee, as for many other writers concerned about the supposed degradation of music, a piece of music was seen as symbolising a human personality, with form representing strength of character, manifested in its control over the otherwise untrammelled expression of emotion. Lee remarked that a composer (unnamed) with whom she had discussed these ideas claimed that music at present regarded as an exemplar of formal beauty might have been perceived in its day as Wagner was perceived now. Lee could not agree that Handel’s music could ever have been morbid like Wagner’s; she was certain that the difference lay in the music and not merely in listeners’ perceptions.

Lee argued that as music had no content, the feelings it generated arose from the material available to the composer: rhythms, for example, that had their counterparts in bodily functions and activities. Moreover, because music was essentially sequential in time, a relatively painful sensation could be superseded by, and in the process enhance, a pleasurable one. In short, ‘music gives us the actual bodily consciousness of emotion; nay (in so far as it calls for easy or difficult acts of perception), the actual mental reality

\(^{29}\) Ibid.: 261.
of comfort or discomfort’. In old music, according to Lee, emotional expression was made subservient to beauty, so the music never embarrased by evoking feelings better not felt.

For Lee, Wagner’s music was characterised by extremes of emotional expression, which in her view often transgressed the limits of decency. But at the time when Lee was writing, the view of Wagner as decadent was receding, and, as will be seen in chapter 3, Wagner’s music was increasingly being appreciated for its architectonic qualities.

2.2.2 The attribution of ethical ideas to music

Vernon Lee’s disconcerting experience of Wagner was bound up with the fact that Wagner was portraying through music the actions and feelings of people. The question remained as to whether ethical attributes could be applied to music itself, independently of words. The contributor to the Musical Times cited above rejected any suggestion of a link between music and morality. However, H. Arthur Smith, writing in the Universal Review in 1890, approached the subject in a less dogmatic way. He noted that music owed its place in elementary education to the belief that it was a wholesome activity; however, it remained open to question whether the distinction between moral and immoral that was applicable to literature could also be applied to wordless music: ‘are there musical Zolas and Rabelais, Don Juans and Cencis expressed in mere sound?’ Prima facie, Smith thought, it might appear not, as music conveyed emotions, not ideas, and only vague emotions at that. However, he observed that vocal declamation was able to convey more specific emotions even to people who did not understand the language being used, so the same might be true of wordless music. Smith took as an illustration

30 Ibid.: 266. For a recent discussion of similar ideas, which remain current, see Davies 2010. Davies rejects the cognitive theory of emotion, i.e. the view that an emotion has an object to which the emotion is directed – so that fear, for example, must be fear of something. In his view, it is possible to experience feelings that have no such object: that ‘powerfully expressive appearances’ (of, say happiness) may induce such feelings by a process of contagion. Davies cites empirical evidence for this process, including studies of the effect of ambient music in shops and restaurants. He also suggests a possible mechanism for this contagion: ‘if the flux of music is felt as an articulated pattern of tensing and relaxing, this is likely to be imaged and mimed within the body, perhaps in ways that are neither subpostural nor subvocal’. See also Berger 1999: 33–4, Robinson 2005: 379–412.

31 UR1890.07. Zola’s novels had a name in some quarters for immorality; the publisher of English translations had been imprisoned for three months two years earlier (Heath 2010: 65–9).
four musical works having to do with death: the Dead March from Handel’s *Saul*, the Funeral March from Beethoven’s A flat Sonata (Op. 26), Siegfried’s Funeral March from Wagner’s *Ring* and the Funeral March from Chopin’s B flat minor Sonata. In each of these he found a different depiction of Death: as triumphed over, as triumphant, as defiance of fate, and as corruption respectively. He accepted that his readings were subjective, but argued that if one and the same person could distinguish between the different effects of compositions based on the same thought, then music was as susceptible to moral distinctions – pure/impure, morbid/healthy, elevating/degrading – as poetry or painting.

Smith discussed the moral influence of music as portrayed in Tolstoy’s novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Like other commentators he vehemently rejected the notion that the character of the presto movement incited the man and woman to their immoral behaviour. However, Smith did not preclude the possibility that music could have a deleterious moral effect, but he was concerned to exempt Beethoven, claiming that Beethoven’s portrayal of ‘healthy, manly gladness’ was fundamentally different from ‘the whirling excitement of the Italian tarantella, or the fantastic rhythm of the Spanish bolero’ (the implication being that both of these crossed the line).

Smith also observed that there were opportunities for moral disapproval when music was combined with words, either sacred words with ‘utterly profane music’ or corrupt librettos with ‘divine melody’. However, referring back to the field of education from which his inquiry started, he believed moral distinctions were for the time being unimportant in English education, where sensitivity to music was still undeveloped, although they could become a serious topic of study, involving ‘the raising or the lowering of the ethical standard of the people’. (His prediction was correct: ethical concerns did emerge later when the suitability of songs for schools was under

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32 Smith’s interpretations conform to the type of hermeneutics described in Bent 1994: 1–8. Having extracted cognitive content analogous to that of literature, Smith felt able to apply ethical categories.
33 T.L. Southgate, for example (PMA1895.12)
34 *UR*1890.07: 435. It was common at the time (and for some years later) to represent the peoples of southern Europe as impulsive and emotional and to relate this to the hotter climate.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.: 436
discussion. The Musical Times reviewer of Smith’s article, who was almost certainly the writer already referred to, remained sceptical about the need for such an inquiry, as individual responses to music were subjective and highly varied. But the reviewer did not notice Smith’s inconsistency in repeating conventional ethical language – ‘utterly profane music’, ‘divine melody’ – in an article calling it into question. Such was the strength of conventional ethical epithets.

Critics could profoundly disagree about the ethical content of a work, whilst broadly agreeing about its aesthetics, as is shown by John F. Runciman’s and E.A. Baughan’s views of Parsifal. Runciman had been full of praise for the music of Parsifal after a concert performance of extracts. But after seeing the work at Bayreuth, he called it immoral. He found the view of life presented in Parsifal negative, hypochondriac and pessimistic, in total contrast to the ‘entirely moral, healthful and sane’ view presented in Siegfried. Nevertheless, although Runciman, like Baughan, wanted to maintain the independence of aesthetic and moral judgement, he had to admit that the negative view of life that pervaded Parsifal after about the middle of the second act infected his response to the music, even though he admitted the latter to be unsurpassable. Baughan strongly disagreed that Parsifal, being a life-denying work, was immoral. He pointed out that the renunciation of self, a theme that ran through all Wagner’s works, reflected the ethical teachings of the three great religions. It is clear that both critics judged Parsifal ethically, but differed in their personal ethical beliefs.

None of the foregoing writers had linked the emotions portrayed in a composition to the character of the composer. However, in a rambling article on ‘Personality and Music’, C. Fred Kenyon maintained that a composer’s portrayal of the emotions of love, hate, longing, repulsion and desire reflected his individual personality, which, if perverted, would colour the music. In his view there were many such instances, but he named no names. He thought an excessive interest in subjectivity inimical to art. ‘Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Weber are popularly supposed to be objective composers, probably because

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37 See, for example, MS1903.08.22, PMA1905.06.
38 MT1890.09
39 SR1897.05.22
40 SR1897.08.28
41 MS1897.09.04b
their music is sane and healthy; [...] it is only geniuses of the second class who find it necessary to go into a madhouse in order to convince us that they are differently constituted from their fellow men’. Kenyon’s binary ‘healthy/unhealthy’ is close to that of Vernon Lee, except that Lee did not try to read Wagner’s personality into his portrayal of the passion of Tristan and Isolde.

2.2.3 The elevating power of music

The belief in the elevating power of music that had sustained philanthropic enterprises and lay behind campaigns for public funding was also called into question during the period. Underpinning the belief that beautiful music was morally elevating lay a more general belief in a strong connection between beauty of any kind and morality. It was invoked, for example, when the provision of local museums and art galleries was under discussion in the earlier part of the century. Some writers on music treated the connection between beauty and morality as self-evident. C. Fred Kenyon, for example, held that ‘constant absorption of beautiful ideas and sensations cannot fail to ennoble and refine’. However, this belief too was not universally shared. J.S. Shedlock, for example, criticised an essay by the American critic H.T. Finck, who had expressed surprise that so few commentators accepted that music had advanced in emotional or moral power. One of the writers criticised by Finck was Richard Grant White, who had concluded that there was no correlation between the appreciation of even the noblest music and mental elevation or moral purity: ‘the greatest, keenest pleasure of my life is one that may be shared equally with me by a dunce, a vulgarian, or a villain’. Finck noted that Hanslick had expressed a similar view: that savages were the most affected by music. Shedlock dismissed Finck’s defence of the ‘moral potency’ of music as inconclusive and amounting to no more than a confirmation of the obvious fact that music had an emotional effect.

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42 MO1901.12b
43 AU1845.04
44 MO1900.02
45 Ac1889.08.03
46 Finck 1889: 150
2.2.4 Responses to Tolstoy’s essay *What is Art?*

The contributions cited above are those of English commentators, with only occasional references to foreign opinion. The most radical challenge to critics’ views about music and ethics came from a foreign source. It was posed by Tolstoy’s essay *What is Art?*, whose central thesis was the complete subordination of art to ethics. The essay stimulated two quite different responses in the musical press, from Joseph Bennett and Rutland Boughton respectively.

Bennett’s was a limited and defensive response that addressed only one aspect of Tolstoy’s doctrine.\(^{47}\) Tolstoy held that art began when an individual expressed his feelings by some external means, in order to induce the same feelings in others. Bennett argued that this was not the only source of art, as some of the finest music, such as the fugues of Bach, was independent of any such aim. Bennett agreed up to a point with Tolstoy’s portrayal of the decadence of art that resulted when the upper classes abandoned Christianity and turned to hedonism, but he could not go along with Tolstoy’s depiction of the incomprehensibility of upper class art to working people, citing ‘people’s concerts’ of oratorios, the musical abilities of Welsh miners, etc. Neither could he agree with Tolstoy’s lumping together the works of such as Goethe, Beethoven, etc., with decadent art and condemning all art that did not spring from religion. Bennett did not engage with the more far-reaching aspect of Tolstoy’s essay: its radical criticism of the whole enterprise of ‘bourgeois’ music. Tolstoy identified the ideological element in art; he adopted the point of view of the ‘labourer’ – which for him was the moral high ground, the only high ground that mattered – and judged from that perspective. By contrast, for middle class English writers on music, art was unassailable and the uneducated were either criticised or pitied for their inability to appreciate it.

The other response to Tolstoy was made a few years later by the writer and composer Rutland Boughton.\(^{48}\) Boughton, a socialist, saw music as a moral force opposed by commercialism, sloth and superstition, and found much in Tolstoy to agree with. Noting

\(^{47}\) *MT*1900.03a
\(^{48}\) *MS*1904.10.01
that Tolstoy condemned whatever in music tended to divide people rather than sympathetically to unite them, Boughton added his own ethical criterion for distinguishing between good and bad music: ‘what tends to unite man in sensual, neurotic or material directions will be condemned […] and what tends to unite mankind in healthy, free and spiritual directions will be accepted as a factor in the unending evolution of Humanity’.\(^{49}\) Tolstoy had asked what right had a musician to concern himself with symphonies when others were starving. To this Boughton could only reply that the starving poor came first, but once fed they could also enjoy music.\(^{50}\) Recognising that musicians, like everyone else, were dependent for their sustenance on the labour of others, Boughton saw the provision of music as a question of fair exchange: did the modern composer supply the labourers with music they could understand and enjoy? Applying his ethical criteria, Boughton was led to the conventional condemnation of the sensual: ‘the dance-tune that fevers the blood of the ballroom, a languorous tune of flesh bereft of all the strong, true, vigorous joy of sex, or a mad and exciting tune bewildering the senses and benumbing the reason – such a dance-tune is loathsome and putrid art whatever its musical qualities may be, because it is exciting an abnormal state which is contrary to man’s well-being’. He condemned what other writers had termed ‘decorative’ music as frivolous, yielding nothing but sensual pleasure – hence his negative assessment of Mozart and adulation of Beethoven’s ‘fiery energy’.\(^{51}\) He identified the enemies of ethical music as ‘the priest, the pedant, and the mere pleasure-seeker’.\(^{52}\) (The first of these was, in his view, the bane of Elgar’s oratorios: see below, p. 214.)

2.2.5 Niecks on music and ethics

Frederick Niecks supplied the most substantial analysis of the relationship between music and ethics. By the time his lectures on ‘The Ethical Aspects of Music’ appeared in 1901, ethical concerns were far less apparent in music criticism (see below, p. 113). The music of Strauss was the principal focus of critics’ attention and, except in the case

\(^{49}\) MS1904.10.08a

\(^{50}\) Shaw had asked himself a similar question some years earlier, but it did not stop his music criticism (SM\(I\): 651).

\(^{51}\) Ibid.: 258

\(^{52}\) MS1905.06.03
of Boughton, ethical considerations were absent from the debate. However, Niecks, who was Professor of Music at Edinburgh University, gave the lectures at Trinity College, London, to an audience that must have consisted largely of trainee musicians and music teachers. This is significant in showing that moral concerns continued to weigh in education, where the formation of character in the young was at stake. But even though the lectures were directed at a specific audience, they are of interest as being the most thorough investigation at that time of the relationship between music and ethics. They were printed in *Musical News* and extensively reported in the *Musical Times*.53

Niecks began by reviewing beliefs about the effects of music held in the ancient world – beliefs that were challenged by arguments prefiguring nineteenth-century formalism: that music, lacking content, could not affect the soul and had no other function than amusement. Niecks found it strange that although the expressive power of music had increased greatly in modern times, recognition of this power had decreased, and music, instead of being seen as a powerful agent of education, was relegated to the status of a pastime. (A similar observation had been made by Finck: see above, p. 34.) Niecks’s intention was to counter this trend by studying the powers of music and explaining how they worked.

Music, according to Niecks, could be physically, intellectually and morally educative – the last named both through its formal, or aesthetic, aspect and through its expressive, or ethical, aspect. The mechanism he offered for the moral influence of aesthetic qualities was simple transmission: ‘if you do not shut yourself up against the influences of music, its orderliness, harmoniousness and sweetness will gradually be instilled into you, more and more permeate you, and finally become absorbed and amalgamated by you.’54 (Note that the piling up of different words to describe the process cannot hide the fact that what was offered here was pure assertion and not explanation. Moreover Niecks’s exposition begged the question of how a term like ‘sweetness’ could be applied to music.)

53 *MT*1901.08
54 Ibid.: 609
Niecks needed to explain how music was able to express emotion; only then could the moral aspect be addressed. He found the explanation in Herbert Spencer’s theory of the origins of music. According to Spencer, feelings were closely tied to muscular activity, including the muscles that produced the voice, so each modification of the voice was the outcome of an emotion. Niecks extended this basic idea, relating the expressiveness of tempo and rhythm to the effect of emotion on heart rate. He also observed that tempo and rhythm also characterised bodily movements and gestures (for example, legato and staccato could be applied to types of walking or running) and sketched an analogical scheme linking visible and audible expression. He claimed that this analogy lay at the root of ‘an enormous extension of the expressive powers of the arts, especially of music’. However, he also recognised that there were other, specifically musical, means of expression that were not directly imitative of emotions: consonance and dissonance, tonality, and orchestration. Niecks argued that emotions as expressed through the voice, gestures, etc., were only the raw material of art; to become art they had to be rendered beautiful and thus idealised. This raised a difficulty, in that the idealised version was at one remove from real emotion. But for Niecks this was a purely intellectual difficulty and hardly existed at all ‘for the feeling soul, that is, for the organ of divination’. He saw the idealisation of living materials as the source of the dispute between ‘formalists’ and ‘idealists’. However, Niecks acknowledged that the expressive power of music had limits: it could not convey information or complex emotions – such as jealousy – that had an intellectual element.

Having explained how music expressed emotion, Niecks turned to the ethical aspect, which derived from a player’s or listener’s sympathetic experience of the emotion expressed. Emotion could be ethically good or bad: noble emotions strengthened and purified the moral character; ignoble ones weakened and vitiated it. Niecks warned teachers that ‘habitual and exclusive indulgence in Spohr, in Chopin, and in Wagner’.

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55 Ibid.: 610. Similar claims for a linkage between musical tempi and a composer’s activities are still influential within popular music criticism, if not musicology; see, for instance, Moore 2004: 77–8.
56 Ibid.: 611
57 ‘Formalists’ here meant those who valorised absolute music, ‘idealists’ those who valorised music with ‘poetic content’.
makes a moral wreck of a man. He anticipated the objection that in practice music teaching did not appear to produce the desired results and had an answer ready: music was not properly taught. Moreover, inevitably musicians were ‘like all specialists, abnormal. Only a harmoniously developed man is a full and normal man. He who develops solely or chiefly a part of himself is a cripple, be he ever so athletic in that part.’

Although Niecks touched on points already made by others, the only comment on his lectures came from a writer who was sceptical about the moral influence of absolute music and suggested a sociological explanation: ‘the social environment of the musician counts for much; there is no doubt that to-day musical skill throws people into good sets and uplifts them’. (In other words: good people are attracted to music; it is not music that makes them good.)

Not long after Niecks’s lectures, an article appeared in the magazine *Health* portraying music as ‘a form of sensual indulgence, or perhaps one might say more acceptably sensual enjoyment, […] absolutely of no value to the race and its continuance’. Cuthbert Harris responded to this accusation, restating the common defence that music like that of a Beethoven or Brahms symphony engaged the intellect through the senses. But like Niecks, Harris accepted that ‘excessive indulgence in the unrestrained and morbid (not necessarily bad, mark you!) music of some composers of the ultra modern school may have a deleterious effect’.

The contributors to the debate about music and ethics discussed in §§2.2.1–5 represent a wide range of opinion. At one extreme were those who held that moral considerations were irrelevant in music; at the other were those who, like Kenyon, took it for granted that contact with beauty had a morally elevating effect. Between these extremes lay those who tried to explain how music could justifiably be judged from an ethical point

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58 To this list Niecks could have added Gounod, the ‘effeminacy’ of whose music was a point of discussion amongst critics. See below, §3.3.1 (pp. 69ff).
59 *MH1901.08*
60 *MO1902.04b*
of view. The views about music and morality current in an earlier period and
documented by Solie and McGuire were becoming more diverse and, as the next
chapter will show, by the end of the period ethical considerations were far less apparent
in music criticism, although admirers of Parry still praised his music in ethical terms
(see pp. 191, 214). However, ethical considerations were still regarded as relevant to the
education of the young and to the edification of the adult population.

2.3 Musicians and manliness

Niecks’s admission that musicians single-mindedly devoted to their art fell short of the
‘harmonious’ development needed to be a ‘full and normal man’ touched on an issue
that writers had for some time felt a need to address: musicians and manliness. It was
difficult to argue that music had a positive effect on the development of character if
(male) musicians themselves signally failed to embody the manly ideal. (An American
article reprinted in the Musical Standard even suggested that it was the association of
music and unmanliness that had prevented England from producing any great
composers, as the latter were invariably male.62)

This is a context that is by now readily understood. The topics of gender and sexuality
in nineteenth-century Britain have generated an extensive range of scholarship, much of
it stemming from Michel Foucault’s work in the 1970s.63 In her study of post-1880
Britain, Lesley A. Hall accepts Foucault’s fundamental contention that sexuality is
constituted by discourse but points out that in this field at any one time multiple
discourses were operating.64 It is therefore important to situate the concern of musicians
with manliness within the most appropriate discourse. Victorian ideals of manliness (the
plural is essential) have been the subject of much scholarly interest in recent years. J.A.
Mangan and J. Walvin note that the early Victorian idea of manliness as the successful
transition from immaturity to Christian maturity – shown by earnestness, selflessness
and integrity – had transmuted by the 1880s into a public school ideal of neo-Spartan

61 ‘Ultra modern’ was clearly used ironically. On the connotations of the term ‘modern’, see
below, p. 192.
62 MS1902.08.16
63 Foucault 1978
64 Hall 2000: 4
virility, exemplified by Stoicism, hardiness and endurance, that was ‘diffused throughout the English-speaking world with the unreflecting and ethnocentric confidence of an imperial race’. 65 The religious element in the earlier conception – also essential to the intermediate ideal of ‘muscular Christianity’ associated with Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes – gave way to athletics in the form of organised games. 66 The later ideal was essentially an upper- and middle-class concern but efforts were made to spread it to the ‘masses’. However, according to Mangan, life inside the public schools did not match the idealised portrait of character development presented by their various headmasters; the schools were the site of ‘crude Darwinism encapsulated in simplistic aphorisms: life is conflict, strength comes through struggle and success is the prerogative of the strong’. 67 John Tosh notes that the boys picked up their values more from other boys than from the staff, and claims that this training in self-reliance was the most attractive feature to parents. But this ‘boy culture […] despised intellectual ability and aesthetic sensibility’. 68 A contemporary writer claimed, on the basis of many years of observation, that ‘the English public school boy, even after he has spent a year or two, or has gone as far as to take a pass degree, at a university, is one of the most profoundly ignorant creatures on the face of the earth’. 69

The scholarship relating to manliness does not refer to musicians as a specific case, but contemporary debate reflected this concern. The public school was not an environment that musicians generally passed through and it yielded an ethos that was hardly likely to confer high value on music and musicians. So it is not surprising that writers defending musicians against the charge of unmanliness made much of the example of Parry, who was not only an Etonian but also one who had excelled at sport. 70

65 Mangan and Walvin 1987: 3; see also Alderson 1998. Alderson argues that the manly self-possession of the British ideal was contrasted with its Celtic ‘other’, associated with ‘excess’ (political, emotional and sexual) and lack of self-control (170). Anxiety that the ‘imperial race’ was in danger of degeneration reinforced ideals of manly outdoor life, as shown, for example, in the founding of the Boy Scout movement. See, for example, Hyam 1990: 73–5.
68 Tosh 2005: 112
69 NPM1903.05
70 Parry’s time at Eton is documented in Dibble 1992: 19–45.
The public-school athletic ideal of manliness that the scholarly literature focuses on was not the only one in circulation. Some writers – especially clergymen – continued to extol the Christian ideal, with its different – but no less ethically charged – understanding of manliness as moral rather than athletic strength. This quality of manliness was sharpened by contrast with the unmanly attributes of ‘weak-minded creatures in man’s costume, […] well-dressed persons who haunt the theatres, concert-halls, and ballrooms, who flutter in the light of fashion like moths about a lamp […]’ Manliness is a matter of character. […] It may be said to consist of three things: dignity, bravery, and boldness’. This other ideal of manliness, even without its religious connotations, chimed more with writers seeking to present musicians as manly.

The stereotype of the unmanly – even effeminate – musician persisted for a time. For example, the stereotypical musician appearing in cartoons in the 1880s was foreign, long-haired, physically weedy and vain (see fig. 1).

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71 Q1888.01
72 Q1896.01
MUSIC AT HOME. (THE EGOISM OF GENIUS.)

Eminent Violinist. “Dell me – who is dat liddle pald old Chendaleman viz ze Vite Viskers and ze Bince nez, looking at ze Bigchus?”

Hostess. “It’s my Uncle Robertson. I’m grieved to say he is quite Deaf!”

Eminent Violinist. “Ach, I am zo sorry for him! He vill not pe aple to hear me blay ze Vittle!”

Fig. 1 ‘Music at Home’, George du Maurier, Punch, 11 August 1883

The efforts made by writers to counter the stereotype was itself evidence of its persistence. They took the form either of invoking the alternative ideal described above and insisting that manliness was not to be equated with athletic prowess, or by conceding the importance of the latter and giving examples of athletic musicians. The readers of the music journals that carried these defences were being provided with ammunition they could use against outsiders.

Foucault argued that the vast apparatus of law, censorship and convention surrounding the subject of sexuality was evidence of its prevalence (Foucault 1979).
The writer in the *Musical Times* whose uncompromising belief in the independence of music and morality was noted above (p. 29) contributed a highly critical review of a novel in which music was claimed to have a morally destructive effect on musicians. The reviewer suggested that the morality of music had been confused with that of musicians, and conceded that the latter tended to be highly strung and that the pursuit of art generally precluded ‘simultaneous devotion to manly sports and exercises’. But he claimed that the best artists had been ‘all round’ men: Schumann, Berlioz and Wagner, for example, were all eminent as writers, and ‘there is not the least reason why an artist should not be manly and virtuous; and the best artists have generally been both.’

Another contributor to the theme of ‘manliness in music’ held that the prejudice that music weakened moral fibre had its source in gossip about opera singers, ‘the most childish representatives of the whole profession’, and claimed that instrumentalists were more balanced and better educated, but less visible to the public. He was venomous in his the condemnation of those who gave the profession a bad name, such as the ‘drawing-room tenorino, a mannikin […] who is not a man but a disease’. About such ‘pests of the drawing-room congregates a swarm of pallid dilettanti, cosmopolitan in sentiment, destitute of any manly vigour or grit, who have never played cricket or been outside a horse in their lives […] It is from contact with these nerveless and effeminate natures that the healthy average well-born Briton recoils in disgust and contempt’. As counter-instances he cited Beethoven, Handel, Mendelssohn, Brahms – ‘the robust individuality of Brahms’s music is the outcome of a thoroughly masculine nature’ – and a native composer who was ‘a veritable admirable Crichton in the manner of athletic accomplishments’ (i.e. Parry).

The article prompted a letter from Lennox Amott, himself a poet and composer, who saw the sedentary life of a genius as almost inevitable: ‘the passion within him must be expressed, and, until expressed, it is, in fact,
a torture to himself, yet the very expression of it wears him out.’ It did not follow that such a man was effeminate and thus contemptible. Amott recorded that his own practice was to follow the burst of feeling that composition involved with a bout of physical activity: ‘the gun, the bicycle, the football or cricket ball, the rod and line, or the gloves’.  

Further comments on the article appeared in the Musical Standard. A correspondent, ‘A.B.D.’, argued that close involvement in music would make a man less fit for the rough and tumble activities that develop courage and bravery, and that the examples of manly musicians given in the Musical Times were exceptional men. In reply, E.H. Turpin in effect invoked the alternative idea of manliness described above. He observed that ‘manliness’ was ambiguous: it could refer to physical, mental or spiritual strength. In his view a good artist had to acquire ‘true manhood’; he claimed that music offered many opportunities for the development and trial of moral strength. But ‘A.B.D.’ still felt that the impression that musicians lacked manliness, whether correct or not, needed explanation; in his view it arose because music was intended to evoke and express feelings, whereas English ideals of manliness, unlike French and German, involved hiding feelings. Moreover, devotion to any art could inhibit effort elsewhere and attention to duties, so music did not necessarily widen and deepen character. ‘It may do, but true manliness in a man, including virtue and moral courage, seem to one to come outside and apart from his music’.

The views related above all date from the period 1888–9, after which concern waned. A few articles (‘shards’) appeared sporadically, rehearsing familiar arguments and citing counter-examples like Parry. C.F. Abdy Williams claimed that music in public schools developed strength of purpose through the effort of preparing for and achieving a successful performance and the esprit de corps engendered. He remarked that ‘the

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78 MT1889.10  
79 MS1889.08  
80 It is interesting to note that in drama there had been a change in acting style, with flamboyant gestures giving way to the restraint expected of the social class of the characters. See, for example, SR1888.12.22.  
81 MS1889.10.05  
82 MT1895.06, MS1900.09.22, MN1905.09.02  
83 Mu1897.07.21
strong masculine music of Handel, of Mozart, and Haydn, of Beethoven, Bach, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and of some of our more vigorous English composers soon appeals to healthy English boys […] On the other hand, merely pretty music that makes no appeal to the intellect, that presents no difficulties to be overcome, can only lead to laziness and effeminacy and sickly sentimentality, the bane of much of our modern art.\textsuperscript{84} Runciman found the ‘manly, unaffected pianist’ Dohnanyi ‘a blessed relief after the winking, squinting, leering boobies who hold the concert platform for so great a portion of every season’.\textsuperscript{85} However, other writers noted that the stereotypes of musicians – narrow-minded, effeminate – were gradually being eroded.\textsuperscript{86} It follows that scholars remarking on nineteenth-century attitudes towards male musicians should be careful about specifying the period during which generalisations can be applied.\textsuperscript{87}

2.4 Masculinity in music

So far the topic under discussion has been the manliness or masculinity of male musicians, including composers; defending their manliness was essential if music was to be credited with positive ethical power. However, as Derek B. Scott has shown, music itself – in its compositional styles and modes of expression – was regarded as gendered.\textsuperscript{88} The reference above to the ‘masculine’ music of Handel, etc., is a case in point. So not only was it important to defend musicians against the charge of effeminacy, it was also important to emphasise that music itself could be, and in its finest manifestations was, ‘masculine’. This concern with masculinity in music is most clearly revealed in criticism of works by female composers.

The number of female musicians steadily increased during the closing decades of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{89} However, except as songwriters, female composers were rare, so when significant works by women appeared, the sex of the composer figured strongly in reviews and the issue of masculinity came to the fore. Masculinity was highly valued,
yet some critics thought it inappropriate for women to be writing ‘masculine’ music. As Gillett shows, comments on compositions by Rosalind Ellicott focused on her sex and her works were criticised for being either insufficiently or inappropriately masculine.\textsuperscript{90}

The clearest example can be found in the divergent reactions to the music of Ethel Smyth. The masculinity of her early orchestral works was praised by the critic of \textit{Musical Opinion}, J.B.K., who became her most enthusiastic admirer among the critics.\textsuperscript{91} Smyth’s \textit{Solemn Mass} (1893) clearly invited comparison with the large-scale choral works of her male contemporaries. Its masculinity affronted several critics, who thought a woman should be womanly; the \textit{Referee} suspected that the masculine manner had been adopted, as the most ‘feminine’ parts were the best.\textsuperscript{92} The \textit{Morning Post} saw her choice of text as challenging comparison with the great masters.\textsuperscript{93} The \textit{Daily Telegraph}, although not going so far as to accuse Smyth of setting out to compete – to ‘speak the special language of the masters’ – believed she should have avoided such competition and ‘consulted her womanly promptings’.\textsuperscript{94} But the masculinity was no obstacle to other critics. For H.F. Frost, the \textit{Athenæum} critic, the Mass confounded expectations of what a religious work by a woman would be like, and had Beethoven as a model.\textsuperscript{95} J.B.K. marvelled that a work of such power should have been composed by a woman in her twenties.\textsuperscript{96} T.L. Southgate thought it worthy to rank alongside the ‘sterling works’ of other English composers.\textsuperscript{97}

It is clear from these divergent expressions of opinion that some (male) critics were uncomfortable with the idea that a woman could write ‘masculine’ music and thus compete on equal terms with men. But equally remarkable is the fact that this did not worry others. It had been generally believed there could not be a female Beethoven because of a fundamental difference between male and female brains.\textsuperscript{98} Yet here was a critic citing Beethoven as the model for a woman’s composition – a small sign that the

\textsuperscript{90} Gillett 2000: 16–7
\textsuperscript{91} MO1890.11, MO1891.01b, MO1892.04b
\textsuperscript{92} MS1893.01.28
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ath1893.01.21
\textsuperscript{96} MO1893.02a, MO1893.02b
\textsuperscript{97} MN1893.01.21
\textsuperscript{98} Scott 2003: 41
belief in a separation between male and female domains in music was losing its hold. But the practice of gendering music itself and valorising masculinity continued. For example, Liza Lehmann’s song cycle *In a Persian Garden* (1896) was commended by the *Musical Times* for its ‘masculine grip and expression’. However, as noted above, by this time the preoccupation with defending music and musicians against the charge of unmanliness had receded, although it could re-appear when the character formation of the next generation was at stake, as Niecks’s lectures demonstrate. In general, though, ‘masculine’, as a term applied to music itself, had become more an aesthetic than an ethical qualifier – unlike ‘manly’, which would in any case have been inappropriate in the case of a composition by a woman.

### 2.5 Overview

The belief in the moral influence of music is a commonplace of scholarship of the period. This chapter adds to this scholarship in two ways: first, it shows that some critics contested the belief and others debated whether the ethical influence could be negative; second, it charts the attempts made to provide a theoretical grounding for the relationship between music and ethics. Much of the debate about the supposed negative influence centred on the music of Wagner. Here the contributions of Vernon Lee – a writer hitherto absent from music scholarship – were the most articulate. As regards the theoretical side, the attempts to provide a justification for the relationship of music and ethics reflect a concern to boost the importance of music. Niecks made the most sustained attempt, although a particular point of interest is the engagement of two writers with Tolstoy’s radical critique of art. It has to be said that much of the other theoretical writing matches F.H. Bradley’s description of metaphysics as ‘finding bad reasons for what we believe on instinct’; in practice, critics often took the ethical dimension for granted and mixed ethics and aesthetics in their judgements, often reflecting conventional views about gender. However, as will be seen later, the ethical element receded during the latter part of the period under study. Baughan, Shedlock and Ernest Newman, who all figured prominently in the debate about Strauss, were sceptical

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99 Smyth’s Mass, for all the praise bestowed on it, had to wait thirty years for a second performance (Gillett 2000: 31). As will be seen in chapter 4, swift disappearance was also the norm for works by male composers, such as Stanford’s *Requiem.*

100 *MT*1897.01
about the linkage between music and morality. Ernest Newman shared Baughan’s view that ethics and aesthetics should be separated and disapproved of critics who condemned works, such as Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique*, whose ethical aims they did not share; he took R.A. Streatfeild to task for criticising Chopin’s failure to produce the ‘serene nobility’ of Bach or Beethoven. At this time, Boughton was the only critic with a strong ethical agenda. But the ethical power of music in general was still stressed in appeals for state funding.

It was an embarrassment that male musicians, as stereotypically represented, appeared to give the lie to the supposed power of music to form character – hence the concern with manliness, manly pursuits and physical strength, and hence also the visceral distancing of musicians from the parade of ‘unmanly’ types. Here the debate described in this chapter feeds into more general scholarship about conceptions of masculinity. However, the extent of this concern should not be exaggerated: articles about it petered out and critics noted that the stereotype was on the wane. There is, for example, no evidence from the wide range of periodicals surveyed that the disgrace of Oscar Wilde in 1895 was the occasion of particular anxiety amongst musicians, as is claimed by Hughes and Stradling. It is, of course, possible that the trials were a subconscious influence, but this is a matter of speculation, to be distinguished from what can be established from evidence.

However, the issue referred to by ‘A.B.D.’ – that the English ideal of manliness involved the suppression of feeling – was central in the critical debate about the regeneration of English music. The common opinion about the English character was well-expressed by the historian W.E.H. Lecky: ‘no one can compare English life with life even in the Continental nations which occupy the same rank in civilisation without perceiving how much less Englishmen are accustomed either to dwell upon their emotions or to give free latitude to their expression. Reticence and self-restraint are the lessons most constantly inculcated’. To some critics this was no merely ethnological observation: it was taken as normative by those who demanded that English music

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101 Sp1906.10.20
102 Hughes and Stradling 2001: 52
103 Lecky 1899: 9
should exhibit the English character. As Lecky’s reference to ‘Englishmen’ indicates, this character was male.

As will be seen in chapter 4, the idea of ‘national character’ played an important part in the debate about the development of music. The term evokes the writings of Herder, who emphasised the diverse characters of national cultures, each of which had its own unique value: ‘a voice in a universal, all-embracing harmony’. However, Herder’s idea of national character referred to the entire culture – language, customs, etc. – whereas the term ‘national character’ as used by music critics most often referred to the personal character of the members of the nation (again, assumed to be male). It was in this sense that David Hume had discussed national character; but he concluded that the English were so diverse that the English ‘have the least of a national character; unless this very singularity may pass for such’. However, critics who insisted that English music should be distinctively English did not subscribe to this tolerant and inclusive view.

This chapter has shown that the debate about music and ethics during this period exhibits the diversity of opinion to which attention was drawn at the outset of the previous chapter. But although the prevalent belief of an earlier period that music and ethics were strongly linked, documented by scholars such as Solie and McGuire, was challenged and debated, it did not disappear: some critics continued to appraise music – for example, the music of Tchaikovsky (see p. 82) – in strongly ethical terms. But these ethical judgements were challenged by those who thought ethics irrelevant, and by the time Strauss was dominating the critical commentary the ethical element in criticism had more or less receded.

By tracing ideas that permeated the evaluation of art music, this chapter forms prolegomena to the next three chapters. Chapter 3 examines critics’ views about progress and degeneration in art music in general and is mainly concerned with foreign

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104 Cassirer 1946: 185, quoted in Llobera 1994: 165. ‘National identity’ is the term more often used today; see below, p. 127.
106 One writer who roundly condemned essentialism was Ford Madox Hueffer, Francis Hueffer’s son (whose adopted surname was Ford). See Parrinder 2004.
music. It is important to distinguish between two levels of meaning in the term ‘foreign’. In the basic sense intended here, it means simply ‘from abroad’, but in another, more specific, sense it is almost a synonym of ‘exotic’. For much of the time critics discussed music as music, not totally disregarding its country of origin but attaching little significance to it; for some it was an article of faith that national origin was irrelevant to the art. To a large extent the views about the development of English music surveyed in chapter 4 were formed against the background of the reception of foreign music, hence the order of chapters 3 and 4. Those who called for English music to have a national character regarded music from abroad as ‘foreign’ in the more specific sense. In chapter 5, which looks at the supply of and demand for art music, there is a strong ethical undercurrent: the morally elevating power of music was invoked in calls for public support and the perceived lack of interest in serious music was taken as a moral judgement on the nation.
3 Progress and degeneration

3.1 Introduction

‘A deep belief in the reality of progress in all aspects of life continued in most quarters until the end of the century, despite doubts and questionings’. J.F.C. Harrison is here expressing the generally accepted view of historians. The idea of historical progress was popularised by books such as H.T. Buckle’s *The History of Civilisation in England.* Some contemporary writers saw progress as underpinned by the theory of evolution and treated ‘evolution’ and ‘progress’ as synonymous, although in strictly Darwinian terms this was not so.

Music critics were impressed by the rapid and recent development of the art, which, unlike the visual arts, did not look back to classical Greece as a high point. Only three centuries separated the crude efforts at polyphony in the middle ages from the glories of Bach and Handel, and there was no doubt in the minds of early historians of music, such as Burney, that music had progressed during this period. It was still possible to hold that between Handel and Beethoven there had been an advance, but beyond this the idea of progress in music became more problematic. It seemed absurd to say that later composers had ‘improved’ on Beethoven. However, the further development of, for example, harmony and orchestration could not be denied. So a distinction had to be drawn between the area of resources and technique and the area of aesthetics – a style might become obsolete without affecting the value of the works composed in it.

However, not everybody agreed that the two areas could be so thoroughly separated: some commentators saw chromatic harmony and sensuous orchestration as signs of aesthetic or even moral degeneration. Many commentators saw in music not progress but an ascent to excellence followed in their own times by a descent into decadence,

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1 Harrison 1990: 13. For the earlier history of the idea of progress see Bury 1920, Nisbet 1980.  
2 Buckle 1861. For a brief exposition of Buckle’s narrative see Bowle 1954.  
3 Houghton 1957: 29–30 explores the different explanations given for progress. Outside natural science, Spencer’s version of evolution had more influence than Darwin’s. See below, p. 54.  
4 See, for example, Flotzinger 1997.  
5 Beethoven’s position in the second half of the century was the ‘apex […] the definitional moment of full symphonic adequacy’ (Hepokoski 2001: 424). Scott Burnham has explored the reasons why Beethoven’s heroic style has been ‘the paradigm of Western compositional logic and of all the positive virtues that music can embody for humanity’ (Burnham 1995: xiii).
seen in both aesthetic and ethical terms. It is important to keep in mind the point of view of the period: how rapidly and recently the stock of works regarded as of high value or even as masterpieces had been formed. The creators were either contemporaries, as in the case of Brahms, or near-contemporaries. This makes more comprehensible the hope expressed by many critics that another ‘great composer’ would soon emerge to continue the line, as well as the concomitant fear that the creative burst might have ended.

This chapter is relevant because the subject of this thesis is critical opinion in Britain about art music in general, not just about British music. Existing scholarship, to a large extent in response to the ‘Land ohne Musik’ taunt, has been preoccupied with British music and gives the impression that this was also the predominant interest of contemporary commentators. However, this chapter will show that critics were just as interested in new foreign music and looked to it for indications of the future direction of composition. This chapter focuses mainly on foreign music (in the basic sense of ‘foreign’ identified above, p. 51). Native music was scrutinised with reference to a more specific agenda and is dealt with in chapter 4. The British reception of new foreign music is a topic largely absent from existing scholarship, so this presentation places the development of native music in a wider context than hitherto has been the case. Contributions to the debate on the progress and/or regress of music were broadly of two kinds: work-specific – stimulated by particular works – and reflective, where a critic stood back and commented on broader themes or trends. Purely for convenience the debate is divided below into four five-year periods. The subheadings have emerged from an examination of critics’ writing and hence vary as the account proceeds.

In each period an event or a topic where critics’ views were especially diverse has been selected as a case study. The subject of the first is Bruneau’s opera Le Rêve, which brought to a head the controversy over the legacy of Wagner. The second examines divergent views about Brahms that were expressed at the time of his death. The third period was dominated by arguments over the programme music of Strauss: the reception of Ein Heldenleben is the subject of the third case study. The fourth returns to

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6 See, for example, Adams 2004: 88. See also below, p. 68 and p. 194.
7 See above, p. 12.
Brahms, to whom, according to some critics, composers would turn in reaction against the excesses of such as Strauss.

3.2 1888–92

3.2.1 Progress, stagnation or degeneration?

Writers in the *Musical Times*, including Joseph Bennett, frequently treated the degeneration of music as a universally acknowledged fact. The reviewer of a book about Brahms was in total agreement with the author’s appraisal that music was ‘appealing to the basest and most superficial feelings, and, by exciting the senses, completely deadening the comprehension of the beautiful’. This judgement exemplifies the interweaving of ethics and aesthetics: sensual experience is said to militate against the experience of beauty, which by implication is ethically prized. There is a reflection here of the view about music and ethics later formulated most clearly by Niecks (above, pp. 36ff). The reviewer expected an eventual reaction against sensationalism, but until then ‘such men as Brahms are the salt of our art, and keep it from utter degeneracy’. As will be seen below, Brahms became for some critics a symbol of musical sanity and a source of hope for the future.

Although the view that music was in decline was widespread, it was not universal. E.F. Jacques offered a theory of the development of music to the Musical Association in 1889. Jacques drew on Herbert Spencer’s doctrine that social life was governed by the same evolutionary law as the natural world, namely an advance from homogeneity to heterogeneity through increasing differentiation. Jacques also took from Spencer two other ‘laws’: that form resulted from the opposition between forces of growth and resistance, and that evolution exhibited a cyclic pattern in which ‘equilibration’ was followed by ‘dissolution’. Challenged to say whether music had arrived at equilibrium or was already in decadence, Jacques stalled and merely observed that very many contemporary composers, such as Grieg, had abandoned development and were just sticking bits together, unlike Wagner, whose later works exhibited the opposite extreme.

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8 *MT*1888.01. The book’s author was Hermann Dieters.
9 *PMA*1889.04
10 Other views of the relationship between music and the natural world are explored in Clark and Rehding 2001; Spencer, however, is not mentioned.
The answer did not satisfy all the audience, but Jacques did not take up the suggestion that he return and deal with the contemporary situation. (Jacques’s inability to apply Spencer’s theory would not have surprised contemporary critics of Spencer: ‘his writings abound in a facile terminology which, while only naming the problems to be solved, seems in itself to afford a solution’.

Spencer’s ‘laws of evolution’ could not determine whether music had reached a plateau or was in decline. The ‘plateau’ image lay behind the question posed by the Musical Standard in 1892: ‘Is the Golden Age of Music passed away?’ The writer concluded that creative genius had died out with Wagner and that contemporary composers were merely imitating their predecessors. However, many commentators saw not a plateau but a marked degeneration. At the most basic level was the offence of flouting the rules of harmony, counterpoint, and so on – the so-called ‘science’ of music, a term implying a body of knowledge based on established and immutable principles. The constant repetition of this doctrine in textbooks – some of which were even called ‘catechisms’ – reinforced the notion of absolute rights and wrongs in composition, the venerable nature of the doctrine often being conveyed by the book design (see fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Cover of textbook on counterpoint (1901 edition)

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11 Barker 1915: 130, quoted in Offer 1983. Offer shows how Parry in his Evolution of the Art of Music was influenced by Spencer. For further discussion of Spencer’s views on music see Offer 2010: 253–74.
12 MS1888.02.18
Hence the outrage of timorous conservative critics when faced with violations: ‘when [Grieg] gives us […] a piece in which both hands play nothing but bare fifths throughout we begin to feel that the whole foundations of musical science are being undermined and a state of artistic atheism is spreading in our midst’.  

The offender in this case was not an ignoramus or a tyro showing off, but a celebrated composer – hence the extreme language of apostasy: the term ‘atheism’ carried an ethical charge at the time. The opposing ‘liberal’ view was expressed by E.A. Baughan, who warned that the natural progress of music would be retarded if all new works were to be judged by rules ‘culled from the works of past masters’. This remark encapsulated the dialectic at the heart of criticism: critics who saw their task as that of evaluating works against established standards were plunged into uncertainty when faced with novelty. Unlike the public, who could like or dislike unthinkingly, critics were expected to be able to discriminate, drawing on their expertise to back up their judgements. The arguments that erupted later over the ‘new criticism’ were essentially about the nature of the critic’s ‘expertise’: did it come from superior technical knowledge or from a superior ability to articulate subjective responses? (See below, p. 159.) As will be seen in the reception of Strauss, many critics sidestepped the issue by reserving judgement pending further hearing; in this way they could at least show themselves as more circumspect than the ordinary public.

Along with rules of harmony and counterpoint went rules relating to musical form. Academicism – judging compositions by their conformity to established rules and the degree of technical skill demonstrated – received its most sustained criticism from Shaw, who saw academic obeisance to forms – fugue, sonata form, four-movement symphonies, etc – as stultifying. For Shaw all the ‘technical stuff’ – the subject-matter of analytical programme-notes – ‘bears no more vital relation to music than parsing does to poetry’. Shaw objected to the way in which certain forms had acquired a high status: ‘the writing of a piece in three movements in sonata form does not add a cubit to

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13 MT1892.03. ‘Consecutive fifths’ was often taken as the archetypal solecism in harmony. Stanford was still inveighing against them thirty years later (Stanford 1922: 90–2).
14 PMA1892.02b
15 SM1: 565–6, 867–8
16 SM2: 119
its stature [...] Bruch’s *Scottish Fantasia* is much better than his concertos; but it is on the strength of the concertos that he is regarded as a sort of contemporary old master’.  

An apparent disdain for melody concerned many critics. W. Barclay Squire, the *Saturday Review* critic, thought many composers had turned away from ‘natural’ melody and were producing disagreeable manufactured music, thinking ‘any sequence of notes, however far-fetched, will do for a theme, provided it is handled according to the rules of composition’. Works produced in this way engaged the brain rather than the heart. Barclay Squire regarded much contemporary composition as turgid, obscure, incoherent, and showy in orchestration. Nevertheless, he did not subscribe to a narrative of general decline, but criticised each new work on its individual merits. He found much to admire in the work of younger composers – Hamish MacCunn, for instance – and applied the same criteria to new works by established composers such as Brahms: ‘in the [Clarinet] Quintet the music flows from the heart, in the Trio it is the product of the brain’.

J.S. Shedlock, the critic of the *Academy*, identified complexity as the prevailing feature of contemporary music: ‘Schumann and Brahms, Berlioz and Wagner, are the models which tempt composers’. It was perhaps strange to group together composers who were usually contrasted: if their music was ‘complex’, it was so in very different ways. But Shedlock was criticising composers for holding complexity in too high a regard. Although he did not see ‘cleverness’ in music as a drawback, like others he regarded it as of little importance compared with originality, individuality or ‘inspiration’. This view was expressed forcibly in a review of Bruckner’s Third Symphony, performed in June 1891: ‘it is clever, but dry, and immoderately long. [...] he lacks inspiration; and an ounce of the latter will outweigh a ton of double counterpoint’.

Amongst the tendencies in contemporary composition that critics detected and disapproved of was the sin of ‘striving after effect’: unable to match the classics for

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17 *SM2*: 580
18 *SR*1892.10.15
19 *SR*1888.11.10, *SR*1891.03.14
20 *SR*1892.04.16
21 *Ac*1889.12.21
melody, formal beauty and charm, composers were resorting instead to arresting ‘effects’, mainly through orchestration but also through harmonic experimentation. W.H. Cummings remarked in an address to the Musical Association: ‘I do feel that bye-and-bye people will tire of this constant striving after effect, without the accompaniment of inspiration, and that, after a time, there will arise the genius who, with simple means, will carry us all captive’.23 Shaw, however, derided the musical conservatives who frowned on ‘striving after effect’: ‘the professor is always ashamed to do the very thing he is there to do: namely, to make an effect; and so he does nothing’.24

The foregoing account shows that critics debating general tendencies in composition maintained a cosmopolitan outlook. They drew examples from foreign composition, without regarding it as ‘foreign’ in the stronger sense identified above.

3.2.2 The messianic hope

The prospect envisaged by Cummings of a ‘saviour’ or ‘Messiah’ figured frequently in contemporary jeremiads. It enshrined the belief that the engine of progress was the ‘great man’ (always a man). In his *Evolution of the Art of Music* Parry tried to draw attention away from the ‘great men’, or at least to place them in relation to their environment, but the ‘great men’ idea retained its hold on many critics.25 Although a local English version of the belief occasionally emerged, the next great man was generally looked to as the leader of music *tout court*, a fact that testified to the strength of the perception of music as a unified, and thus cosmopolitan, field. Given the tendency of innovators (such as Wagner) to divide opinion, there was a strong element of fantasy in the idea of a genius who would ‘carry us all captive’. Those who harboured this hope were disturbed by the clash of conflicting opinions and longed for an ordered regime of settled doctrine. John Broadhouse, editor of the *Musical Standard* believed that a genius was needed who would combine ‘the poetic insight of Tennyson, the energy of Wagner, and the genius of Mozart […] But at present we are waiting for

22 *Ac*1891.07.04
23 *PMA*1891.05
24 *SMI*: 624
25 Parry 1893
the coming man." Later, in an article entitled ‘The Triumph of Mediocrity’, he complained that there were ‘plenty of musical John the Baptists, but no musical Messiah. The old forms sanctified, glorified, perfected by dead giants, are imitated ad nauseam by their puny followers’. Gounod was named as a living ‘great’, but ‘after his death, what?’ Broadhouse saw progress in science, poetry, painting – everywhere but in music: ‘it is only the musicians who fail to perpetuate the race of giants […] everything seemsparalysed by a deadly mediocrity’.

This article drew the response that even the ‘giants’ had produced a mountain of poor music and the current repertoire revolved around a limited number of pieces by a limited number of composers. As a result, other composers were denied the hearing whereby they might learn and improve. Behind this observation lay one of the fundamental features of the period: the limited range of opportunities for performance that resulted from a combination of low demand and commercial pressure. This topic is taken up in chapter 5.

### 3.2.3 Audience demands

A particular cause of concern to critics was the way in which composition was being affected by the changing demands of audiences. The optimistic narrative of progress put forward by Buckle and others (see above, p. 52) was under strain by the closing decades of the century, a significant area of concern being the rise of democracy through the gradual extension of the franchise, and the concomitant fear, expressed some years earlier by John Stuart Mill and reiterated by the prominent historian W.E.H. Lecky, of a tyranny of the poorly educated majority. The purchasing power of this majority was also growing. Music was adapting to environmental changes, although no contemporary commentator made the Darwinian connection. The Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, whose book *On Beauty in Music* appeared in an English translation in 1891, had linked the heightening of effect to a ‘pathological’ mode of listening that was merely a

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26 MS1890.01.04b  
27 MS1892.06.04  
28 MS1892.06.11  
29 Lecky 1896; see Bowle 1954 for a brief exposition.
submission to physical sounds. A writer in the *Musical Times* thought this was how a large majority of concert-goers listened, and in order to meet audience expectations ‘composers in these latter days degrade music by making it first of all appeal to sensation […] the public will tolerate nothing that does not pretend to tell a story, illustrate some extraneous thought, or simply thrill the nerves’. A similar pessimism coloured Frederick Corder’s view of the future of the symphony. He refused to accept that the symphony, as a form, was dead but could not see it flourishing when mass appeal was essential to success; it would do so only if and when music was taken out of the commercial nexus. But noting that Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert had been able to write music with mass appeal, he argued himself out of this jeremiad with some advice to fellow-composers, pending the arrival of the next genius: ‘Let us strive for an art form that will be concise enough to avert boredom from our impatient modern audience; let us – if we must – give titles to and invent stories for our compositions; […] Matters could be set right in a trice by the advent of a real genius; but, until the next individual of the small class appears on earth, the above is the best advice I can give’.

### 3.2.4 The legacy of Wagner

While some critics awaited the arrival of the next giant, others were bewailing the legacy of the last one. Wagner’s influence extended well beyond the field of musical composition. As Erwin Koppen has noted, ‘Wagnerism is a predominantly, if not exclusively, extramusical form of Wagner reception’. Sessa 1979 documents Wagner’s impact on literary and artistic circles in England. However, as Shaw observed, when Wagner’s works first appeared in England, conservative critics were preoccupied with his musical irregularities and errors, as they saw them. Although this dismissive attitude receded, critics still focused on Wagner’s compositional methods.

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30 Parry, who applied the Spencerian schema to the evolution of composition, said little about audiences as a factor, except in the case of opera, where poor taste had an effect (Parry 1893).
31 Dahlhaus observes that almost any genre of music could become kitsch if listened to in a sentimentally absorbed manner (Dahlhaus 1989: 313).
32 *MT* 1892.01
33 *MO* 1890.06b
34 Ibid.
35 Hoppen 1992
36 See also Sutton 2002: esp. 1–23.
and, with the exception of Shaw, had little to say about Wagner’s influence beyond the sphere of music.37

The responses of European composers and critics to Wagner, ranging from emulation to repudiation, have been well documented.38 The ethical reservations about his music were discussed in chapter 2; here and later in this chapter the focus is on his influence on composition: the use of ‘representative themes’ (leitmotive), a liberalisation of harmony, a fluid approach to form and the expression of poetic ideas through music. The comments of the sample of English critics represented below cannot be said to be strikingly original, but it is necessary to take note of them as the views expressed were an essential component of the English debate about the development of music and, as will be seen in the next chapter, an important part of the background to the debate about native composition.

The chequered history of the reception of Wagner in England left a legacy of continued argument. At first antagonistic critics concentrated their attention on Wagner’s theory about the relationship between music and drama, in the expectation that exposing its fallacies would undermine the works themselves. When Wagner became increasingly popular and his music took its place in the repertoire alongside the absolute music of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and so on, it became clear that the theory could be decoupled from the works and discarded. But although Wagner’s status as a ‘master’ had generally been acknowledged in England by 1888, he still had his detractors. In an anti-Wagner diatribe J.F. Rowbotham claimed that ‘the bubble has at last burst’, and Wagner’s operas, with the possible exception of Lohengrin, would be extinct in a few years’ time.39 A devastating reply from Stanford appeared in the next issue.40 Another unrepentant anti-Wagnerian was H. Heathcote Statham, whose scathing critique of the Ring – written before its first production – was republished virtually unchanged.41

37 SM3: 423. Baughan was an exception, crediting Wagner with the invention of the ‘new woman’, the image of female emancipation portrayed in novels of the period (MMR1898.04).
38 The conflict between Brahmsians and Wagnerians is well known. Dahlhaus observes that the influence of Wagner on European music in the period from 1890 to 1914 not only extended to absolute music but even in opera involved repudiation of the kinds of literary source Wagner had used: ‘the path around Wagner led through Wagner’ (Dahlhaus 1989: 339–41).
39 NC1888.10
40 NC1888.11. Stanford was ‘a reluctant spokesman for the Wagnerites’ (Dibble 2002: 195–6).
41 Statham 1892
Statham retorted to H.F. Frost’s dismissal of this critique that hearing the work had not changed his opinion: ‘[Wagner’s] method of using music is, in an intellectual point of view, a deplorable descent from that of his greatest predecessors’.  

Joseph Bennett was also well known as being inimical to Wagner; although Shaw claimed that Bennett had been forced to climb down when Wagner became popular, Bennett retained his reservations.  

Shaw saw no future in following Wagner, but for a quite different reason: Wagner, like Mozart, represented the culmination of a development, not the start of a new one, so ‘efforts to exploit the apparently inexhaustible wealth of musical material opened up at Bayreuth only prove that Wagner used it up to the last ounce’.  

### 3.2.5 Programme music

One of the issues that Wagner raised – in an extreme form – was that of the ‘poetic content’ of music. In a paper given to the Musical Association in 1892, H.C. Banister insisted that music should not be subordinated to drama or any other art and objected to the word ‘formalism’ being used as a term of denigration. Jacques’s plea for the tolerant acceptance of different standards of judgement for ‘absolute’ and ‘poetic’ music met with a fierce rejoinder from Cummings, for whom absolute music was the highest kind and had reached its apogee in the first three movements of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony.

Programme music was the subject of heated debates throughout the period of this study. Those who disapproved of it, or accorded it an inferior status, saw it as retrogression from the autonomy achieved by music when freed from association with words. Frederick Corder, whilst not denying legitimacy to programme music, censured the way in which contemporary critics set out to uncover the ‘meaning’ of a new symphony. ‘For, alas, story telling seems to be superseding all other forms of art in this curious high pressure age, the reason probably being that it is the easiest feat to achieve and the easiest to comprehend’. However, those who believed that music should convey some

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42 *Ath*1892.04.09  
43 *SM1*: 948. Bennett wrote a series of articles on Wagner for the *Musical Times* in 1890.  
44 *SM2*: 481  
45 *PMA*1892.01  
46 Ibid. : 66  
47 *MO*1890.05
poetic content could argue that formalism reduced music to mere ornamentation. As E.A. Baughan put it: ‘If music concerns herself only with beautiful sounds, having no origin or meaning beyond their beauty, she depresses herself to the level of the arts of gem-cutting and tessellated pavement’. 48

A common stance towards programme music was to hold that the music should be judged independently of the programme or poetic title. This was the view of W. Barclay Squire, who criticised the composer of a concert overture entitled *Tam O’Shanter* for trying to depict incidents in the poem whilst retaining an orthodox form; in his view the piece could stand on its own merits. 49 He was generally sceptical about the ability of music to portray extra-musical content, commenting that Saint-Saëns’s *Le Rouet d’Omphale* could as well be said to represent ‘the enslavement of a prizefighter by a lady of no virtue’. 50 (In a similar vein Shaw had remarked that the Inferno music in Liszt’s *Dante Symphony* could just as well represent an ordinary house fire. 51) Shedlock held that it did not matter if a composer had a programme in mind when composing (as in the case of Dvořák’s G major Symphony), but that the programme was best left unstated and the music left to stand purely as music. 52 He thought the distinction between ‘abstract’ and ‘poetical’ music artificial and agreed with the American critic W.J. Henderson that in the highest form of programme-music the programme was simply ‘an emotional schedule’. 53 However, the question as to whether the programme should be published or suppressed became an important issue in later debate.

Later controversy about programme music centred on the music of Richard Strauss. As will be seen, Strauss eventually eclipsed Wagner as the central point of reference in English debate about the development of music. However, the first appearance of Strauss’s music in London in 1889 (two movements from *Aus Italien*) was inauspicious; H.F. Frost judged it ‘student’s work, absurdly pretentious […] apparently designed to show that the composer was able to commence where Berlioz and Wagner left off’. 54

48 PMA1892.02a
49 SR1891.11.07. (The composer was Learmont Drysdale.)
50 SR1888.03.03
51 SMI: 214–5
52 Ac1891.06.20
53 Ac1892.04.23
54 Ath1889.12.07. Shedlock’s view was similar, if less strongly expressed (Ac1889.12.07).
3.2.6 Bruneau’s *Le Rêve*: a case study in ‘degeneration’

The reception of Alfred Bruneau’s opera *Le Rêve* encapsulates the views expressed by conservatively minded critics about contemporary composition. The work, with a libretto based on a story by Zola, appeared at Covent Garden in 1891. The most extreme condemnation came from T.L. Southgate after a paper by E.A. Baughan on the development of opera: ‘not only for ugliness, but also for violation of all the rules of harmony and beauty, it is difficult to find its parallel’. He asked if the work represented a legitimate and still further development of opera since Wagner’s time. ‘If so, and it be true that music sprung from chaos, it seems likely to speedily return there again.’ This challenge to Baughan was a re-run of an exchange of views in the *Musical News*. Southgate saw *Le Rêve* as a work that raised fundamental questions about the progress or regress of music: ‘This daring opera presents a mélange of advances and retrogressions which may well engage the attention of thoughtful musicians and cause us to ask the question, “What is ‘progress’ to end in?”’. Whilst accepting that the range of acceptable sounds had been steadily enlarged, he believed that music had to have some fundamental attributes: ‘a certain regularity and appreciable measure, a feeling for accent, a well-ordered progression of parts, a coherency, and above all an

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55 Although the work has dropped out of the repertoire (last performance 1947) it was highly thought of by Mahler; for recent scholarly interest, see Huebner 1999.
56 *PMA*1892.02c
57 *MN*1891.11.13
obedience to that which underlies our daily speech, grammar’.\textsuperscript{58} If these were removed, then all that had been achieved in the past to make music expressive of emotion would be lost. Southgate accepted that parts of \textit{Le Rêve} showed Bruneau to be a gifted dramatic composer, ‘yet he has produced an opera more devoid of melody, replete with hideous chord combinations, harsh progressions, defiance of the common rules of composition, and richer in ugliness than anything that has yet attained to the dignity of a public performance’.\textsuperscript{59} In Southgate’s view, acceptance of the work as legitimate entailed a rejection of the works of the past masters. ‘They cannot be right, and Mons. Bruneau right too. Which is in the wrong?’

Having condemned the work from the point of view of its musical language, Southgate also condemned it as retrogression in relation to the development of opera. Like Wagner, Bruneau had abandoned the aria and reverted to recitative, a move that in Southgate’s view hampered rather than enhanced expressive power. But it was the iconoclasm that most alarmed Southgate: ‘all that the experience of the ages has taught us will become obliterated in individual licence, and the boundless resources of the magic kingdom of harmony […] will be pushed on one side, and nothing of value given us in place of it’.\textsuperscript{60} In his response, Baughan, as a convinced Wagnerian, predicted that the older kind of lyric opera, where drama was subordinated to musical requirements, would be eclipsed by music-drama, of which \textit{Le Rêve} was a good example.\textsuperscript{61} He insisted that the ‘rules’ of musical grammar had to advance with the advance of music itself. But Southgate was adamant that music had to be subject to ‘laws of order, of coherency, and of well-ordered progression’. He was not prepared to discard ‘rules which the wisdom of past ages has handed to us as the outcome of mathematical and artistic experience’\textsuperscript{62} (The Southgate-Baughan confrontation was continued into the next issue but without resolution.)

Southgate’s review was not the first mention of \textit{Le Rêve} in the \textit{Musical News}. A week earlier the critic F. Gilbert Webb had contributed a review in which the iconoclastic

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.: 738  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.: 739  
\textsuperscript{61} MN1891.11.27  
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.: 774
features of the work were duly noted, but without any expression of outrage: ‘the music, which is composed of a tangled web of almost innumerable leit-motives, breaks every rule of form and harmony extant [...] At the same time, there is such an earnestness of purpose, so much cleverness, and dramatic perception displayed, that attention is excited and interest increased as the recital proceeds, and a work that does this must undoubtedly possess a certain merit’. 63

Joseph Bennett, music critic of the Daily Telegraph, was, like Southgate, a musical conservative with similar anti-Wagnerian views. He cited Le Rêve as evidence of the contemporary victory of poetry over music amongst ‘advanced’ composers: ‘an accompaniment of dramatic text and scene by music stripped of well-nigh all the characteristics which make it an art as distinguished from elemental sound’. 64 Bennett’s further remarks could have come straight from one of his anti-Wagner diatribes of the 1870s: ‘It is of the highest importance to determine whether a theory entailing absolute musical formlessness, an absence of all the beauty that in art depends upon order and symmetry, and utter disregard of the natural laws whereupon, as a science of tone, music is based – whether such a theory is an improvement on that which through Beethoven, gave us Fidelio, and through Mozart, enriched the world with Don Giovanni’.

Some other critics also found no redeeming features. Lack of melody was the main criticism (as it had been in the case of Wagner). For the Musical Times, Le Rêve was ‘as daring as the most revolutionary could desire. There is an entire absence of tunefulness except at the beginning of the second act, [...] when a lively popular air from another pen is introduced, this proving an oasis in the musical desert’. 65 For the critic of the Monthly Musical Record, ‘M Bruneau seems to have shattered his musical barque on the rock of theory’; he had tried to out-Wagner Wagner and had produced a work that was clever but wearisome. 66 The lack of melody was also noted in a review in the Lute: ‘the result is certainly calamitous. In the strains, both vocal and instrumental, M Bruneau is earnest even unto self-forgetfulness, and so courageous as to defy the canons

63 MN1891.11.06
64 MS1892.01.09
65 MT1891.12
66 MMR1891.12
of art’. However, this reviewer did recognise the dramatic force of the work, as did the critic of the *Theatre*, who found much of the music bewildering but acknowledged that at the most dramatic moments the composer showed exceptional gifts.  

Comparing Bruneau’s technique with that of Wagner, Frost judged that Wagner’s treatment of his themes evinced a symphonic level of control, whereas Bruneau ‘gives us nothing but a piece of patchwork’. Moreover, Wagner’s changes of tonality showed consummate art, delighting the ear, but Bruneau ‘jumps from key to key in most arbitrary fashion, producing effects as ear-torturing as his constant succession of excruciating discords’. But although Frost thought Bruneau used too many leading themes, he found in many of them ‘a certain weird beauty’. The *Musical Standard*’s reviewer agreed that Bruneau did not match Wagner’s skill in handling leading motives and that his music broke all the rules. But he had to admit that, possibly owing to an excellent production, the work held the audience’s attention throughout. The *Musical Standard* also published extracts of reviews from three daily papers, none of which condemned outright Bruneau’s highly unconventional musical language. The *Standard* came closest to doing so but in the end reserved judgement: after noting the extreme dissonances and frequent and abrupt key-changes, the critic concluded that ‘there is a sense of power and purpose which an attentive listener cannot fail to recognise, and the beauty and fitness of certain portions of the music […] indicate that there is method in what may lightly be deemed a species of musical madness’.

A few critics were, like Baughan, much more positive. Shedlock, not entirely convinced at first, became quite enthusiastic after a second hearing. He noted that Bruneau’s music recalled Gounod and Massenet, but his workmanship Wagner; he regarded Wagner’s influence as neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy, but merely inevitable: ‘he has not been able to escape the epidemic of representative themes’. After a second hearing Shedlock defended the composer: ‘There are Beckmessers who will fill you a slate full

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67 *Lu*1891.12
68 *Th*1891.12
69 *Ath*1891.11.07. Frost had been an early champion of Wagner, as Ebenezer Prout noted in an obituary (*Ath*1901.05.11).
70 *MS*1891.11.07a
71 *MS*1891.11.07b
72 *Ac*1891.11.07
with his faults and failings; but the composer, like Walther, has something within him which outweighs them all: he has true dramatic instinct and imagination’. Shaw, too, was impressed by *Le Rêve*. He saw Bruneau as having the talent to build successfully on the diverse legacies of Gounod and Wagner: ‘The score is full of the most delicate melody; and the harmonies and orchestral scoring are appropriately tender and imaginative’.  

After its London performances, *Le Rêve* moved to Brussels, where its reception was dubious at first but became increasingly favourable. It was the fact that such ‘advanced’ works were gaining public performances and were not immediately hooted off the stage that explained, at least in part, why conservative critics like Southgate were so shrill in their denunciations. They feared that they were on the losing side.

One strain of thought emerging from this debate was the admiration expressed by some critics for the ‘symphonic’ Wagner, who handled his themes with a mastery of control compared with which other composers’ efforts were ‘patchwork’. Even Wagner’s shifts of tonality were singled out for praise. These critics were free of the preoccupation with the supposed degeneracy of the elements of Wagner’s musical language and accredited Wagner’s compositional method as a legitimate variant of the ‘organic development’ of themes expected in compositions of the highest class. Concerns about musical language – chromaticism, etc., – tended to recede in the debate about the development of music.

The foregoing account of the critical response to a French work that exhibited the influence of Wagner shows again that English critics of the time saw music and its development as a cosmopolitan field. The impression given by accounts such as that of Hughes and Stradling that Wagner was of interest only as an external influence on English composition is misleading. As W. Barclay Squire observed, contemporary music ‘is addressed to the world at large’.

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73 *Ac*1891.11.28
74 *SM*: 467
75 *MMR*: 1892.01
76 *SR*: 1893.06.17
The response to *Le Rêve* demonstrates the strength of feeling, amounting to outrage in some instances, amongst critics who saw composition as degenerating. Expressions of hope for a musical Messiah, and numerous jeremiads, also testify to this conviction. Pessimistic views predominated during this period.

3.3 1893–7

3.3.1 Gounod and femininity

The death of Gounod in 1893 occasioned a commemorative article by Joseph Bennett, who by his own account had known the composer personally. Bennett described Gounod’s nature as essentially feminine and hence responsive to sensuous beauty: ‘blended colours, harmony of sounds, ornate displays of ceremony [...] the alliance of these with religious worship largely helps to fill our churches with women and with young men of almost equally susceptible organisation’. (It was a common belief amongst Protestants that ritualism and effeminacy were associated.) Bennett also observed that an over-developed response to sensation and feeling could lead just as easily to licentiousness as to religion, a view that chimed with Niecks’s views on music and ethics. In Bennett’s view Gounod’s cast of mind led to a lack of variety in his works; he was the musical equivalent of Rossetti in poetry: ‘luscious harmonies, slow moving and languorous, decked out with all the voluptuous colouring that a modern orchestra affords.’ Bennett concluded that Gounod ‘was mastered by voluptuousness – the word is not used offensively, but because, in its general application, it was the best.’

Given the ethically charged diatribes against effeminacy that appeared elsewhere in the *Musical Times*, it is striking that Gounod was not subjected to serious criticism for his feminine sensuousness. In fact, the previous issue had ridiculed the language used in an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, where the composer was criticised for his femininity. However, it should be noted that Gounod’s oratorios *Redemption* and *Mors et Vita* were

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77 MT1893.12a
78 See, for example, Hilliard 1982, Hanson 1997. Byron Adams, drawing on Hanson, extends the association to Wagner (Adams 2004).
79 See above, §2.2.5 (p. 36).
80 Bennett had drawn attention, in some detail, to Wagner’s ‘feminine’ love of silks and satins; the amount of space he devoted to this belied his assertion that it was a foible of no concern to others (MT1891.11a).
very popular with choral societies and were published by Novello, the publisher of the *Musical Times*. The issue that carried Bennett’s article also announced the publication of the score of the *Requiem from Mors et Vita*.\(^{81}\)

### 3.3.2 The return of melody

A resurgence of Italian opera reinstated the element that had been missed in much contemporary composition: melody. Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* had been very successful at its first London appearance in 1891 and Leoncavallo’s *I Pagliacci*, which appeared in 1893, achieved a similar success. Charles Willeby was pleased to announce that the musical world had its own ‘new’: ‘the new opera’.\(^{82}\) But his tone was humorous and others wrote did not take up the phrase. However, not all critics were enamoured: F. Gilbert Webb regarded *Pagliacci*, ‘with its characters of low animal type and brutal story’ as ‘detrimental to the growth of appreciation of refined and intellectual artistic workmanship’.\(^{83}\) Lest this moralistic reaction be taken as typical, here by way of contrast is the view of H.F. Frost: ‘Not one of the characters possesses any moral sense […] The atmosphere is grim, unwholesome, and sordid to the last degree, but it is intensely and pitilessly human, and the author has arranged his material with consummate art, so that, aided by music surging with feverish vitality, the whole becomes irresistibly fascinating’.\(^{84}\)

Mascagni’s second opera *L’Amico Fritz* was judged by many critics to be musically an advance on the first, but for the *Speaker* critic the work lacked dramatic interest and would have made no impression had it been the composer’s first work.\(^{85}\) He saw *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci* as representatives of a new school of Italian opera in which the music never held up the highly dramatic action and where Wagnerian endless declamation was replaced by continuous melody.\(^{86}\) Frost perceived in Mascagni’s third opera, *I Rantzau*, ‘the dawn of what looks like genius of no mean order […] the efforts

\(^{81}\) *MT*1893.12b
\(^{82}\) *EIM*1893.08. The epithet ‘new’ abounded at this time: the ‘new drama’, the ‘new woman’, etc.
\(^{83}\) *NQMR*1893.08b
\(^{84}\) *Ath*1893.05.27
\(^{85}\) *Sp*1892.05.28
\(^{86}\) *Sp*1893.05.27
of a mind teeming with fresh ideas to express itself in its own way [...] from first to last melody reigns supreme, though it may not be melody sliced out in eight-bar phrases.  

He described the music of Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* as ‘distinguished by Southern warmth and vivid colouring [...] All over there is the intensity peculiar to Italy, and certainly as much force and dramatic energy as we find in the works of Mascagni and Leoncavallo’.  

He called the work a ‘typical example of the new Italian school’. He was even more enthusiastic about *La Bohème*, calling it a masterpiece.  

Shaw, too, had a high opinion of *Manon Lescaut*; he saw ‘the domain of Italian opera enlarged by the annexation of German territory’, finding a symphonic character in the music and an extension of harmonic technique.  

Another work whose success was attributed to melody was Humperdinck’s *Hänsel und Gretel*, a ‘masterpiece’ according to one critic. All critics saw the strong influence of Wagner, but for the Speaker critic the influence was tempered by the use of ‘rhythmical, metrical, easily-to-be-remembered tunes’.  

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87 *Ath*1893.07.15  
88 Ibid.: 654  
89 *Ath*1897.05.01  
90 *SM3*: 216  
91 *MN*1894.12.29  
92 *Sp*1894.12.29
describing it as a masterly use of ‘absolute music’ in a genre often thought to be its antithesis. The work showed that Wagnerian methods did not preclude originality. But for the public it was the opera’s tunefulness that appealed, as in the case of *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

3.3.3 Ugliness rampant

Although the operas of the new Italian school were favourably received, in other respects contemporary composition continued to be regarded as increasingly ugly. This aspect was thrown into relief by the revival of early music, with which modern music was sometimes unfavourably compared. The qualities detected in early music wavered between aesthetic (beauty) and ethical (truthfulness, or purity of intention). Runciman, reviewing some new music, turned with relief to the old, as revived and performed by Arnold Dolmetsch: ‘our music has more in it of human passion, often more of mere hysteria; and while the old music is never hysterical it generally equals ours, and sometimes beats it, in point of pure beauty’. For Shedlock a similar feeling was evoked by a successful revival of Gluck’s *Orfeo* at Covent Garden: ‘the very simplicity seems a merit, and almost a condemnation of modern art’. Shedlock detected in contemporary opera the consequences of living in a ‘feverish’ age, where ‘tales of dishonour and death’ were to the public taste. For him a light piece like Mozart’s *Bastien et Bastienne* provided welcome relief. Haydn’s music could have a similar effect: ‘his fresh genial strains are often more welcome than the sounding brass and clanging cymbal of many a modern musician’. (‘Brass’ and ‘cymbal’ carried the ethical connotations of their appearance in the New Testament.) Shedlock found a performance of *The Creation* ‘refreshing, particularly to those who are constantly hearing modern works. The development of music has not been all progress.’ Shaw agreed with this judgement. He denounced the degeneration he saw in modern music, apart from Wagner: ‘Test it by the operas of European popularity – *Don Juan*

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93 *NQMR*1895.02, *MS*1894.12.29
94 *MMR*1895.02, *Ac*1894.12.29, *MO*1894.06
95 *SR*1895.02.02
96 *Ac*1890.11.15
97 *Ac*1893.01.21
98 *Ac*1892.04.16
99 *Ac*1894.12.15
[Don Giovanni] a century ago, Carmen today. Or take program music, with Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony to begin with, and Moszkowski’s Joan of Arc or Benoît’s Charlotte Corday to finish with. Or compare Mozart’s Requiem and Rossini’s Stabat Mater with Dvořák’s. Surely we have along these lines the most frightful degeneration, which has only been masked for us by the irresistible power with which Wagner drew our attention to himself alone.’

As noted above, from time to time a critic would express a longing for the appearance of a new musical genius. One of these critics, Walter Bernhard, insisted that the ‘coming musician’ had to be a melodist: ‘a master of pure melody, such as streamed forth ceaselessly from the brain of Handel, of Mozart, of Schubert, of Beethoven’.

He pointed out that the critics had been discomposed by the recent successful revivals of Maritana and The Bohemian Girl, the ballad operas of the 1840s; they should not have been surprised, as what gave these operas their enduring popularity was their melodiousness.

The indefatigable Joseph Bennett returned to one of his favourite topics in an article on beauty in music. He claimed that more and more composers were using ugly effects to attract attention, not so much in pure orchestral music, ‘which now is seldom written at all’, but in chamber music, where ‘we are often called upon to suffer turgidity, coarseness, and that form of vulgarity which […] consists in extravagant emphasis, redundant utterance, and obscurity of sense’. The result was a failure but was to be expected, as modern composers ‘share the hurry of the age’ and could not take time to develop their technique, though they may satisfy audiences ‘as ignorant as they are.’ (Bennett named no particular targets for these remarks.) The phrase ‘the hurry of the age’ points to a pervasive sense of the period as one of haste and hurry. ‘Time flits quickly in this hurried age of ours’, wrote the literary critic Hubert Crackanthorpe.

Spencer Curwen spoke of ‘the nervous tension of modern life’. Another writer saw

100 SM3: 176–7
101 MO1893.12
102 MT1895.09
103 YB1894.07
104 MS1897.06.19a
the decline of the three-volume novel, the preference for short operas and the demise of sonatas as indicators of ‘the hurry and unrest which pervades the modern world’.  

Turning to programme music, Bennett observed that the criterion of beauty was often overridden by that of fidelity, with unpleasant results. He cited Saint-Saëns’s *Danse Macabre* as an example where an unbeautiful subject was illustrated by unbeautiful music, and questioned whether such a creation could be justified. He recalled a diatribe by Ruskin against sensationalism and horror in art, and extended its scope to music, citing pieces by Berlioz, Raff, Wagner and, as before, Saint-Saëns. He asked finally ‘what may be done to reinfuse the spirit of beauty into those developments of modern music from which it seems to have departed’. Bennett again complained about the expectations of uncultured audiences. Observing how an audience in Rome enjoyed the generally unrelieved intensity of Leoncavallo’s *Chatterton*, he remarked: ‘the half-educated crowd in all countries do the same, and the temptation to humour them is, of course, very great.’ Parry expressed a similar view, though more temperately: he noted that audiences increasingly preferred realism – they felt they could understand music with descriptive titles and even preferred operatic extracts in the concert room to symphonies.

The problem, as far as conservative critics were concerned, was that audiences preferred the sensational (and in their view the ugly) to the beautiful. But although critics denounced the situation they did not make practical suggestions for redirecting public taste.

### 3.3.4 Strauss and programme music

Strauss and programme music continued to elicit strong censure, but the critics were beginning to be split. A performance of the prelude to Act I of Strauss’s opera *Guntram*...
confirmed, for Shedlock and J.B.K. that the composer was following in Wagner’s footsteps, but, in J.B.K.’s opinion, ‘without approaching in the remotest degree the beauty of the master’s melodic material and orchestral combinations’. However, J.B.K. did acknowledge that the music had been separated from the drama that may have given its *motifs* their significance.

Shedlock was far more definite in his review of *Till Eulenspiegel*, performed at the Crystal Palace in March 1896. He described the work as ‘one of the cleverest of its kind ever written […] a programme piece of first rank, and the orchestration little short of a marvel’. This opinion was confirmed after a second performance: ‘however wild at times the fun may be, the composer keeps fairly within the limits of his art’. But when he next heard the work, Shedlock, who had earlier recommended not divulging a programme, criticised the composer for withholding it; he continued to maintain the superiority of absolute music, but conceded that ‘by direct imitation and association of ideas, striking effects may be obtained’. Frost described *Till Eulenspiegel* as ‘extraordinary’ and ‘eccentric’ but added ‘though the music is madness, there is method in it, some of the themes being really beautiful’. However, after hearing the work for the third time, he decided that it did not improve on acquaintance. This was also the experience of J.B.K., who gave the work high praise at first but later described it as an ‘extravagant illustration of the grotesque’. However, another writer in the same periodical welcomed works that departed from ‘severely classic models’ and offered ‘relief to the high sobriety and seriousness of the symphonic “atmosphere” in general’. He thought it did not amount to a devaluation of great works or a lowering of taste to want something lighter from time to time; on that score, *Till* was to be welcomed.

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109 *MN*1896.02.22
110 *Ac*1895.10.05, *MO*1895.11a
111 *Ac*1896.04.28
112 *Ac*1896.06.06
113 *Ac*1896.10.31
114 *Ath*1896.03.28
115 *Ath*1896.06.06
116 *MO*1896.05b, *MO*1896.12
117 *MO*1897.01b
Although Frost felt able to dismiss Strauss’s *Till Eulenspiegel* as harmless humour, he could only condemn *Also Sprach Zarathustra* in the strongest terms: ‘Condemnation […] must be pronounced on the far more elaborate work performed for the first, and, we fervently hope and believe, for the only time at the Crystal Palace […] This is founded on F. Nietzsche’s fantastic prose poem *Thus spake Zarathustra: a Book for All or None*. We should say for none, at any rate in this country’. The writer of the programme notes for the work, C.A. Barry, had claimed that Strauss’s intention in the music was to undermine rather than glorify Nietzsche’s anti-religious views. (Considerable ingenuity was clearly needed to make the programme palatable to English sensibilities.) Even so, Frost noted, the work was received ‘with significant signs of disapprobation’, the applause having been for the conductor. He expected better from Strauss when he had sown his wild oats. After hearing *Don Juan* he was still of the same mind and hoped that Strauss would abandon his eccentricities and ‘pen music that will speak for itself’ (by which he no doubt meant absolute music).

Runciman found in *Don Juan* another failing of contemporary music – a ‘craze for originality’. He thought the work was ‘not in the least a poem and has little of tone – beautiful tone – in it […] One cannot tell at first whether it is the product of extreme idiocy or of extreme artfulness; but as to the entire lack of art no one can possibly have a minute’s doubt’. After a concert conducted by Strauss himself in December 1897 Runciman tried to put his finger on what he disliked. ‘Clever, diabolically clever, it certainly seemed and still seems to me; but in the qualities of passion, beauty, dignity, directness of expression, I did and do find it singularly wanting. Moreover I find in it a thick vein of commonness. Yet […] again and again a hint of something like genius appears – a brief bit of melody, a touch of harmony, a really fresh and beautiful bit of orchestral colour’. He put Strauss into the same category as Berlioz: ‘he thinks far more of the mathematics, or if you like, the gymnastics of music than of its beauty, expressiveness and nobility of architectural design’. The reference to mathematics is somewhat obscure, especially as it is likened to gymnastics, but it presumably stands for the absence of ‘beauty, expressiveness’, etc. In chapter 2 above,
Tod und Verklärung ‘about as banal and clumsily imagined a tale as was ever thought fine by a German’ and found the conclusion of the work as vulgar as a drawing-room ballad. Frost made the usual apology for not making a firm judgement of Tod und Verklärung, that its form was not immediately apparent: ‘a striking work, though so strange in structure that it cannot be appreciated at its value on a first hearing’. 124

Strauss was not the only composer whose programme music came in for severe criticism. Shedlock thought Dvořák’s Golden Spinning Wheel so bad that he wondered whether Dvořák might have gone into decadence. 125 He was no more pleased by Dvořák’s The Water Fay, finding it impossible to track the story in the music. 126 And when a third ‘symphonic poem’, the Noon Witch, was performed, it confirmed his low opinion: ‘In composing these three Symphonic Poems Dvořák committed three sins: he ought not to have selected poems without poetry; he ought not to have yielded to the craze for realism; and he ought not to have trebled his artistic error’. 127 The third of these works was also censured by Frost because the composer had degraded music by associating it with unpleasant subject-matter. 128 Frost had the same view of the composer’s other symphonic poems: they were ‘based on lugubrious and repulsive subjects’. 129 (There was an echo here of a debate that had taken place a few years earlier in the field of painting: see below, p. 87.)

3.3.5 Brahms: a case study in divergence

From time to time a critic would uphold Brahms as a model for the future progress of music, in opposition to Wagner. As observed above, appreciation of Wagner’s strengths in composition was growing; appraisals of Brahms were prompted by the composer’s death in 1897.

mathematics appears as the quintessential amoral field; here it is the quintessentially inexpressive, as gymnastics is in comparision with dancing.

124 Ath1897.12.11
125 Ac1896.10.31
126 Ac1896.11.21
127 Ac1896.11.28
128 Ath1896.11.28
129 Ath1896.12.12
In a recent study of Brahms reception, Daniel Beller-McKenna argues that commentators have downplayed the composer’s Germanness, locating his music in an idealised cultural realm untouched by politics. Although this account of Brahms’s nationalism has been challenged, the ‘idealised’ de-Germanised representation of the composer matched the role he played in some conservatively minded English critics’ views about the progress or regress of music. W.W. Cobbett spoke of Brahms’s work as typifying ‘what is loftiest in Teutonic aspirations, those from which “blood and iron” are absent’.

Fuller Maitland devoted a third of his book Masters of German Music (1894) to Brahms – justifiably so in the opinion of a reviewer: ‘with the exception of Johannes Brahms, no contemporary German musician has much claim to the title of master’. Another reviewer agreed, noting that Brahms’s symphonies had been held up by Parry as examples of ‘the loftiest standard of style of the present day’. Shedlock linked Brahms with Dvořák as the pair of composers who were doing most to preserve past traditions but who were still in broad sympathy with the contemporary spirit. But he was prepared to criticise Brahms severely at times: he found the Double Concerto ‘a dry, insipid, and in many places ugly work’. Shaw, whose view of Brahms had been very negative, re-appraised the composer in 1894 and in the process changed his attitude towards absolute music. He thought Brahms ‘tedious and commonplace’ when he tried to express any extra-musical ideas but ‘absolute music was in him abundant, fresh, hopeful, joyous, powerful, and characterised by a certain virile seriousness and loftiness of taste which gave great relief after the Byzantine corruption of the latest developments of operatic music’.

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130 Beller-McKenna 2004
132 MN1897.04.10. Beller-McKenna, however, draws attention to Brahms’s admiration for Bismarck, the ‘Iron Chancellor’ (op. cit.: 133).
133 Ath1894.08.25
134 Sp1894.05.25
135 Ac1893.03.04
136 Ac1894.06.09
137 SM3: 176
to her a ruthless exploitation not only by the poet and higher dramatist, but by the sensation-monger and pander’.\textsuperscript{138}

Brahms’s death in April 1897 drew further appraisals. For ‘H.A.S.’ [H.A. Scott?], writing in the \textit{Outlook}, the death of Brahms left music leaderless: ‘month after month rolls by, and the Messiah whose coming is awaited so anxiously throughout the musical kingdom of the earth does not arrive’.\textsuperscript{139} (Note again the essentially cosmopolitan perception of the ‘musical kingdom’.) W.H. Hadow, writing about the composer in the \textit{Contemporary Review}, firmly believed in the superiority of ‘classical’ music – meaning music in which style and treatment were paramount – over music designed primarily to evoke emotion.\textsuperscript{140} Composition of the ‘classical’ music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven required strenuous educational preparation; but ‘Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner, can hardly be described as educated musicians at all’.\textsuperscript{141} Although Hadow acknowledged that Brahms sometimes exhibited ‘a touch of deliberation’, he defended him against the charge of being academic and contrasted the nobility of Brahms’s music with the ‘riot and intemperance’ that he saw in German music after Brahms. Hadow’s language about contemporary composition carried ethical overtones: ‘Excessive sensationalism, excessive stimulation, thought that is often morbid, phrase that is deliberately harsh and cacophonous; all these are the marks of an art that has passed its prime […] If German music returns from its period of anarchy it may once more resume its high position in the artistic world. If not, the sceptre will pass into other hands’.\textsuperscript{142} Hadow reckoned that it would be some years before Brahms was appreciated sufficiently to influence composition: in the meantime there appeared to be a period of ‘Slavonic supremacy’. But in the course of time the lawgiver rather than the rebel would be held in esteem. Hadow’s likening of Brahms to a lawgiver reflected the views of musical conservatives who looked for a successor to Brahms as leader and lawgiver of the domain of music, a domain that was in their view in a temporary state of anarchy. The references to anarchic German music were clearly to Strauss.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.: 177
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Out}1898.04.09
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{CR}1897.05
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.: 656
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.: 659–60
Fuller Maitland had no doubt that Brahms would be numbered with the greatest.\(^{143}\) He contrasted the dignity and masterly thematic development of the symphonies with ‘the minor felicities of instrumentation which makes for effect with the public at large’, and defended Brahms against the charge of formalism, which came from ‘some of the newer critics of the present day, who have contrived to blind themselves to the beauty of his ideas and the grandeur of their treatment’. (The reference to ‘newer’ critics was probably to Runciman, whose unguarded and subjective criticism was attacked as ‘the new criticism’ by writers of a more conservative temper (see below, p. 159).)

Other critics were more ambivalent in their judgements. Runciman held that the ‘true’ Brahms was to be found in many of his songs; but the composer’s ambition was to create music like that of Beethoven, an ambition in which he was egged on by Schumann, Hanslick, and others: ‘he accepted himself as the guardian of the great classical tradition (which never existed); and he wrote more and more dull music’.\(^ {144}\) (For example, the *Haydn Variations* were for Runciman ‘the merest rubbish’ and the Fourth Symphony very clever but ‘intolerably dull’.\(^ {145}\) ) The *Musical Herald* believed that Brahms’s music was too esoteric and academic to be popular, as the composer represented the culmination of the German tendency ‘to make the inner meaning of the music more important than the beauty of sound […] He was always clever, suggestive, intellectual, profound, and these qualities are of high value; but the first and most necessary requirement of music is to be musical’.\(^ {146}\) The *Monthly Musical Record* believed that only time would tell how much of Brahms’s music would last.\(^ {147}\)

Brahms’s life as well as his music was held up for approval. The *Musical Times* thought the composer’s life ‘in which consistent and unfaltering devotion to the highest aims was the dominant principle’ would exert a beneficial influence.\(^ {148}\) For E.A. Baughan, writing in the *Musical Standard*, Brahms’s music ranged from the warm and poetical to the dry and academic but he admired the composer’s absolute devotion to his art and

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\(^{143}\) Ti1897.04.05  
\(^{144}\) SR1897.05.01  
\(^{145}\) SR1897.06.05  
\(^{146}\) MH1897.05  
\(^{147}\) MMR1897.05  
\(^{148}\) MT1897.05
indifference to public opinion.\textsuperscript{149} Musical Opinion reprinted an article from the Daily News, which stated that Brahms had recently been more popular in England than in Germany, ‘where there is a strong and noisy party devoted to a much more advanced style’ (Strauss again).\textsuperscript{150} The Athenæum carried only a short article commenting on a range of the composer’s works. Shedlock defended Brahms against the accusation of obscurity but agreed that some of his works – those where intellect predominated over emotion – were dry but others had rightly brought the composer lasting fame.\textsuperscript{151}

By focusing on the pronouncements of the more conservative-minded of critics it is possible to give the impression of widespread devotion to Brahms (a 'shards’ illusion: see above, p. 18). However, the overall impression given by these appraisals is that of a gifted composer, single-mindedly pursuing his artistic aims but working within self-imposed limitations as regards form and means of expression. Only Hadow – and possibly Fuller Maitland – saw in Brahms’s oeuvre the best hope for the future of music.

The issues debated during this five-year period show again that English critics saw music as a unified field to which composers of any nationality were contributing. The debate was in many respects a continuation of that initially stimulated by Wagner’s music, specifically that of the Ring, when conservative critics like Joseph Bennett had upheld beauty as the criterion of musical worth, as against appropriateness to the situation depicted.\textsuperscript{152} Programme music kept this issue alive, making the choice of subject a crucial matter for critics insistent on the primacy of beauty. Strauss was beginning to attract critical attention and some critics saw Strauss and Brahms as representing alternative paths for the future development of music, a view that endorsed Germany as still the musical centre of gravity.

\textsuperscript{149} MS1897.04.10
\textsuperscript{150} MO1897.05
\textsuperscript{151} Ac1897.04.10
\textsuperscript{152} DT1876.08.14
3.4 1898–1902

3.4.1 Tchaikovsky: the abandonment of reticence?

In the light of the ethically charged debate about worthy and unworthy emotions recorded in chapter 2, it was not surprising that Tchaikovsky would come in for criticism. But the London premiere of the *Pathétique* in 1894 had been so successful that the work was repeated at the next Philharmonic concert and soon established itself in the repertoire of the Proms. Typical of highly positive appraisals of the work was that expressed by the *Musical Standard* in 1897, which found ‘a vast amount of musical cleverness’ that appealed to the musician together with ‘pathos and emotion that carry away the least learned of listeners’.\(^{153}\) It is clear that for this writer being carried away carried no ethical disapproval. Even Runciman, difficult to please, wrote a highly appreciative article about the work, and described Tchaikovsky as ‘one of the few great composers of the century’.\(^{154}\) However, some critics denounced the work and by implication the taste of audiences. The *Musical Times* described it as ‘Mr [Robert] Newman’s hobby-horse’ which was ‘once more ridden to the admiration of a crowded house’.\(^{155}\) The critic stayed away on this occasion: ‘We cannot endure this nerve-shattering music any more.’ Tchaikovsky’s sensationalism was also deprecated by Charles Maclean in a paper given to the Musical Association in 1898; however, his opinion was by no means endorsed in the discussion that followed.\(^{156}\)

Ethical judgement was very apparent in negative responses to Tchaikovsky. C. Fred Kenyon saw in Tchaikovsky the clearest evidence of a movement from objectivity (found in Bach and Beethoven) to extreme subjectivity, which he attributed, in unashamedly ethical terms, to ‘selfishness, or the cultivation of self pity’.\(^{157}\) Kenyon feared that subjective music would take over completely in time, resulting in ‘the annihilation of all that is most noble and most pure in the noblest and purest of all arts’. Ernest Newman defended Tchaikovsky in a diatribe against the failings of English music critics, who applied to the composer an ignorant caricature of Russian semi-

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\(^{153}\) *MS*1897.04.24
\(^{154}\) *Do*1897.06
\(^{155}\) *MT*1898.12b
\(^{156}\) *PMA*1898.01
\(^{157}\) *MO*1899.09b
barbarism and based their judgement on very little acquaintance with his overall output.\footnote{CR1901.06} However, ethically charged language similar to Kenyon’s reappeared in an article by Arthur Symons, who was mainly known as a literary critic and poet. Symons found savagery in the Pathétique: ‘Tchaikovsky is a debauch, not so much passionate as feverish’.\footnote{Ac1902.04.05} Symons also found a ‘touch of unmanliness’ that he believed to be characteristic of modern art: ‘There is a vehement and mighty sorrow in the Passion Music of Bach, by the side of which the grief of Tchaikovsky is like the whimpering of a child. He is unconscious of reticence, unconscious of self-control’.

Earlier in the period under study, ethical objections had centred on Wagner’s music, as recounted in chapter 2. In Symons’s view, Tchaikovsky’s blatant self-obsession eclipsed any reservations there might have been about Wagner. Symons argued that Wagner’s expression of emotion always had an elemental and universal dimension, whereas Tchaikovsky was entirely focused on self-pity. In uncompromisingly ethical terms Symons contrasted the attitude of ‘loving obedience’, which he ascribed to composers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the excessive emotion and ‘selfishness of desire’ exhibited in modern music. Once again, early music was being credited with an ethical purity of intention absent from modern music.

It is noticeable that Symons was the only critic who explicitly suggested effeminacy – a ‘touch of unmanliness’ – in Tchaikovsky, and even this was immediately universalised as a characteristic of modern art. However, the references to lack of self-control imply a falling short of English ideals of manliness, but even here this could have been attributed to the ‘Russian temperament’, stereotypically seen as exhibiting ‘extremes of optimism and pessimism’.\footnote{Sp1893.11.11} There was no reference to Tchaikovsky’s sexuality, most likely through ignorance rather than reticence.\footnote{Before Rosa Newmarch’s book on Tchaikovsky (which itself makes no mention of sexuality) appeared in 1900, little was known of the composer’s life (MN1900.07.07).}
3.4.2 A return to absolute music?

‘There is no doubt that the orgies in which Richard Strauss, Dvořák, and the Young Russian School have indulged in is about to cause a reaction’, wrote the critic of *Musical Opinion* (pseudonym ‘Common Time’, hereafter abbreviated as ‘CT’) in January 1898. He cited Frederick Niecks, Grieg and Joseph Bennett as wanting a return to the worship of Mozart, as if, said CT, it were possible for Mozart, who was perfect in his day, to meet the needs of the present. However, another writer in the same periodical thought there was some merit in the idea of a greater acquaintance with Mozart: ‘we have got very far away from the soundness and limpidity of Mozart in these days of sensational realism’. It was therefore strange that this paper should print an entirely uncritical article, complete with portrait photo, of Richard Strauss. His music was described as ‘fresh, free, and flowing with life’. The article concluded: ‘His published works would now fill a long list, but none are more popular and beautiful that *Don Juan*’. (This was one of the works earlier dismissed as eccentricities by some critics.)

Joseph Bennett continued to denounce the degeneracy of contemporary music. In a series of articles in the *Musical Times* in 1898 he represented music as in a state of anarchy: ‘the highest seats in the temple are vacant, the living voice of authority is silent, and, like a swarm of bees without a queen, the neophytes are pursuing their own devices, unguarded and unchecked […] now that we have no leader, word has gone forth that it is shameful to be led. “Live your own life” is urged upon musicians, as upon the restless, aimless crowd of half “emancipated” women.’ (Note the appearance of the ‘new woman’ as an image of degeneration.) Bennett granted that genius would pursue its own path, but held that the proper behaviour of others was to ‘secure the position last gained, make the best of its possibilities and await another commander-in-chief’. (The last leader was presumably Brahms.) Bennett continued to bewail the popularity of ‘eccentric and often repellent music’, such as Saint-Saëns’ *Danse Macabre* (which he had already castigated: see above, p. 74), that resulted from

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162 MO1898.01a
163 MO1898.02a
164 MO1898.01b
165 MT1898.03
the democratising of audiences, whose craving for nervous excitement was being satisfied by ‘the abuse of the modern orchestra in ministering to that unhealthy appetite’. He claimed that ‘intellectual’ music (counterpoint, fugue, etc) was consequently marginalised and believed that the musically educated class needed to induct the new entry into accepting its standards. (As before, no mechanism for this was suggested.) A writer in the *Outlook* concurred in the view that music after Brahms was leaderless and that the anxiously awaited Messiah had not arrived.

Ernest Walker, in a paper given to the Musical Association, claimed Brahms as the leader in the fight against the degradation of instrumental music, ‘the noblest of all arts’. He saw the Wagnerian influence on the orchestral music of Strauss and others as disastrous: ‘In the midst of all these orchestral pictures and orchestral novels, and portrayals of all things and all emotions in heaven and earth, we feel, or we ought to feel, how immeasurably greater is the art so modestly concealed in a Haydn string quartet’. (Note the ethically charged language: ‘ought to feel’.) Responding, Maclean did not endorse a blanket condemnation of programme music, citing the *Siegfried Idyll* as a beautiful example. But most composers of programme music he saw as ‘engaged on a race down-hill’.

But degeneration could also be detected within absolute music. Shedlock acknowledged that the themes of Borodin’s Second Symphony were striking, ‘but the general construction is loose and unsatisfactory, like that of so many Russian composers’. A symphony by Balakirev elicited a similar response: it showed no organic unfolding, only repetition. Shedlock remarked that composers like Balakirev who had considerable talent, though not genius, would do better to stick to shorter works and not attempt symphonies: ‘We often hear about [symphonic] form being “played out”, but the truth is that most modern composers cannot play themselves into it’. He censured E.A.

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166 *MT*1898.06
167 The musically educated (middle) class was, in Dahlhaus’s terminology the ‘taste-bearing stratum’ (Dahlhaus 1989: 41ff).
168 *Ou*1898.04.09
169 *PMA*1899.04
170 *Ibid.*: 123
171 *Ibid.*: 137
172 *Ath*1898.02.05
173 *Ath*1901.10.05
Baughan for urging composers to modify the form of the symphony. Shedlock believed that young composers should start by copying the example of great masters such as Beethoven – if they thought modification essential they might be tempted ‘to all kinds of foolish changes’.174 (Shedlock was frequently to warn of the dangers of experimentation by the inexperienced.)

However, amongst the jeremiads there were occasional expressions of, if not optimism, at least a sanguine view of musical development. CT observed that complaints about deterioration had appeared every time music became more expressive, and it was a fallacy that classical music, because it aimed at pure beauty rather than expression, was thereby ‘intellectual’. The pursuit of beauty was nothing but a form of sensuousness: it was exemplified perfectly in Pater’s Marius the Epicurean where it was clear that the intellectual love of beauty was a concern of a decadent people. It was healthier to respond to that which had the power to move – pieces such as Siegfried’s Funeral March. George Hopper thought the pessimistic view that the giants (Brahms and Wagner) had left the stage and only mediocrities abounded lacked a proper perspective.175 It was a selective view of the past, filtering out the host of mediocrities that accompanied the giants in any age; and in any case future historians might judge the present fin de siècle very differently. Hopper emphasised the linkage between music and the rest of life: ‘each new phase in the history of music was less a product of the man than of the time’. (This, broadly, was Parry’s view; see above, p. 58.) So the quality of music would, like that of all the arts, ‘rise and fall proportionately with that of the civilisation of which it forms a part’.

Runciman’s chief complaint about contemporary composition was precisely that music failed to link with the rest of life. Composers were merely repeating what had been said well enough before and added nothing that reflected contemporary life: ‘In England there is a steady output of oratorios and cantatas constructed according to well-tried designs; France is no further advanced than she was fifty years ago; from Germany we get little else than symphonies, overtures, symphonic poems that date back to pre-Wagnerian days; the young Italians – at least whatever things are good in the young

174 Ath1900.08.11
175 MO1899.04b
Italians – are as old as Rossini. […] How one longs for a man who will be done with the formula, who will come off the beaten track.'

Runciman was dismissive of Russian music, whose virtues had been extolled by correspondents to the Saturday Review:

‘Salvation will come not by the nigger or the Tartar’, as the primitive art of savages could never satisfy modern Western men and women. The term ‘salvation’ shows yet another critic looking towards a renaissance of music in the future.

### 3.4.3 Music, painting and poetry

Walker’s paper on Brahms at the Musical Association was followed by a paper on programme music by the composer William Wallace. Wallace was unwilling to say whether programme music represented a step forward or backward or a transitional stage, but believed its existence had to be accepted in the interests of dispassionate criticism. He observed that music was moving in the opposite direction to painting and sculpture: artists such as Whistler, Degas and Rodin were downplaying literary content and exalting technique, whilst composers were basing works on literary ideas.

The development in painting that Wallace referred to had been controversial in England. The controversy dated back to at least 1877, the year of the Ruskin v. Whistler trial. It came to a head again in a debate in 1893 when the prominent art critic D.S. MacColl confronted the journalist and critic J.A. Spender (who wrote under the pseudonym ‘The Philistine’). One of the paintings at the centre of the controversy was Degas’s *L’Absinthe* – criticised by conservatives for its low subject-matter – which perhaps explains Wallace’s specific reference to this artist. MacColl upheld the view that subject-matter in painting was subordinate to treatment – form, use of colours, etc.: ‘it is this element, the music of space and form, that really plays to the imagination behind the images that represent person or thing’. The use here of the term ‘music’ to invoke the non-referential qualities of space and form chimes with Pater’s well-known dictum about art’s aspiring to the condition of music. Judged from this standpoint, programme music clearly appeared as a move in the opposite direction. However, another contrast

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176 SR1900.07.28
177 SR1900.09.22a
178 PMA1899.05
179 Flint 1988, Stokes 1989: 33–52
invoked by MacColl – that between literariness and poetry – lends itself to a parallel application to music.\textsuperscript{181} Wallace distinguished between an objective (pictorial or dramatic) aspect, as in the \textit{Ride of the Valkyries}, and a subjective (poetic) aspect, as in the Prelude to \textit{Lohengrin}. The latter was more important, freeing the composer from a specific narrative and allowing him to develop form in response to the poetic idea. Wallace acknowledged that the rise of programme music owed something to the attitude of audiences. But its justification lay in the fact that the power of music to convey dramatic images and evoke emotions enabled listeners to realize more vividly a poetic idea previously suggested to them through words. (This judicious treatment of such a controversial topic did not – to Wallace’s own surprise – stimulate a heated controversy amongst those present at the Musical Association.)

Ernest Newman, intent on establishing a theoretical justification for programme music, argued that the relevant comparison was not between music and painting but between music and poetry.\textsuperscript{182} He maintained that Pater’s dictum was applicable to painting but not to poetry, where words were inevitably tied to some intellectual content. He observed that modern poets, such as Mallarmé, were trying to move further in a ‘musical’ direction, whereas modern composers were inclining more towards poetry. The ideal towards which new poetry was striving was old music: fugues, sonatas, etc., but the modern composer was content to surrender some of the formal perfection of abstract music in order to make his art ‘touch more closely, more searchingly, the actual world of living men’.\textsuperscript{183} Moreover, Newman argued, the combination of music and poetry could still approach Pater’s ideal: for example, Tchaikovsky’s \textit{Romeo and Juliet} could be said to have encapsulated all the essential drama without being burdened by detail. Modern composers had been drawn precisely to those elements in music that symbolists like Mallarmé were denigrating – the physical realities of orchestral sonorities and colours – which they could use to express poetically and pictorially the outer world. For example, a steady drum-beat in the second movement of the \textit{Pathétique} was used to express weariness and despair: ‘while the poets are trying to write in the spirit of music, the musicians are trying to write in the spirit of poetry’.

\textsuperscript{180} MacColl 1931: 90  
\textsuperscript{181} Stokes: 38. Stokes observes that ‘poetry’ was a vague term used to claim elevated status.  
\textsuperscript{182} Sp1901.06.15  
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.: 299
3.4.4 Programme music: continued controversy

Programme music remained the main area of contention in commentary on contemporary music. It supplanted opera as a focus of interest. Controversy about the elements of the Wagnerian musical language – chromatic harmony, sensuous orchestral colour, etc., hitherto seen by some critics as signs of degeneration – abated, and issues relating to form – narrative logic, control, coherence, balance and the limits of expression – came to the fore.\(^\text{184}\)

Conservatively minded critics were concerned that an external programme gave a composer licence to relax the ‘internal’ desiderata for well-written music – in particular, form. For example, Shedlock thought Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade* contained striking and even beautiful themes, but was so irregular in its structure that it was difficult to follow.\(^\text{185}\) He missed ‘true organic development, the backbone of instrumental music’.\(^\text{186}\) Wallace’s symphonic poem *Sister Helen*, which was originally intended to accompany a staged presentation of Rossetti’s poem, helped to crystallise Shedlock’s reservations. Reading a printed programme was no substitute for seeing the stage action; it offered ‘an intellectual puzzle rather than an artistic enjoyment’.\(^\text{187}\) For him programme music of the ‘proper’ kind was, as in Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony, ‘an expression of feeling rather than a painting’. If music did not follow an established form, as for example in the Eroica Symphony, then an explicit programme was needed.\(^\text{188}\)

Modifying music-drama for the concert-room was one tendency; CT detected it in the music of Delius, but he saw alongside it a search for a form of absolute music to replace the symphony.\(^\text{189}\) In CT’s view, music that attempted realistic description had been a failure; by contrast, Wagner’s preludes conjured up moods, and were not constrained to represent details but had a musical form of their own. Runciman too derided the attempt

\(^{184}\) Some scholars continue to regard the musical language as the main area of concern. See, for example, Adams 2004, discussed below, p. 194.

\(^{185}\) *Ath*1898.05.28

\(^{186}\) *Ath*1898.10.22

\(^{187}\) *Ath*1899.03.04

\(^{188}\) *Ath*1899.10.28

\(^{189}\) *MO*1899.07
to write Wagnerian dramatic music for the concert hall, substituting written programmes for staging. Like his fellow-critic Baughan (whose views he was commenting on here), he wanted a return to the symphony, though not of the academic type, but of a type where the form was determined by what the composer had to express.

Ernest Newman’s uncompromising insistence on written programmes stimulated much debate. Newman noted that a kind of truce had occurred whereby critics whose allegiance was to absolute music conceded legitimacy to programme music provided it was not over-realistic and sounded well to a listener ignorant of the programme. Newman rejected this compromise: absolute music sprang from a delight in sound and programme music from a desire to express human interest and emotion, and these different sources gave rise to different kinds of musical phrase and treatment. Just as the words of a song were needed to appreciate the musical setting, so the extra-musical source of programme music had to be known to gain a full appreciation. Newman argued that there were historical reasons why absolute music was giving way to programme music. Earlier composers had been entirely taken up with music itself, having little intellectual interest or practical engagement with the wider affairs of life, and a limited instrumental palette with which to work. But forcing the wider scope of modern life and thought into the old forms was counter-productive. Newman made a direct stab at Hadow: ‘Brahms […] consummately endowed, in some respects, for the musical representation of poetical or pictorial ideas, torturing himself and his hearers […] in a vain attempt to carry on the good old “classical tradition”. The Speaker critic, W.G., took issue with Newman’s ‘glorification’ of the symphonic poem. Newman had suggested that had Tchaikovsky supplied the programme of the Pathétique, listeners would have understood passages thought of as weaknesses. To W.G. this suggested that advocates of the symphonic poem saw merit in composers being able to justify weaknesses and cacophony.

190 SR1899.09.30
191 CR1900.09
192 Ibid.: 425
193 Sp1900.11.10
Descriptive realism, where composers went beyond conveying mood or emotion and tried to represent events and phenomena in the outside world, was a significant impediment to the acceptance of programme music. Shedlock acknowledged that some of the greatest composers had written descriptive music, so the question of its legitimacy was academic. But there had to be a criterion of acceptability: ‘if the realism is crude or forced it is to be condemned; if […] it is in keeping with the tone-picture, and skilfully presented, then it is acceptable’. The work that had prompted these thoughts was Dvořák’s *The Spectre’s Bride*, which in the critic’s view passed the test. However, it was the music of Strauss that most clearly raised the question of what was acceptable in programme music.

### 3.4.4 Strauss: the limits of the musically expressible

The controversy about programme music centred on the music of Strauss, whether or not his name was explicitly mentioned. Many critics had a problem with Strauss: he was clearly recognised as highly gifted, especially in orchestration, but critics were fearful of being in the position of their predecessors who had denigrated Wagner. Shedlock’s reaction illustrates the dilemma. He had spoken highly of two non-programmatic works – an early violin sonata and a suite for wind instruments – but did not know what to make of the ‘eccentric’ symphonic poems. He recognised the danger of initial over-reaction, recalling a French critic’s remark that many composers’ works had been accused of ‘want of clearness’ but critics were eventually proved wrong and the composers right. He observed that German opinion of Strauss was very divided, even though the technical skill was recognised.

Strauss’s harmonic experimentation was not a contentious issue. A correspondent to the *Times* saw it as an instance of the way in which the art of music ‘progressed’ in between high points of unassailable achievement. Baughan agreed that Strauss was

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194 The term ‘realism’ as used here has a narrower meaning than the constellation of meanings discussed in Dahlhaus 1985.
195 *Ath* 1902.03.15
196 *Ath* 1898.03.12, *Ath* 1900.05.12
197 *Ath* 1900.03.24
198 *Ath* 1902.02.08
199 *MS* 1902.07.05
progressive: unusual harmonies that at first appeared to have no rationale were later seen as carefully chosen to express the composer’s ideas. Here he found common ground with Runciman, who also had no problems with Strauss’s harmony. But Runciman could see nothing in Strauss beyond ‘prodigious industry and an appalling facility in working out mathematical problems’ and castigated the composer’s attempts to convey intellectual ideas.\textsuperscript{200} Baughan replied with his own standard formulation: that music conveyed the intellectual emotions aroused by intellectual ideas. Although he objected to the realism in Strauss, ‘one can listen to his music and seize the emotional expression of the feelings aroused by the contemplation of those actions which seem outside the powers of musical description, without attempting to connect the music to them’.\textsuperscript{201} This convoluted statement shows Baughan involved in a difficult balancing act.

The case of Strauss prompted some one-to-one debates – Baughan versus Newman, Newman versus Symons – on the limits of the musically expressible. Baughan set out the nub of his profound disagreement with Newman.\textsuperscript{202} Both critics had made interpretations of motifs in Strauss’s tone poems that differed from the composer’s. Baughan drew the conclusion that programme music was inherently flawed, Newman that it was impossible to listen to programme music aright without having the key, which the composer had to supply. Baughan remained adamant that music was incapable of description, only of expressing feeling: ‘It is not the subject [Strauss] illustrates but his own emotions aroused by it’.\textsuperscript{203}

Newman and Symons debated the ability of music to express abstract ideas. Symons, like others, noted that programme music represented a movement in the opposite direction from that enshrined in Pater’s dictum.\textsuperscript{204} He held that music was able to express emotion and to suggest sensation, but no ideas beyond these, because ‘it speaks the language of a world which has not yet subdivided itself into finite ideas’. So a

\textsuperscript{200} The quotation is from an article by Runciman in the \textit{New York Courier}. On ‘mathematics’, see above, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{201} MS1902.07.12
\textsuperscript{202} MS1902.11.01
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.: 271. Compare MacColl on painting: ‘the lines of the image [the artist] creates are not meant to reproduce the thing, but to convey what he felt about the thing’ (MacColl 1931: 89).
\textsuperscript{204} MR1902.12
composer like Strauss who attempted to express abstract thought in music was ‘fatally at war with the nature of things’. Strauss himself had said that Also Sprach Zarathustra was intended to convey an idea of the development of the human race. This was attempting the impossible; Symons suggested that the music could equally be said to represent the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Nevertheless he accepted that there was a philosophical kind of emotion that would accompany the contemplation of philosophical ideas, citing as an example the overture to Parsifal, which he described as ‘abstract ecstasy’.205 (These contortions show Symons trying, like Baughan, to find a theoretical justification for his own aesthetic responses.) Symons thought Strauss a cérébral: emotion was transformed into idea rather than idea transfigured by emotion, and his music, being like a commentary on literature, did not stand up as music. Symons described it as ‘astonishingly clever’, but ‘logic without life’ (a view that echoed Runciman’s).206

Newman disagreed profoundly with Symons.207 He thought Symons pedantic, treating the word ‘idea’ as if it was being used in a considered scientific manner. Symons lacked ‘a musical brain’, so was unable to see how Strauss had ‘re-thought Nietzsche’s material and given it a new birth as music’. The intense musical pleasure Strauss’s works gave to thousands of musicians contradicted the notion that he was concerned not with music but with the expression of abstract ideas. Symons, failing to respond to Strauss, had invoked a false aesthetic to prove that the composer was at fault.

The critical reception of Ein Heldenleben offers a digest of views about the composer and about programme music in general.

3.4.6 Ein Heldenleben

First performed in Frankfurt in 1899, Ein Heldenleben had its first London performance under the composer in December 1902, followed by a second under Henry Wood in January 1903. The Musical Standard reported that the audience’s reception of the first performance was ‘extraordinarily enthusiastic’ and that this reflected well on the

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205 Ibid.: 84
206 Ibid.: 89
207 Sp1903.04.11
capacity of listeners, given the complexity of the work. But the writer was conscious that critics, wary of repeating the mistake over Wagner, might over-praise. CT contrasted the overwhelmingly enthusiastic response of the audience with the response of the press – ‘all kinds of lukewarm praise or blame’; even most of those who enjoyed the music qualified their praise and sat on the fence. He likened the attitude of many critics to ‘the action of timid fish when something is thrown into the water. At first they are startled, and then growing bolder they tentatively nibble at the thing they don’t understand’. As a summary of the critical response this was not entirely fair: there was a tendency to reserve final judgement, but critics who praised aspects of the work, as well as those who found little to commend, were articulate in expressing their reservations. The fact that there were two performances in quick succession makes it possible to see whether any opinions changed after a second hearing.

First performance

The Pall Mall Gazette critic (Vernon Blackburn) judged the work to be the best ever heard since the death of Wagner, but no other critic went as far as this in their praise. For Baughan the work was clear proof that the symphonic poem had a future: Strauss had embarked on a new stage in his career, having abandoned the realism of earlier works and ‘chosen a subject which naturally clothes itself in musical form, and by this has shown the true and firm path which programme music should follow’. Baughan endorsed Strauss’s aim of depicting ‘a general and free ideal of great and manly heroism’ and saw the work as psychological, representing the inward battles of life.

By this time even the most hostile critics had acknowledged Strauss’s remarkable ability in orchestration and his ‘cleverness’. But Heldenleben showed that he could also compose music that, judged by their own standards, was of great beauty. The love music was singled out for praise by both the Times and the Daily Telegraph, the latter describing the ‘Song of Love’ as ‘a tangled web of exquisite polyphony’. Even

208 MS1902.12.13a
209 MO1903.01b
210 MS1902.12.13b
211 MMR1903.01
212 MS1902.12.13b, Ti1902.12.08
Runciman found, amidst much that was incomprehensible, instances of ‘the true touch of magic that changes all things into things of beauty’. But the problem was the ‘incomprehensible’ majority of the work. The Musical Times reviewer was inclined to give Strauss the benefit of the doubt: there was ‘enough clear, broad music in Heldenleben to induce musicians to trust Strauss even where as yet they cannot follow him’. However, the ugliness of much of the score remained an obstacle. The Daily Telegraph conceded that, although not to everyone’s taste, the ugliness was intrinsic to what the composer was depicting. But other critics were less conciliatory: the Times found few memorable themes and much ugliness, whilst the St James’s Gazette found the work ‘so colossally clever […] and at times so utterly hideous’ that a person brought up on Bach, Mozart and Beethoven ‘stands somewhat aghast to think that the “divine art” has been brought to such unlovely use’.

The programme of the work was seriously censured. The Musical Times summed up a common criticism: ‘the poetic basis seems to us to halt between idealism and realism’. The battle scene was a sticking point: neither the Times nor the Telegraph could square its realistic depiction with the idea that it represented a spiritual conflict.

Even Newman had these reservations. He sensed a duality in Strauss’s psychological make-up that led him to try to combine his mastery of emotional expression and that of realistic representation; the results, when unsuccessful, wrecked the sense of balanced form. For J.H.G. Baughan, lack of form or design was the work’s most serious weakness – one that was by no means inevitable, as Tod und Verklärung had proved. For Shedlock, whose attitude to Strauss has been traced above, the work was the reductio ad absurdum of programme music. Ein Heldenleben was accompanied by a booklet (endorsed but not written by the composer) containing a substantial explanatory programme: ‘if the music requires such help – thirty-six pages including seventy themes […] – then programme-music seems to us in a parlous state’. He dismissed the
programme writer’s rationale that it was needed to make up for a deficiency in the
listener’s ability to understand the music: a person with such a deficiency would not be
helped by an elaborate analysis. The booklet was, however, clear evidence that Strauss
was in earnest about his artistic aim; but in Heldenleben he had taken it to extremes.
Shedlock was also concerned that the work could spawn feeble imitations – works
lacking musical logic and merely held together by an external programme.

Runciman dismissed the subject matter of the programme as ‘poor Nietzsche pseudo-
philosophy’ and wished that Strauss would ‘look at life with his own eyes and feel it
with his own heart’. He was expressing here his overall criticism of contemporary
composition: that it did not engage with modern life and feeling.

Second performance

After the second performance, the Times critic was still doubtful, but unwilling to
condemn outright for fear of the judgement of posterity. He regarded the controversy
surrounding the work as beneficial, since art progressed through argument. Shedlock
remained unconvinced: he admired much of the work, but still thought that Strauss
might be ‘vainly trying to write a music drama without a libretto’. But J.H.G.
Baughan’s view changed: ‘it seemed strange that one had ever thought the music was
cacophonous!’ For him the programme issue went into the background: ‘I listened to
the music as music, and was thoroughly satisfied. It carried you away; it thrilled you’.

E.A. Baughan continued to hold that Strauss’s works, especially Tod und Verklärung
and Heldenleben, had a musical logic and design which made an elaborate external
programme unnecessary: their titles were a sufficient guide to their emotional content.
He argued that Strauss had used the programme to mould the form of Heldenleben. He
also went further than those who conceded that ugliness was occasionally appropriate,
claiming that ‘in its proper place, ugliness is beautiful, as Bach, Beethoven, Schumann,

222 SR1902.12.13
223 Ti1903.01.02
224 Ath1903.01.10
225 MS1903.01.10
Brahms, Wagner, and Tchaikovsky well understood’. But Runciman, in spite of his appreciative remarks about *Heldenleben*, remained sceptical about Strauss and programme music in general: ‘just now pure music seems to have gone lame: it cannot hobble along without the aid of literary ideas to serve as crutches’. Like Baughan, he totally rejected Newman’s analogy between the symphonic poem and the music-drama; he even suggested that the cinematograph could replace the programme. He looked forward to the time when music would ‘arise proud, confident, strong, vigorous and self-supporting, and the crutches will be thrown away’.

Some critics who had not commented on the first performance did so after the second. Rutland Boughton, for whom, as noted in chapter 2, the ethical dimension of music was paramount, saw *Heldenleben* as an ethical saga and ‘a statement of faith’. Or rather he did until the composer failed to rebut critics who treated the work as realistically descriptive. For Boughton realism was ‘materialism’ and ethically worthless.

The most devastating critique of *Heldenleben* was that of C.L. Graves, for whom the work was blatant egoism. Strauss’s undoubted command of the orchestra was used to produce ‘impressive grandiosity’. Moments of beauty were oases in a desert of unmitigated ugliness. His works would not survive piano reduction – for Graves a test of greatness. Graves believed that German music needed a period of rest, having been exhausted in one direction by Wagner, in another by Brahms; it was showing ‘the inevitable sign of an epoch of exhaustion – a tendency to run riot in complexity of detail and rococo extravagance. The great man will come in time, but he cannot be expected until the nation has had a rest’. Graves was thus in no doubt that Strauss represented decadence rather than a new stimulus.

To sum up: Graves expressed, in an extreme form, the view of critics for whom Strauss represented riotous disorder; such critics – Hadow and Maclean were also of their

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226 Ibid.: 26
227 SR1903.01.03
228 A prophetic remark: early (silent) films were accompanied by a pianist; live orchestral accompaniment came much later.
229 MS1903.05.16
230 MS1904.11.19b
231 MO1903.03c
number – looked to Brahms as a model for a return to sanity (although for Graves even the Brahms seam was exhausted). Others were still unsure of their judgements: they recognised the power, originality and beauty to be found in Strauss’s works, but their reservations about programme music were not silenced. *Heldenleben* convinced one sceptic – J.H.G. Baughan – after a second hearing, when he ‘listened to the music as music’. But there was otherwise no sign that the general opinion about Strauss would move as opinion about Wagner had moved a generation earlier, where theoretical controversy had eventually abated under the impact of the works themselves.

The contemporary debate about Strauss has been presented in some detail partly to correct the impression created by the foregrounding of English music in existing scholarship that English critics were preoccupied with the development of native music. English critics took Strauss seriously; like Wagner, he had prodigious talent and what he was doing with it could have a lasting effect on the future direction of music. The importance accorded to Strauss shows that critics at the time still saw Germany as key to the future direction.

It is noticeable that expressions of the ‘messianic hope’ for a great composer who would unify the musical world fell off after the appearance of Strauss. Strauss, whose ability was acknowledged even by those with reservations about his output, was a divisive force. Perhaps it was realised that the hope for a great but uncontroversial composer had been a fantasy. The hope was henceforward restricted to critics for whom Strauss represented an aberration and who looked for a future composer who would draw inspiration from Brahms. The profoundly different views that critics had formed of Strauss coloured both their views on the influence he was perceived to be having on English music and their reactions to remarks he made about English composition, in particular his endorsement of Elgar as the first progressive English composer (see below, p. 190).

The issue of programme music rose higher on the agenda because a composer of Strauss’s ability was working in the genre. His model, with its detailed written programme, was an extreme one and if any model were to be rejected out of hand by
critics suspicious of programme music it would be this one. Nevertheless, engaging
with these works opened up a serious debate about the criteria for appraising
programme music in general and helped critics to articulate their individual views about
the boundaries of acceptability. As Strauss stretched his model towards further
extremes, his earlier symphonic poems became more acceptable and this helped to make
the genre better regarded. As noted in the next chapter, it became the genre of choice for
young British composers.

3.5 1903–7

3.5.1 The Strauss Festival

Strauss and programme music continued to be controversial for some years. A Strauss
Festival was due to take place in London in 1903 and some critics prepared the ground
for it. A.E. Keeton mocked the view that absolute music was altogether superior to
programme music: ‘according to this doctrine, no song, however beautiful, and no
opera, however great, can ever quite achieve the perfection – as a pure work of art – of,
let us say, Herr Kontrapunkt’s Sonata in F or Mr Thorough Bass’s Symphony in D’. Newman opined that the response to Strauss in England had suffered from the way in which his works had become known. After initial neglect, early and middle period
works had been frequently performed, followed by Ein Heldenleben, which divided the
critics. But the works judged by Newman as Strauss’s greatest – Also sprach Zarathustra and Don Quixote – were relatively unknown. After the Festival, Newman noted that even a hitherto well-disposed critic had condemned Don Quixote outright. Newman was sure that opinion would change, observing that Tod und Verklärung,
which had been dismissed a few years ago, was now found even by the Times critic to
be ‘sane and normal’. Newman also reported that after two performances of
Zarathustra, the work was ‘henceforth safe in England’. This remark, with its echoes of
the ‘timid fish’ image mentioned earlier, shows that Strauss was now being assimilated
into the repertoire – the process that Wagner had undergone a generation earlier.

232 The holding of a Strauss festival at a time of Anglo-German political antagonism is further
evidence that the worlds of music and politics were not linked.
233 CR1906.03
234 Sp1903.05.09
235 Sp1903.06.13a
Newman regarded Strauss as the greatest living musician.  

But Shedlock still had serious reservations and felt it wise to withhold judgement.  

But in spite of this cautious policy, he expressed his distaste for *Don Juan*, with its ‘ridiculous realism’ and the ‘painfully ugly polyphony of many pages of the score’.  

He thought the work went beyond the limits of art; it might be acceptable as a joke – Strauss showing the absurdity of realism – but the inclusion of some passages of great beauty showed this was not the composer’s intention. The *Academy* critic regarded Strauss as the most notable contemporary composer, but one who provoked not only diverse but fluid reactions: an esteemed fellow-critic’s opinion about *Zarathustra* had swung from one extreme to another within a few months.  

A year later, he himself was still undecided: Strauss was ‘an unsolved problem’.  

*Tod und Verklärung* was ‘great music’, but difficult to understand without the programme, so either the programme was too complex to be conveyed by music, or else Strauss was a pioneer, revealing capabilities in musical expression hitherto thought impossible. ‘At any rate he is in earnest, he is interesting, he has power, and we must wait and listen and suspend judgement’.  

#### 3.5.2 Realism intensified: *Symphonia Domestica*  

Realism still worried critics; the issue was complicated by the instances of realism in esteemed works – the donkey braying in Mendelssohn’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* or the cuckoo in Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony.  

It reached a head with the premiere of Strauss’s *Symphonia Domestica*. Even Newman parted company with Strauss at this point. He was hugely disappointed by the work. He thought the writers of the programme notes had made a ludicrous attempt to turn a very ordinary story of a day in family life into a philosophical meditation: the noise of a baby plunged into a bath could not be interpreted as the struggle of a new-born soul, as it so clearly happened twice in a twelve-hour period (as indicated by a chiming clock). Newman was uncompromising in his judgement: ‘it is time the world protested against so much of its leisure and its funds

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236 *Sp*1903.10.24  
237 *Ath*1903.06.06  
238 *Ath*1903.06.13  
239 *Ac*1904.02.13  
240 *Ac*1904.12.24  
241 For the definition of ‘realism’, see above, p. 91.  
242 *Sp*1905.03.04
being taken up with sheer inanities of this kind’. Newman thought Strauss’s frequent
descents into freakishness showed that his artistic sense was degenerating; his themes
were becoming more fragmentary, his scoring overblown and his treatment of themes
such as to destroy their effect. ‘The *Symphonia Domestica* I take to be the work of an
evernously clever man who was once a genius’.

Shedlock was sent an advance copy of the programme note and took it as ‘a clever
satire on programme-music’. Reviewing the performance, Shedlock, like Newman,
could not reconcile the realistic details with the abstract theme of ‘life in the great
human family’. A second hearing convinced him that Strauss should abandon his
present course and aim, as in his songs, at simplicity – ‘not one, however, which
implies retrogression, but merely one in which the art is concealed’.

However, audiences enjoyed the work. The *Times* critic impugned their taste, attributing
their enjoyment to the ‘nursery sentiment, so dear to the British public, which has made
the fortunes of numberless trumpery ballads, as well as of many a pantomime in which
the scene of washing a baby is always the surest of “draws”’. He asserted that all
commentators agreed that the work was a musical joke; nevertheless he regarded the
work as more attractive, as music, than *Heldenleben*, even though the enjoyable music
often emerged from ‘an avalanche of noise’. CT objected to this facetious review, as
Strauss had it made clear that the work was not intended as a huge joke. But CT thought
it pointless to argue with such prejudice; it was enough to report that the second
performance of the work ‘was received with an enthusiasm which is rare in a London
concert room’.

H.C. Colles’s review of *Symphonia Domestica* was thorough and detailed and brought
out in a measured way the misgivings that had been felt, if not so articulately expressed,
by others. Like most critics, he had no problem with the novelty of Strauss’s musical
language. But Strauss developed his simple themes with no obvious logic to the point of

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243 Ibid.: 537
244 *Ath*1905.02.25
245 *Ath*1905.03.04a
246 *Ath*1905.04.08
247 *Ti*1905.02.27
‘freakishness’ and then suddenly provided relief by a return to over-simplicity: ‘the audience is alternately insulted and patronised’. His musical language pulled in one direction, but his sense of form, and especially of tonality, pulled him in another, helping to give shape to the work. But although there were moments of great beauty and an overall feeling of physical energy, the sense of balance was missing. Colles regarded the programme as an unwelcome distraction for a listener who wanted to listen to the music as abstract music. If the work just represented banal events, it was not worth serious consideration; but if it expressed deeper thoughts prompted by the events of family life, then Strauss’s fundamental error was to say what these events were, thereby placing a barrier between his musically expressed thoughts and the thoughts of the listener. Strauss claimed that his music could be appreciated as music but supplied a crib that made this impossible. Colles thought the work demonstrated more clearly than ever before ‘both the good and the evil that are in him and his teaching. We must hear it many times to learn all we can from it’. As it happened, Colles’s experience after further hearing was similar to that of other critics: after a performance some months later, much that had been obscure or even ugly became lucid and beautiful. This was further evidence that, like Wagner before him, Strauss was being assimilated.

3.5.3 Programme music: conceptual arguments

Frederick Niecks examined the theoretical basis of programme music, first in a substantial two-part article in the *Musical Times* in 1904 and later in a treatise published in 1907. Niecks argued that there was a spectrum of programme music – one extreme being vocal music, where the words supplied the programme – and no hard-and-fast distinction between programme and non-programme music. The success of programme music depended on the choice of a really musical programme. In his explanation of how music could express extra-musical content, Niecks drew on ideas presented in his lectures on the ethical basis of music (see above, p. 36). He argued that music could represent visual phenomena such as speed or light/darkness analogically, through tempo, melody, intensity, harmony and instrumentation, and it could represent emotion through its physical expression in voice or bodily sensations and movement. Moreover,
through the pathetic fallacy (not named by him as such) imitations of the sounds of nature could represent states of mind – calmness, turbulence, and so on, while unusual melodic or harmonic elements suggested the supernatural. But a subject might not be suitable for musical treatment: it might be beyond the expressive reach of music, or lead to lack of beauty. Young and impetuous composers often produced formlessness – musical prose instead of musical verse. Niecks claimed that that the great mass of contemporary vocal and instrumental music was programme music in a very broad sense: ‘music which is meant to mean something and not merely to tickle our ears and to please our form-sense’. D.F. Tovey, addressing the Musical Association in 1904, held, like Niecks, that it was pointless to try to demolish the ‘symphonic poem’ as an art-form by a priori metaphysics: of each individual work it had to be asked whether it was ‘so far consistent and beautiful that it justifies its existence as a work of art’. He likened the composition of a piece of programme music to the design of a bridge that would be both practically and aesthetically satisfying.

Returning to the subject of Strauss in 1905, Baughan identified form as ‘the burning musical question of the day’. In ‘absolute’ music, themes underwent purely musical adventures, but their adventures could be more exciting than the old forms allowed. Form had always been in a state of flux, but theorists had failed to distinguish between architectural form and tonal form. Architectural form was to a large extent arbitrary: a symphonic first movement could as well start with a development section and lead up to a statement of themes. But the distinguishing features of new forms lay in tonality: in the old forms a certain key sequence was thought to be a necessity, but each new departure from the rules eventually became accepted. Complete absence of architectural form was impossible. Strauss resembled Liszt in his freedom of form, but was more successful in giving his compositions form by using the same themes throughout: for example, three basic themes in the Sinfonia Domestica. If a work appeared formless, it was because its tonality was determined by what was being expressed rather than by traditional rules.

251 Ibid.: 234. Here Niecks was echoing the sense of Baughan’s much earlier remark about gem-cutting and tessellated pavements (above, p. 63).
252 PMA1904.06
253 MR1905.08
R.A. Streatfeild’s admiration of Strauss, evident in his book *Modern Music and Musicians*, drew further contributions to the debate.\(^{254}\) Newman welcomed Streatfeild’s general treatment of programme music, but thought him wrong in asserting that music could express only emotion, never incident: Strauss’s tone poems were full of depictions of incident.\(^{255}\) Shedlock reiterated his belief that the sources of a work’s inspiration should be suppressed: ‘the more precise that declaration, the less of poetry do we find in the music’.\(^{256}\) He praised Stanford’s Symphony in memory of the painter G.F. Watts because it had no written programme but represented the composer’s response to two of Watts’s pictures.\(^{257}\) Harold E. Gorst (Runciman’s successor) upheld the superiority of absolute music ‘where the soul of the composer soars beyond the help of tangible material’.\(^{258}\) As Streatfeild observed, the ‘never-ending battle between conservatives and radicals’ had become centred on Strauss; the *Musical Times* welcomed Streatfeild’s passionate support for the composer because ‘the strong admirers and the strong haters are the men upon whom depends the issue of the battle’.\(^{259}\) (If the protagonist in *Ein Heldenleben* was Strauss himself, then this was the battle depicted there.)

According to the *Musical Times* reviewer of Niecks’s comprehensive treatise on programme music, ‘listeners are perplexed and bewildered […] and they are often left dubious as to whether the art is drifting helplessly to chaos, or whether perchance it is being steered to new worlds of beauty by master minds whose methods are beyond the ken of the common folk’.\(^{260}\) It was inaccurate to say that listeners found programme music perplexing and bewildering; it was the critics who were divided.

### 3.5.4 The progress or regress of music in general

Although Strauss continued to dominate debate, some critics reflected more generally on developments in composition. Runciman was the most disappointed: all he could see

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\(^{254}\) Streatfeild 1906  
\(^{255}\) Sp1906.10.20  
\(^{256}\) Ath1906.12.01  
\(^{257}\) Ath1906.01.27  
\(^{258}\) SR1906.08.29  
\(^{259}\) MT1906.11a  
\(^{260}\) MT1907.04
was regurgitation of old material. Wagner had bequeathed a huge problem of where to go next: ‘he entered his domain and closed the door behind him’. Runciman thought contemporary absolute music ‘colourless or ugly […] paraphrases of things said long ago’; nothing of any significance had come out of Germany, France or Italy. He believed that the future lay with opera and could not understand how composers could be satisfied with the halfway stage represented by programme music. His ideal of music-drama was represented by the end of the second act of Tristan, although he thought future composers might work on a more intimate scale like that of Mozart. By contrast, Baughan cited Tristan as a reason for rejecting Wagnerian music-drama altogether. Having counted himself among the Wagnerians, he defected in 1906, claiming that Wagner’s music was essentially symphonic and unsuited to drama, which was made subservient to it; this explained why extracts could be performed in the concert hall. Isolde had to ‘struggle against a storm of abstract music’ at precisely the point where her individuality should not be smothered in ‘magnificent generalisation about love and death’. (It is perhaps significant that Baughan had become both music and theatre critic for his paper, the Daily News.)

As noted above, lack of form was a common criticism of contemporary compositions. Addressing the Musical Association on this issue, F. Gilbert Webb argued that subject matter determined form and that the existing theory of key-relationship needed to give way to a more comprehensive system. Maclean vehemently disagreed: ‘no amount of subject-matter will ever alter the fundamental principles of the sounds which build up music. […] [The composer] can no more get on without balance of keys than he can without his pen and ink.’ The conservative standpoint was expressed even more forcibly by Frederick Bridge, who had begun to feel ‘it is time some of us left the scene, and allowed the musicians of the future to pursue their horrible devices without us’.

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261 SR1904.05.07. This was also Shaw’s view (above, p. 62).
262 SR1904.06.25
263 FR1906.07
264 PMA1905.05
265 Ibid.: 136–7
266 Ibid.: 137
Over-emphasis on orchestration was another complaint. Percy Buck detected an ‘overworship of scoring’ and thought that the appeal of music to feelings was hiding a lack of intellectual content: ‘we are told by many modern critics that our feelings form the final court of appeal; and so does the general public, at the cost of all sane and permanent criteria, maintain in a thousand and one instances the sovereignty of the charlatan’.\(^{267}\) This was the complaint Joseph Bennett had aired several years previously: that a sensation-seeking public was fuelling the degradation of music.

The *Musical Times* reported that similar conservative views were being expressed in the German musical press. A composer, Otto Fiebach, had proposed the inauguration of a ‘musical renaissance’ by abandoning ‘licentious extravagances’ and observing strict rules of form, harmony and counterpoint, whilst retaining ‘plastic’ melody and modern harmony.\(^{268}\) The writer doubted that such views would lead anywhere, as the history of music had shown that ‘even the wildest musical extravagances […] may really be but further turns of the wheel of progress’. A remark of Ruskin’s to the same effect – ‘the gibes of one generation are the seeds from which spring the praises of the next’ – was quoted by F.J. Sawyer in a paper welcoming the developments in harmony exemplified in Elgar, Strauss and Debussy.\(^{269}\)

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267 *PMA*1906.06  
268 *MT*1906.06  
269 *Ath*1906.01.20. This is rare instance in which a contribution of Elgar to music in general, not merely English music, was identified.
Debussy received praise from an unlikely source in an article by Hadow which included very complimentary remarks about *Pélleas et Mélisande*. However, very little of Debussy’s music had been performed in England. His ability to create atmosphere was praised at the performance of *L’Après-midi d’un faune* in 1905. Those who were acquainted with Debussy’s music saw in it a ‘distinctive and original personality’ with ‘an Aesthetic of his own’. Such discussion as there was focused on his harmony and his orchestral colouring, but there was no debate as yet about his possible significance for the development of music in general. The theorist Walford Davies acknowledged ‘a laudable attempt to extend the harmonic realm’, but thought the results out of control: ‘they baffled us, and they baffled themselves’. Hadow doubted whether Debussy’s unanchored tonality was able, like the diatonic scale, to express ‘epic ideas’. The academic Yorke Trotter saw in Debussy’s music ‘a sensuous element, appealing not so much to our highest nature as to the lower emotional order’. The ethical hierarchy of mental faculties that has appeared many times in this chapter is reflected in this remark.

### 3.5.5 Brahms: the inspiration for the future?

As was noted above, at the time of his death in 1897 Brahms was recognised as a great composer within his own chosen métier, but was not generally seen as a model for future composition. In 1905 Colles, who later became the *Times* music critic and editor of a new *Grove*, mapped a path for musical development with Brahms as a source. He rejected Newman’s contentions that programme music represented the perfect art-form and that only three options lay ahead: pedantic conservatism, Wagnerian music-drama or programme music. Colles expected a development in which all of the expressive possibilities opened up by programme music would be summed up and included in a purely musical form. Brahms, he believed, had been wrongly portrayed as a conservative, hanging on to outmoded forms. Brahms put perfection of musical technique first, as the only acceptable vehicle for emotional expression; he did not, as

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270 *ER*1906.10a (summarised in *MT*1907.02)  
271 *Ac*1905.04.15  
272 *MS*1906.03.31, *MS*1907.01.12  
273 *MS*1907.12.07  
274 *ER*1906.10c  
275 *PMA*1907.03  
276 *Ac*1905.07.15  
277 *Ac*1905.07.22
did others, develop the resources of the orchestra. As an example to show what Brahms’s way forward would be ‘when all side issues, such as effects of colour and expression and harmonic possibilities, shall be settled’, Colles chose the first movement of the Sextet in G in which a germ (the rise of a fifth over the chords of G and E flat) underwent a logical development where every note was relevant. Colles made it clear that he was not advocating Brahms as a model, but pointing out that what Brahms excelled in was ‘a vital part of music at its greatest’. That Colles did in fact hanker after a successor to Brahms is shown by his remark in an article on concertos: ‘if Brahms went furthest in this direction [achieving balance between soloist and orchestra] it will be Brahms’s successor, that man whom we so anxiously await, who may do this’. Colles thus shared the messianic hope – his messiah was to be a disciple of Brahms.

In addition to the ‘experiments and movements’ of the contemporary scene, Colles discerned a group of composers who looked to Brahms, whose music, in his opinion, rose above that of ‘romantic’ 19th century composers, being governed by ‘deeper principles’. He predicted that ‘a future volume of the Oxford History of Music will have to deal with a great school of composers who honour Brahms as their founder, and whose history begins with that of his work’. He did not name any composers belonging to this ‘great school’, but he believed that eventually the work of Brahms would be appreciated as a great resource. In an article on Brahms’s Piano Sonata (Op. 1) he wrote: ‘its influence upon posterity cannot be gauged until the work of Brahms has been far more completely assimilated than it has been at present or seems likely to be in the near future’. Similarly, in the field of orchestration Colles upheld Brahms, for whom variety of colour was not a major concern, as a superior guide. He anticipated a reaction from the ‘complexity and rapidity of contrast for which modern audiences thirst, and in which modern composers excel’ – a clear reference to Strauss. When this thirst had been slaked, listeners might ‘learn to look deeper’.

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278 The logical tightness of Brahms’s compositions was a feature that appealed to Schoenberg. See Frisch 1984.
279 Ac1905.10.28
280 Ac1906.04.21
281 Ac1906.06.30
282 Ac1906.10.20
283 Ibid.: 402
recognised that audience preferences would have to change to give ‘saner’ music a chance to flourish.

Brahms continued to be held up for emulation by Hadow. Hadow accepted that criticism could not follow textbook rules; nevertheless, ‘some structural coherence and organisation’ was a *sine qua non*.\(^{284}\) He regarded Berlioz, Schumann, Liszt and early Wagner – the ‘School of 1830’ – as essentially untutored: expressive and poetic but lacking in structure or technique. From this ‘school’ issued two polar opposites: Wagner and Brahms. The former, who threw aside traditional forms, was a poor model outside the field of music drama. The latter, who worked within them, showed how poetry could be combined with musical design and in this respect his music stood pre-eminent. But Hadow acknowledged that Brahms’s influence had been negligible; he seemed to mark the end of a development rather than a beginning. (This judgement paralleled that of Shaw and others concerning Wagner: that he had exhausted the seam he was working.) But just as interest in Bach died and was reborn, so ‘when music is ready for another stage in its advance it will return to Brahms for counsel’. The abstract phrase ‘when music is ready’ hid the real situation, which was, as Colles was aware, ‘when audiences were ready’.

Hadow found an unrestrained opulence in Strauss (and Reger) that showed the lack of taste and self-respect in the “advanced schools” of German composition. The function of music was ‘to beautify and idealise’, but Strauss had incorporated into music that which could not be idealised. Moreover, his compositions combined poverty of melodic invention with elaborate orchestral treatment – a clear instance of decadence: ‘It is the manner, not of Rome and Athens, but of Byzantium and Alexandria’ (a remark that echoed Graves’s earlier comments on *Heldenleben*). According to a writer in the *Musical Times*, Hadow had set out to formulate ‘some definite critical standard by which in the present time of bewilderment and embarrassment we may hope to steady our judgement’. Coming from a conservatively minded commentator, ‘bewilderment’ was understandable, but it is unclear who was embarrassed or by what.

\(^{284}\) ER1906.10b
Not everyone saw Brahms as the hope for the future. For Baughan, Brahms’s sticking to the traditional forms showed ‘a curious aloofness from the modern spirit, an aloofness that seems to me unnatural and even perverse’.285 H.A. Harding agreed with Hadow that Brahms was the pioneer of a new style, in which musical design was combined with a purified romanticism.286 But although he sensed that the composer’s reputation was growing, both in England and in America, he did not hold him up as the hope for the future of music. In fact, when some of those present started censuring programme music he reminded them that he had said nothing that implied any criticism of programme music. Moreover, he thought the advocacy of Brahms by academics and critics contemptuous of what ordinary listeners enjoyed was one reason why the composer’s reputation had not advanced even further. (In other words, snobs lionised Brahms.)

3.6 Overview

At the start of the period, conservatively-minded critics descried plenty of evidence of what they regarded as a decline in composition: disrespect for compositional rules and canons of beauty, a retreat from established forms and a growing tendency towards an ethically despicable sensationalism. The frequently expressed yearning for a new leader or ‘Messiah’ testified to the predominantly cosmopolitan perception of the field of music.

Some saw the anarchic situation as a legacy from Wagner; even critics who were less pessimistic saw dangers in trying to imitate him. The arguments came to a head in the reactions to Bruneau’s opera Le Rêve. This work proved to some critics that attempting to advance along Wagnerian lines led to nothing but ugliness and confusion. Others admired the composer’s sincere engagement with the Wagnerian legacy; moreover, although they saw strengths in the work they also became more aware of the architectural quality of Wagner’s own music.

A revival of interest in early music seemed to underscore the contrast between ancient beauty and modern ugliness. Conservative critics like Joseph Bennett bemoaned the growing tendency towards sensationalism and extremes of emotional expression, the

285 *MR*1905.08
latter exemplified by the highly popular music of Tchaikovsky. Bennett saw this
development as driven by the desire of untutored audiences for nervous excitation.
This was by no means the universal view, as others were in no doubt about
Tchaikovsky’s greatness. But Bennett and those of similar mind saw the world of
composition as leaderless and expressed the messianic hope for a great composer who
would lead music in a saner direction. Some saw Brahms as a model for future
development; however, others saw in him a composer whose achievements had been
circumscribed by self-imposed limitations.

The fundamental issue that Wagner had raised about the relationship between music and
the extra-musical – poetry, drama, emotion, ideas – came, in one form or another, to
dominate the debate about the progress of orchestral music for the rest of the period.
E.A. Baughan, who took a prominent part throughout this debate, put the issue in stark
terms: that unless music related to human life, as an art it was of no more value than
gem-cutting or tessellated pavement. The debate centred on programme music and
became more heated under the impact of Strauss. Strauss attracted more attention than
any other composer, but for many critics he remained, in the Academy critic’s words, an
‘unsolved problem’. There was no doubting his talent, which some saw as approaching
genius. As a hugely gifted German composer he could be thought of as a possible
successor to Wagner, and the scale of the interest shown in him testified to a continuing
belief in Germany as the musical nation par excellence. But whether Strauss’s
undoubted talents were put to good use was a matter of opinion. Critics fearful of
repeating their predecessors’ errors over Wagner hedged their bets. The issue of
programme music, which had rumbled along before Strauss appeared, became of central
importance because it was the chosen genre of such a major figure.

Two of Strauss’s most prominent advocates – Baughan and Ernest Newman – held
quite different views about the relationship between music and programme. For
Newman the work of art was constituted as the combination of written programme and
score, the first being as essential to the listener as the words of a song. Baughan saw the
programme as external: the stimulus for the emotional response that the composer
expressed in music. Some other critics, including Shedlock, worried about the effect of
an external programme on form; in Shedlock’s view, music had to obey an inner musical logic without which it became incoherent. This and other concerns were brought to the fore in the response to *Ein Heldenleben*. Critics found a great deal to praise, but their reservations were not silenced. The realism – the musical depiction of actions and events – of parts of the score was a stumbling block. Later, the unashamed realistic depiction of trivial events in *Symphonia Domestica* lost Strauss his most committed English supporter, Newman.

The most unfavourable assessment of Strauss was that of Charles Graves, who saw in him nothing but decadence. Meanwhile critics who believed that composers would eventually react against the excesses of such as Strauss hoped that Brahms would become a source of inspiration to a future generation. But audience preferences would have to change if such music were to gain ground.

In spite of the views about the ethical dimension of music tracked in chapter 2, ethics intruded into this commentary only in the earlier part of the period, in the diatribes against sensationalism by Bennett and others and in the invective directed by Symons and others against Tchaikovsky’s overt expression of emotion. In both cases the target of moral disapproval was lack of control over the ‘lower’ faculties of sense and feeling. Ethical reservations about Wagner’s sensuous chromaticism were little in evidence, interest having switched to the more technical aspects of Wagner’s compositional methods. Apart from Rutland Boughton’s ethical endorsement – later thrown into doubt – ethical considerations were absent from the debate about Strauss, which was conducted entirely in aesthetic terms: beauty, ugliness, form, etc. Even the most dismissive of Strauss’s critics used the aesthetic category of decadence. It is also noteworthy that Niecks, who supplied the most carefully argued case for an ethical dimension to music, treating emotion and its expression as an essential part of the scope of ethics, made no reference to ethics in his *Musical Times* articles (or in his treatise on programme music), but gave an ethically neutral account of the psychology of musical expression. It was perhaps helpful that the character of Strauss the man could be held up
for admiration: the *Academy*, for example, reported that, remarkably for a musician, he was a cultured man with wide intellectual interests.\(^{287}\)

Although there were occasional echoes of the ethical hierarchy of mental faculties in the debate about musical expression, the relative absence of ethical considerations in the later part of the period is further evidence of the diversity of opinion – even on a topic frequently represented as central to discussion of the arts during the period – and illustrates the danger of drawing wide-ranging conclusions from the views expressed by a subset of the community in question. (This is referred to above as the ‘shards’ illusion; see p. 18.) The debate about programme music was chiefly conducted by professional critics who focussed on artistic matters without the distraction of trying to persuade an indifferent population of the value of music – the issue that underlay much of the writing about ethics in chapter 2 and that will be returned to in chapter 5.

As will become apparent in Chapter 4, ethical considerations weighed more heavily in the debate about the development of native music, where, as observed above (p. 50) the idea of national character played a prominent part and foreign music was seen by some commentators as ‘foreign’ in the more specific sense referred to above (p. 51). Following on from this distinction between two senses of foreignness, a parallel distinction needs to be drawn between ‘native’ (originating in England) and ‘national’ (having a specifically English character). As will be seen in chapter 4, this important distinction is elided in much of the existing scholarship relating to English music.

As noted above, behind the debate about programme music lay the fundamental issue of the poetic basis of music. For critics like Baughan and Newman, the direction of progress lay in extending the expressive power of music, and in deeper engagement with human life and emotion. This is what, in spite of differences of opinion in detail, they found in Strauss, and, as will be seen in chapters 4 and 5, they did not find in the output of the ‘English Musical Renaissance’. On the other hand, critics like Hadow and Maclean, who had the strongest reservations about the music of Strauss, were the most supportive of the direction taken by the ‘Renaissance’. Either way, Strauss was an important reference point in the commentary on English music.

\(^{287}\) *Ac* 1905.02.11
Biased as it is towards the development of English music, existing scholarship has little to say about the reception of new foreign music. This chapter has shown that critics generally saw music as a unified cosmopolitan field. The signs of degeneration they detected – loss of beauty, sensationalism, the declining tastes of audiences, etc. – affected music as a whole, and the hopeful signs – melodic Italian opera, the orchestral music of Tchaikovsky and (for some) Strauss – were also seen as contributions to the development of the art as a whole. So when English music was judged, it was judged in part, at least, against the background of this wider field: Was it, for example, bucking a regrettable trend towards sensationalism? Was it matching the quality of the best continental music? Running alongside this critical commentary was the fact of competition: resources were limited, especially for the expensive production of orchestral music and opera, so foreign and native music competed for a hearing. Native music had come off badly in this competition in the past, so its fortunes would depend greatly on how it fared against newly appearing foreign music. One would expect scholarship relating to the development of English music to take up this crucial issue. However, Hughes and Stradling are almost entirely concerned with competitive struggles within the English music community during this period: Sullivan’s place in the renaissance, Elgar versus South Kensington. Tchaikovsky’s music, for example, which, as shown above, received great critical acclaim and was often mentioned as a reference point in appraisals of native music, is barely mentioned.

A final point is impossible to make without anticipating some of the findings of the next chapter. It is that many of the debates recounted in this chapter were about fundamental issues: the poetic basis of music, the limits of the musically expressible, the fixity of form, the relationship of form to tonality, etc., and with few exceptions were prompted and informed by the work of foreign composers. By comparison some of the debates about English music seem somewhat parochial: for example the appropriateness of mixing Handelian and Wagnerian styles in oratorio. Only the debate about nationalism can be said to address a fundamental issue and this too was prompted in part by the nationalism found in foreign music.
4 The development of English music

4.1 Introduction

There are a number of reasons for treating English music separately. First, there was a general sense that English composition, if it was advancing at all, was catching up with continental developments rather than taking the lead. Second, English composers cultivated a genre – oratorio – that had largely been abandoned by foreigners, and the reference points cited by English commentators – Handel, Mendelssohn – were absent from continental discourse. In other fields the pace was being set by foreigners: Dvořák, Grieg, and especially Tchaikovsky and Strauss in orchestral music; Mascagni, Puccini and others in opera. Third, a nationalistic thread emerged in the commentary on English music in which foreign music was represented as ‘foreign’ in the stronger sense identified in the previous chapter (p. 51). Fourth, critics not only commented on native works but also gave advice to composers. Some, at least, believed, rightly or wrongly, that they could influence the development of English music; others were partisan supporters of particular composers. A fifth reason is that English music, unlike foreign music in England at this time, is the subject of an existing body of scholarship.

Prominent in this scholarship is the narrative of the ‘English Musical Renaissance’ (EMR). It was put forward during the period of this study as an account of the recent history of English composition, but, as this chapter will show, it became far more a matter of dispute amongst contemporary commentators than a settled narrative. Since then it has become prominent through its reiteration in book titles, record sleeve notes and concert programme notes. The ethical concerns described in chapter 2 and the views formed about foreign music described in chapter 3 both helped to form critics’ responses to English composition. The diversity of critical opinion revealed in the wide range of sources examined in this chapter calls into question the central position occupied by the EMR narrative in accounts of the period.

The examination of existing scholarship in §4.2 is arranged thematically. There then follows, in §4.3, a brief résumé of contemporary views about the prospects for English composition immediately before the start of the period 1888–1907. The critical debate
about native composition during the period is divided chronologically, as in the previous chapter. In each of the chronological sections §§4.4–4.8 two types of commentary, reflective and work-specific, have been examined. The main focus is on reflective commentary, where critics aired opinions about English music in general. Work-specific commentary comprises remarks about the development of English composition made in reviews; here there is space to consider only the works that prompted most such discussion. The aim in reporting both types of commentary is to bring out the diversity of opinion, which resists distillation into a dominant narrative. One of the issues that attracted much debate was the expression of nationality in music.

4.2 Existing scholarship

4.2.1 The ‘English Musical Renaissance’

The most prominent narrative in the scholarship relating to English music in the latter part of the nineteenth century has been that of ‘the English Musical Renaissance’ (EMR).¹ This chapter will argue that making this a central narrative distorts the account of the contemporary debate about the development of English music.

Fuller Maitland put forward the narrative in 1897, but its origin has generally been attributed to his 1902 book English Music in the XIXth Century.² In this narrative, English composition, which since the time of Purcell had been under the foreign domination of first Handel and then Mendelssohn, experienced a renaissance from about 1880 onwards under the leadership of Parry, Stanford and others. W.H. Hadow endorsed the date 1880, the year in which Parry’s Prometheus Unbound appeared.³ This work was also cited as the start of the EMR by Ernest Walker (1907) and in the preface

¹ The abbreviation is used throughout without quotes; this does not imply endorsement of the narrative.
² MS1897.06.12, Fuller Maitland 1902
³ ER1906.10d
to the *Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians* (1924). The EMR narrative has been reinforced by the appearance of substantial studies with ‘EMR’ in their titles.

The studies by Howes and Pirie take the standpoint of aesthetics. Howes claims that there was a step-change in the quality of English composition, the evidence for which is to be found through critical appraisal of works. It is, for example, the perceived weakness of Sullivan as a composer that denies him a significant role. Howes sees his task as that of distributing prizes judiciously. He identifies the renaissance in a line of compositional development involving particular composers: first Parry and Stanford, who were able to raise the status of music because of their university education, and later Vaughan Williams and Holst. Others, such as Sullivan and Elgar, cannot be ignored but are positioned off the main stream. For Howes the ultimate achievement of the EMR was to free English composition from German models. Pirie has no such overall schema and in many respects his account challenges that of Howes, for example in giving a far more significant role to Elgar and in downgrading the achievements of Parry; but it is still based on the critical appraisal of works.

Hughes and Stradling adopt a very different standpoint. They dismiss aesthetics as the self-correcting product of a self-appointed establishment. They are highly critical of accounts, such as those of Howes and Pirie, which treat composition as if it were an autonomous activity, with composers untainted by a concern with reputation, and the music business unaffected by its social, political and economic context. They set out to contextualise the renaissance, relating it to other currents of thought and to political developments. They present it as a politically motivated movement centred on the foundation of the Royal College of Music (RCM), with George Grove playing a leading role. In a speech (no doubt scripted by Grove) eliciting public support for the planned institution, the Prince of Wales attributed the lack of a distinctively English national music to the absence of a central guiding institution. The RCM was intended to fulfil

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4 Walker 1907: 300, Allen 1924: v. Hughes suggests that the choice of *Prometheus* was the result of a desperate attempt to find a work of Parry’s that antedated Elgar by some years but could be represented as progressive (Hughes 2002: 158–9).
6 Temperley too suggests educational and social background as an important factor.
7 Hughes and Stradling 2001: xv
8 Ti1882.03.01. The message was repeated when the RCM opened (MS1883.05.12).
this aspiration, and Hughes and Stradling’s account focuses on the efforts of the ‘South Kensington Renaissance’ to establish its aesthetic authority. However, the narrowness of this focus makes the study an unreliable guide to the wider debate about the development of English music revealed in this chapter. In particular, the diversity of the debate resists compression into a binary narrative on the model of the ‘Brahms vs Wagner’ antagonism in Austro-German music. Hughes and Stradling give the impression that, apart from disagreements about opera, the leaders were bound together by common beliefs, but, as Paul Rodmell notes in his study of Stanford, Grove found Stanford useful to the RCM without caring for his music. Hughes and Stradling make no comment on the very unBritish dirigisme in the concept of a guiding institution – a concept that placed the RCM in an unstable position in the music community at large. Recognition of this could have streamlined the account of its vicissitudes.

As was noted in chapter 1 (pp. 13ff) Hughes and Stradling’s presentation of the EMR has been severely criticised by Alain Frogley for its cavalier approach to historical evidence and its dismissal of specialist musicological research as parti pris. Frogley focuses his criticism on the account of the period after that covered by the present study, so the critique presented here can be seen as complementary. In spite of both Hughes and Stradling’s revisionist account and the criticism of it, the EMR narrative retains its hold; it is, for example, a commonplace of concert programme notes and CD sleeve notes.

Various writers have put forward revisions of the narrative, citing different key events, dates or composers. Reviewing these, Jürgen Schaarwächter has argued that so great is the variation that the usefulness of the narrative is now questionable. However, the interest of this thesis is in how and to what extent the narrative figured in the

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9 Rodmell 2002: 169
10 The Musical Times approved of ‘an ultimate court of appeal in matters aesthetic’ but saw no prospect of a ‘tyranny of taste’ as ‘English provincialism’ would assert itself (MT1879.02). Frogley 2003
12 Schaarwächter 2008
contemporary debate about the development of English music, rather than in retrospective judgements.

4.2.2 The prehistory of the ‘English Musical Renaissance’

One question arising from the EMR narrative is why English music made such a poor showing beforehand. Nicholas Temperley attributes this to a combination of the xenophilia of the upper classes – whose preference for the foreign was a badge of exclusivity – and the aspiration of the rising middle classes towards the upper-class lifestyle.\(^{14}\) The class basis of musical preferences was acknowledged in one of the earliest English music periodicals, the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (*QMMR*), anticipating Pierre Bourdieu’s findings by over a century and a half.\(^{15}\) However, although many critics from the early nineteenth century onwards saw the neglect of English music as due to fashion, others accepted that foreign music deservedly beat English.\(^{16}\) Moreover, there was a strong commitment to the doctrine of free trade: the *QMMR* upheld it and it continued to be endorsed.\(^{17}\) One historian has described the move to free trade as ‘one of the decisive events of modern British history, perhaps *the* decisive event’.\(^{18}\) No ignominy was attached to importing foreign goods, and it was recognised that British goods – including music – needed open competition with foreign if they were to improve. Critics who berated their fellow-countrymen for failing to support native composers were up against a strong predisposition to regard national origin as irrelevant.\(^{19}\)

Hughes and Stradling assert that before about 1870 art music was generally regarded as morally dubious or even subversive, citing in support isolated remarks by Carlyle and Ruskin.\(^{20}\) Hughes has since retreated from this view, citing both writers’ advocacy of

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\(^{14}\) Temperley 1999. The emergence of this fashion amongst the upper classes in the previous century has been charted in Newman 1987: 41ff. See also Colley 1992: 87–8, Black 2005: 211ff.

\(^{15}\) *QMMR*1818.01a. The use of aesthetic preferences as class markers is examined in Bourdieu 1984, where one case study is of musical preferences in modern French society.

\(^{16}\) See, for example, *NMMLJ*1834.02.

\(^{17}\) *QMMR*1820.07

\(^{18}\) Gamble 1985: 55

\(^{19}\) See, for example, *MW*1851.08.23.

\(^{20}\) Hughes and Stradling: 6–7
the moral power of art, including music. A non-musical publication reported as early as 1818 that middle and lower class prejudice against Italian opera was disappearing. There was, it is true, a widespread belief, dating from the early years of the century, that England was, or had become, an unmusical country. Oft-repeated denials testify to its persistence. A call for the foundation of a national school of composers was made as early as 1818 in the QMMR and prompted a lively debate about the direction to be taken. Thereafter several efforts were made to kick start a musical renaissance, starting with the ‘British Concerts’ in 1823 and continued through the ‘Society of British Musicians’, the ‘British Orchestral Society’ and others. Most hopes for a national school were focused on opera and there was a succession of proposals for a national opera. From about 1870 onwards, provincial festivals increasingly included native works and, along with the Crystal Palace under the conductor August Manns, became the main outlets for them. Sullivan’s Te Deum, performed at the Crystal Palace in 1872, was hailed by the Musical Times as ‘a gratifying promise that English Music is blossoming into a Spring to be succeeded by a Summer, such as this land has not experienced since the death of Purcell’. The year 1873 was regarded as especially productive, and critics were becoming increasingly upbeat about English composition, although they accepted that no composer of genius had appeared.

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21 Hughes 2002: 2–3
22 TI1818.05
23 Ex1813.05.09, Ex1814.01.30, BLM1815.02, LG1817.03.08, QR1817.10, BA1818.09, BA1823.04. The French historian Élie Halévy could find no other explanation than a ‘racial incapacity’ (Halévy 1938: 117).
24 See, for example, CJ1883.12.08.
25 QMMR1818.01b, LM1820.06.
26 QMMR1822.10, Ti1834.10.28, MMR1876.01. For the Society of British Musicians see also McVeigh 2000.
27 Ath1833.11.09, NMMLJ1834.02, Ath1834.05.03, MW1836.09.16, Or1866.04.21.
28 It is strange that the Crystal Palace does not figure in Hughes and Stradling’s account (except as the venue for the Handel Festivals), especially as Grove supervised it; perhaps its choice of composers was too eclectic. The history of the festivals is addressed in Drummond 2011, discussed below, pp. 252ff. An outlet for new chamber music was provided by the concerts given at the home of Edward Dannreuther.
29 MT1872.06
30 Or1873.11.21, MW1873.12.27, MMR1874.01, Ac1874.04.25
Hughes and Stradling’s contention that Pater’s studies of the Italian Renaissance were part of the ‘intellectual background’ of the 1870 Education Act, making the act itself a major component of the EMR, is without foundation.\(^{31}\) In fact the debate leading up to the act had been dominated by bitter divisions over religious instruction.\(^{32}\) Music was not, as Hughes and Stradling aver, made a compulsory subject.\(^{33}\) They also claim that H.R. Haweis’s *Music and Morals* (1873) was a turning point for the EMR, decisively challenging the view that music was morally questionable. However, Haweis’s case for the morally beneficial effect of serious (German) music was made against indifference, not hostility. (His advocacy of Mendelssohn twenty-five years after the composer’s death, at a time when *Elijah* had become an essential part of every festival, seems otiose.) Haweis believed that England could only be called properly musical if it produced a distinctively English brand of orchestral music; opera he dismissed as unworthy of attention.\(^{34}\) However, he gave no indication of how to proceed (unlike his contemporary Hueffer, who suggested the incorporation of elements of popular

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\(^{32}\) Murphy 1972

\(^{33}\) Each pupil who sang to a certain standard earned the school an extra grant (Cox 1993).

\(^{34}\) Haweis’s view changed when he became a fervent admirer of Wagner.
music). Haweis’s book had little impact on critics, whose opinions ranged from dismissive to lukewarm; none mentioned his views about a national school.

An encouraging historical narrative of English music was an essential prerequisite for a renaissance, as Maria McHale shows. Critics frequently used an abbreviated form of this narrative to ‘prove’ that England was, in spite of appearances to the contrary, a musical country. Here is a typical example: ‘there was a time […] in our history when we English were the pioneer musical people. We have not, as far as I know, changed the ingredients of our nature since then, nor has there been any mixing of nationalities among us which would account for indifference towards music’. (The revival of interest in Tudor music and the inception of a collected edition of Purcell’s works can be seen as efforts to establish the premise of this argument.) McHale argues that because the high points in the narrative – especially the Elizabethan period – involved vocal music, the national music had to be vocal. At first, choral music – especially oratorio – was favoured; but according to McHale this came to be seen as outdated by more progressive thinkers, who advocated opera as the more modern genre of vocal music. So McHale’s account bifurcates into oratorio and opera. The most obvious weakness in this account is the omission of orchestral music, which was as important as oratorio to the ‘South Kensington Renaissance’ – Parry indeed resented the demand of festivals for oratorio. Another weakness is the treatment of oratorio and opera as if their common feature were more important than their differences. Choral music was for amateur participation; opera required professionally trained soloists and cannot be described as the music of the ‘singing people’.

It was, however, true that many commentators placed their hopes for a national school in opera, and the fortunes of English opera were debated throughout the nineteenth century. When in 1866 the institution that became the National Training School for

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35 Ex1874.03.21
36 SR1871.12.02, Ath1871.12.30, MMR1872.02, TSF1872.01, MT1872.01, BQR1872.01, SPM1872.03, WR1872.07, MM1876.04
Hughes and Stradling make much of the fact that the book went into twenty ‘editions’ (most of which were reprints and reproduced clearly outdated material). It covered a wide range of topics, so it is not possible to point to any part of the book as influential with the general public.
37 McHale 2003
38 MO1891.04a
39 Parry to Dannreuther, re Judith (Hughes and Stradling 2001: 36)
Music (NTSM) was under discussion, a petition signed by five hundred musicians called for the foundation of a music college and a national opera. This reflected a widespread concern that English opera was suffering from neglect and needed drastic improvement. In spite of its omission from the purview of the NTSM, an English national opera remained an aspiration for many commentators. This helps to explain the level of interest that continued to be shown throughout the period of this study. This is an area that receives scant attention in Hughes and Stradling; Sullivan’s *Ivanhoe* is the only work discussed at any length, and then only as an episode in a supposed leadership contest between the RCM and Sullivan (see below, p. 158).

The EMR narrative, with its ‘turning points’ and key events, places an emphasis on discontinuity, whereas this section has shown that concern about the state of native composition had been occupying critics since the early part of the century. Hughes and Stradling argue that this concern suddenly became urgent for political reasons, with the unification of Germany and Italy by 1872. This assertion is examined in the next section.

### 4.2.3 Nationalism and English music

The aetiology of nationalism is an area of lively scholarly debate, much of it centering on the question of whether it is a modern phenomenon or whether its roots go back further into ethnic identities. The distinction between nationalism and patriotism has also been debated. Walker Connor defines patriotism as an emotional attachment to one’s state or country and nationalism as an emotional attachment to one’s ethnonational group – hence British patriotism, but English/Welsh etc. nationalism. This formulation is adequate for this study, especially as critics used ‘English’ and ‘British’ interchangeably unless specifically making a distinction between English, Welsh, etc. The nationalism that emerged in the writings of music critics was culturally rather than politically orientated and drew on ideas of ethnicity. As Connor observes,

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40 Or1866.12.15
41 Or1869.08.06, *Ath*1869.08.21, *MW*1871.10.07, *Ath*1871.10.28, *IR*1872.02, *Ath*1872.05.11, Or1873.08.08
42 Hughes and Stradling 2001: 22
43 For a concise overview see, for example, Hearn 2006.
the sense of belonging to an ethnonational group, of sharing kinship and a common ancestry, is stimulated by symbols, familial metaphors, poetry and music, all of which operate at a non-rational level. But although this is undoubtedly the case, it does not follow that music is in all instances a strong, or even a necessary, carrier of national feeling.

The potential of music to be a carrier of national feeling gives it the potential to become an instrument of propaganda aimed at binding the listener emotionally closer to the nation. Although, as chapter 2 has shown, many music critics believed in the ethical power of music, none of those who wished to see a distinctively English music suggested this propagandist aim. They wanted English music to reflect English character and feeling, and believed that such music would not only appeal to English audiences but also show other nations that England too possessed its own national music. Government took little interest in art music, which was spread across multiple institutions; when it did, its action was to facilitate the foundation of a training school for performers and teachers. Moreover, the clientele for art music was the middle class: if there was any anxiety about national solidarity, it was directed towards the working classes, which were becoming more militant.

In the interests of clarity it is useful to make a distinction between ‘native’ and ‘national’. ‘Native music’ is taken to mean music – in any genre or style – written by English (or British), as opposed to foreign, composers; ‘national music’ is taken to mean music that is believed or intended to reflect in some way the characteristics of its country of origin, and a ‘national school’ means a group of composers producing such music. This distinction is elided both in Hughes and Stradling’s account and Hughes’s study of the press’s role in the EMR (see below, p. 131). As noted above, the desire for a national music – in particular, a national opera – had a long prehistory. Hughes notes that the critic H.F. Chorley, lecturing on national music in 1862, had averred that there was no distinctively English national music; Hughes sees these lectures as the point of departure for a development that led to the folksong-inspired ‘Pastoral School’. However, as will be shown in this chapter, there was a prolonged debate about the

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44 Connor 1993
45 Hughes 2002: 70–1
musical expression of nationality in general, and of Englishness in particular, well before the so-called ‘Pastoral School’ emerged.

Hughes and Stradling claim that in the early 1870s a concern about the increasing power of a unified Germany (and a unified Italy) made a national music a ‘political necessity’. However, there is no evidence that this implausible argument carried weight with the government. Although the government gave a measure of support to the foundation of, first, the National Training School for Music (NTSM) and later the RCM, its involvement was limited. It was unable to persuade, let alone coerce, the Royal Academy into a merger with the NTSM, in spite of a report severely criticising the former. In the considerable range of evidence presented in G.W.E. Brightwell’s study of the merger negotiations, the only clear reference to a national music was in a petition by musicians arguing for a State school of music and an English national opera. The petitioners, like many musicians both before and after them, saw the cultivation of a national music as a means of overcoming a sense of national failure within their specific field rather than as a political necessity. Neither does the claim, made in a speech enlisting support for the foundation of the RCM, that a national music would strengthen ties with the colonies show such music to have been a political necessity; it is a gross exaggeration to suggest that national music had become as important to the Empire as the Navy.

Another explanation offered for an increased interest in a national music is the anxiety generated by the threat to British commerce coming from the industrial growth of Germany and the USA. Temperley argues that this led to protectionism and a drop in demand for foreign imports that benefited native composers. There was, however, no drop in demand for foreign music during the period of this study, as is evident from the previous chapter. Moreover, it is a somewhat hazardous enterprise to link the supposed growth of musical nationalism to an account of British economic decline, as

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46 Hughes and Stradling: 7
47 Brightwell 2003; see also above, pp. 122f.
48 Hughes and Stradling: 30. Native music was rebuffed when a foreign band was engaged for an important imperial occasion: see below, p. 260.
49 Temperley 1999
the latter is a matter of controversy amongst economic historians.\textsuperscript{51} It is true that there was a strong protectionist agitation from the late 1890s onwards, directed principally against Germany.\textsuperscript{52} Although art music was of minimal importance as an economic product, it is possible that anti-German feeling aroused by protectionists affected the music community. Jeremy Dibble suggests that Sullivan’s protest at Richter’s appointment to the Hallé Orchestra in 1898 may be an instance, but as with Runciman’s protest at Messager’s appointment to Covent Garden, it was more a protest at the appointers’ lack of patriotism.\textsuperscript{53} As will be seen in §4.5, calls for a specifically national music fell off, even though economic competition with Germany persisted. Sometimes, indeed, efforts to improve Britain’s competitiveness had a negative effect on music provision: technical education took priority over music when money for extension classes became available, and largely displaced the cultural activities of the People’s Palace in East London.\textsuperscript{54}

At the level of government, Britain’s longstanding policy of distancing itself from continental rivalries was under strain in the 1890s. But views differed as to which of the continental powers, France, Russia or Germany, posed the greatest threat and which offered the strongest candidate for partnership.\textsuperscript{55} An Anglo-German alliance was favoured by one faction, but came to nothing.\textsuperscript{56} Attitudes towards Germany were diverse: Paul Kennedy, whilst warning against the simplification involved, distinguishes two sets of attitudes, ‘realist’ and ‘idealist’.\textsuperscript{57} Realists demanded a strong militarily prepared state to pursue the nation’s best interests: many saw Germany as a model, in

\textsuperscript{51} Weiner 1981 attributes the decline to anti-industrial attitudes amongst the middle classes. This and other cultural explanations are critically examined and rejected in Thompson 1994: 143–61. Dintenfass 1992 attributes the decline to unmodernised working practices. Rubinstein 1994 argues that British strength lay in commerce, which prospered, rather than industry, which declined. Kennedy 1988: 290–5 argues that contemporary alarmists exaggerated the threat.

\textsuperscript{52} Williams 1896 was the best-known protectionist tract. Medley 1896 was a pro-free trade riposte.

\textsuperscript{53} Dibble 2001b: 84, SR1901.01.01. Another small indicator: the German publisher Augener advertised their sheet music as ‘designed, engraved, and printed in England on paper of English manufacture’ (MMR1900.10).

\textsuperscript{54} Joyce 1996

\textsuperscript{55} Searle 2004: 259 ff. France (in Africa) and Russia (in Asia) posed greater threats than Germany until after 1900. In le Queux’s ‘invasion scare’ novel \textit{The Great War in England in 1897} (published 1894) France and Russia were the enemies and Germany an ally. In later novels by the same author Germany was the enemy. See Clarke 1995.

\textsuperscript{56} Searle: 265–6

\textsuperscript{57} Kennedy 1975: 137–48
spite of its being the most likely antagonist.\textsuperscript{58} Idealists believed in free trade and democracy and found armed conflict repugnant; impressed by the cultural and artistic heritage of Germany, they were forced to distinguish between the German people and the Prussian militaristic state. Kennedy argues that the ‘peacemakers’ had no real understanding of the fundamental differences between the English and German politics.\textsuperscript{59} However, cultural relationships were mostly uninterrupted: Hegelianism permeated British philosophy; Germans admired Burne-Jones, Beardsley and English domestic architecture; and ‘admiration for German music in Britain remained unaltered’.\textsuperscript{60} Evidence given in chapter 3 and this chapter supports the latter statement.

A third type of explanation sees English musical nationalism as part of a wider phenomenon of cultural nationalism and the search for, or construction of, national identity. This is the context into which Hughes and Stradling place the EMR. It is useful to clarify the relationship between ‘national identity’ and ‘national character’. The former refers to images of the nation in the minds of its members and encompasses institutions, customs, fundamental values, etc.\textsuperscript{61} ‘National character’ refers to the supposed typical personal qualities of a member of the nation. A contemporary exposition of the connection between the two (in which, however, the term ‘identity’ – a relatively recent coinage – was not used) was given by the historian Mandell Creighton.\textsuperscript{62} Creighton argued that there was what we would now call a synergy between the English national character and national institutions (constitution, law, church, etc.). From early times the English manifested a desire to do their own things in their own way and this trait was fundamental to the national character, which both formed national institutions and was formed by them: ‘the great product of England is not so much its institutions […] as it is the individual Englishman, who is moulded by all these influences, and is the ultimate test of their value’.\textsuperscript{63} As will be seen, this notion of the national character as a compendium of personal traits was at the root of debates about a national music.

\textsuperscript{58} The Kaiser’s leadership was praised in the most popular ‘invasion scare’ novel of the period, Childers 1903.
\textsuperscript{59} Kennedy 1980
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.: 389. See also Dibble 2001b.
\textsuperscript{61} See, for example, Clark 2000: 250.
\textsuperscript{62} Creighton 1896
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 7
There were a number of initiatives in the period that suggest a resurgence of pride in English achievements and a desire to spread it amongst the growing reading public. G.R. Searle mentions the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1885–1901) and the launching of Cassell’s ‘National Library’ and ‘Men of Letters’ series, to which may be added Froude’s Oxford lectures on English seamen of the 16th century. The celebration of the bicentenary of Purcell’s death might be said to come into this category, although immediately afterwards his music was no more evident in the repertory than before. Krishan Kumar argues that English nationalism was a late arrival when compared with the development of nationalism in Europe, and when it did arrive it took a cultural rather than a political form. According to Kumar, at the turn of the century British imperial self-confidence was flagging while nationalism in Europe had developed beyond mere demands for self-determination towards a belief that each nation possessed a ‘national soul’, expressed in its language, culture, folklore, etc. But what determined that an English, as opposed to a British, nationalism should emerge was the birth of Irish, Scottish and Welsh nationalisms, all three sharing a ‘Celtic’ element. Kumar suggests that a specifically English cultural nationalism arose as a response to these: England, too, could claim to have a ‘national soul’. In the historiography of the period this soul was posited as ‘Anglo-Saxon’ with solid qualities that distinguished it from that of wayward and temperamental Celts.

The historiography that Kumar refers to has been termed ‘Teutonism’ and its basis was racial. From the mid-century onwards, race was gaining in currency as ‘the key determining category of mankind’. Many prominent contemporary historians – including the highly popular J.R. Green – emphasised the German ancestry of the English. Teutonists held that English institutions and practices could be traced back to the Anglo-Saxon period, and had yielded ‘a disposition bred into the national stock over a thousand years, one whose crucial adjectives [were] “manly”, “frank”, “decent”, “staunch”’. Peter Mandler argues that views about the English national character were much affected by the rise of democracy and the extensions of the franchise, and the

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64 Searle: 600–1, Froude 1895  
65 Kumar 2003: 175–218  
66 Walvin 1987b: 251  
68 Bentley 2005: 5
‘Anglo-Saxon’ character was formulated so as to be universal across the class spectrum.\textsuperscript{69} However, Mandler also charts the process whereby, in order to counter Irish calls for secession, the common characteristics of Celts and Teutons were emphasised.\textsuperscript{70} Although there was no settled depiction of English national identity during the period, the normative conception used by some music critics had much in common with the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ formulation, as will appear below.

According to Kumar, cultural nationalism in the field of music emerged as English ‘folk mania’ and led to the celebration in music of the pastoral landscape of England, especially southern England.\textsuperscript{71} Jan Marsh sees the 1890s folk music revival as one aspect of a reorientation of cultural interest in some quarters towards the land, in repudiation of industrialism and the degeneracy of urban life. Folk-song collectors’ interest was fixed on the countryside: for them the music of the people did not include songs from industrial areas and cities.\textsuperscript{72} However, the idea that this pastoral fixation was widespread is an instance of the ‘shards’ illusion (above, p. 18): Peter Mandler has argued that the ‘swooning nostalgia for the rural past’ that emerged around the turn of the century was confined to ‘a small, articulate but not necessarily influential avant-garde (or, rather, a derrière-garde)’.\textsuperscript{73} For most of the population, the culture was distinctly urban: ‘populist, commercial and present-minded’.\textsuperscript{74} The evidence gathered in this chapter shows that not only did the desire for a national music antedate the folk-song revival but also that there was much scepticism about drawing on folk-song.

\textbf{4.2.4 Imperialism}

During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century the British Empire expanded rapidly and imperial issues were more and more often in the news.\textsuperscript{75} The desirability or otherwise of imperial expansion had for long been a matter of dispute amongst

\begin{flushleft}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{69} Mandler 2006. This portrayal of national character and identity pervaded elementary school readers (Heathorn 1995).}
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.: 133ff.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.: 208. See also Howkins 1986.
\textsuperscript{72} Marsh 1982: 74–5. See also Boyes 1993: 23.
\textsuperscript{73} Mandler 1997: 160
\textsuperscript{74} ibid., 161.
\textsuperscript{75} See, for example, Pugh 1994: 101ff.}
\end{flushleft}
politicians and political commentators, but supporters of the Empire made many efforts to spread interest and pride by means of imperial exhibitions, ceremonial occasions, magazine articles and novels, etc. \(^\text{76}\) Bernard Porter argues that this propaganda did not have a profound effect and the population as a whole was not much interested in the Empire. \(^\text{77}\) However, music journals included the Empire in their coverage of events abroad. British conductors undertook tours in 1888 (Cowen, Australia) and 1903 (Mackenzie, Canada). Mackenzie’s was widely reported in the *Musical Times* and was in effect an export drive, his thirty-three concerts consisting entirely of British music. \(^\text{78}\)

Music and imperialism most obviously intersected on ceremonial occasions, as Jeffrey Richards observes. \(^\text{79}\) Richards judges the contributions made by Sullivan to such occasions as too lightweight for a true imperial idiom. He accepts the Stradling-Hughes account of the EMR, but finds its outcomes (which he characterises, idiosyncratically, as a continuation of the Protestant oratorio tradition, a backward-looking ‘Merrie England’ and a fascination with Celtic mysticism) irrelevant to the expression of imperialism. He sees Elgar as the authentic musical voice of imperialism and argues that Elgar’s imperialism was of the same type as Kipling’s, which saw the spread of British values as a force for good in the world. Richards argues strongly against the ‘revisionist’ interpretation of Elgar made in the 1960s when imperialism began to have a bad name.

For David Cannadine, the relationship between the EMR and ceremonial was quite different. He argues that it was fortunate that the vogue for big ceremonial occasions (whether seen as expressions of self-confidence or self-doubt) coincided with the EMR, thus allowing such occasions to be ‘festivals of native talent’. \(^\text{80}\) Such a description, however, is not always appropriate. David Wright notes that the Coronation of Edward VII in 1902 included a great deal more foreign music than Victoria’s in 1838. \(^\text{81}\)

\(^{76}\) Dawe 1902 is a typical example.
\(^{77}\) Porter 2004. His is a difficult case to argue, as comprehensive evidence is necessary to establish the absence of something, in order to counter the ‘shards’ illusion. (A similar problem is encountered in assessing how much interest was shown in the EMR.)
\(^{78}\) *MT* 1903.05
\(^{79}\) Richards 2001
\(^{80}\) Cannadine 1992: 130
\(^{81}\) Wright 2006
Moreover, with one exception the British music was all church music, forming an Anglican choral enclave (from Tallis and Gibbons to Stainer, Stanford and Parry) between two programmes of orchestral music, all foreign apart from Elgar’s closing *Imperial March*. A surprising inclusion was Wagner’s *Kaisermarsch*, rearranged to include a choral section with English words. The choice of these programmes was, we are told, that of the King himself and suggests that, apart from Elgar, English orchestral composers had at that time made little impact at the top of the social tree.

### 4.2.5 The reception of the ‘English Musical Renaissance’

Hughes complements the account of the EMR with a study of the role of the press. He argues that critics, described by Fuller Maitland as ‘watchmen of music’ standing on the walls and examining would-be entrants to the citadel, were essential to the EMR. The simile is, however, not entirely apt: as Hughes himself points out, some critics were simultaneously either inside the citadel or trying to gain entry as composers, librettists or writers of programme-notes. Hughes notes that the great majority of critics were keen to see English composition flourish, but they had widely differing views about the ways in which it should develop; attitudes towards Wagner – inspiration or warning? – were crucial. As Hughes recounts, some critics were enthusiastic supporters of the ‘South Kensington Renaissance’, but others showed no special interest in the South Kensington composers, and Prout, for example, ‘went out of his way to portray the RCM professors as liabilities to the Musical Renaissance’.

It is difficult to assess the press’s contribution to the ‘success’ of the EMR. If the success criteria have to do with its reception by the press, the argument is circular, given that the composer-critic relationship was often close (and, in the case of the *Musical Times*, extended to the publisher). Elgar, as Hughes shows, was adept at manipulating his portrayal in the press, especially in the *Musical Times*. If the success criteria lie outside this narrow circle and relate to reception by the public, the role of the critics is

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82 Range 2012: 225–38  
83 Hughes 2002  
84 Ibid.: 78
difficult to determine, especially as their views diverged. Hughes admits that ‘there is no methodology to estimate the effect of critic on public’.  

Hughes and Stradling’s account of the EMR is presented as, from its earliest days, an effort to found a *national* music. However in Hughes’s study ‘national’ is more or less equated with ‘native’ and the promotion or praise of English compositions is taken *ipso facto* as support for ‘national’ music. Thus, for example, the publisher Novello is described as ‘an organisation which placed its financial strength and corporate resources behind national music without hope of gain’.  

However, the previous chapter has shown that critics were not generally concerned to promote native music over foreign, but were even-handed in their appraisals of the latter. Hughes similarly stretches the term ‘renaissance’ to include any positively appraised native composition. Moreover, given the central importance of nationalism to Hughes and Stradling’s presentation of the Renaissance, it is surprising that there is so little reference to this aspect: during the period 1888–1907 Hughes records only two examples of works seen by critics as distinctively ‘English’. Parry’s Third Symphony was described in Joseph Bennett’s programme note as English; H.F. Frost of the *Athenæum* and W.A. Barrett of the *Musical Times* agreed. Barrett and Bennett also found an English flavour in Parry’s *Ode on St Cecilia’s Day*. However, the study is mainly based on reviews of works, where critics had limited space to develop more wide-ranging arguments and appeared mainly concerned to mould opinion. Hughes likens Bennett’s writing about the Englishness of the *Ode* to subliminal advertising.

Hughes’s account is based on a limited range of sources (*Times, Daily Telegraph, Musical Times, Athenæum*), a selection skewed towards those most supportive of the ‘South Kensington Renaissance’. Prominent critics such as E.A. Baughan, J.F. Runciman and Ernest Newman are scarcely, if at all, mentioned. Hughes offers his study as ‘a platform on which other researchers and scholars could build’. The present chapter may be seen as one response to this invitation. It is based on a far wider range of

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85 Ibid.: 23  
86 Hughes: 103. This view of Novello cannot be sustained: see Drysdale 2013.  
87 Ibid.: 152  
88 Ibid.  
89 Ibid.: 9
sources, and, taken together with the following chapter, shows that whilst the RCM composers – especially Parry – had their champions, the ‘renaissance’, when acknowledged at all, was not seen by most commentators as centred on them. As will be seen, the EMR narrative is most decisively called into question by a crucial event – or rather non-event – that showed how little national recognition had been achieved (below, §4.6).

### 4.2.6 Individual composers

Studies of the most prominent composers of the period – Parry, Stanford and Elgar – include Jeremy Dibble’s accounts of the life and works of Parry and of Stanford, Paul Rodmell’s study of Stanford and a growing biographical and critical literature on Elgar.

Dibble notes that Parry ‘detested the press’ and there are only occasional references to the press commentary in Dibble’s study.\(^90\) Parry was more concerned with feedback from professional musicians, especially from his mentor Edward Dannreuther. In a more recent study, Bernard Benoliel essays a psychological and aesthetic re-evaluation of the composer but makes no mention of contemporary critics other than Shaw.\(^91\) In Dibble’s study of Stanford’s life and works, the *Musical Times* is the source of most references to contemporary reception, together with quotations from Shaw.\(^92\) The first part of Paul Rodmell’s study is similar in its chronological ‘life and works’ format to Dibble’s, but, surprisingly, given the professional relationship between Stanford and Parry, makes no reference to Dibble’s *Parry*; again, the *Musical Times* and Shaw are the source for the majority of references to critical reception.\(^93\) The second part consists of an appraisal of Stanford’s legacy as a teacher and an account of his reception and reputation as a composer after his death.\(^94\)

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\(^{90}\) Dibble 1992: 227, 232  
\(^{91}\) Benoliel 1997  
\(^{92}\) Dibble 2002  
\(^{93}\) Rodmell 2002  
\(^{94}\) Stanford’s invective against the degenerative tendencies and ugliness of the new music appearing from about 1917 onwards echoes that of earlier critics of Wagner and Liszt (Rodmell 2002: 360ff).
The field of Elgar scholarship, even when the writings of ‘enthusiastic speculating hero-worshippers’ are discounted, is so large that only material directly relevant to his contemporary reception can be noticed here.\(^95\) Other contributions are referenced in §§4.6.4 and 4.8.3 below. The reception of the *Enigma Variations* and the near-disastrous premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius* are well covered in biographies. Early reviews of *The Apostles* are reproduced and discussed by Aidan J. Thomson, who observes that the reservations expressed are ‘an uncomfortable reminder that Elgar’s music did not meet with universal approval, even in Britain’ – an observation amply confirmed in this chapter.\(^96\) Thomson also gives a detailed account of the divergence between pro- and anti-Elgar critics to which reference is made below (pp. 213f).\(^97\) According to Charles McGuire, in *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, Elgar was ‘attempting to create a sacred and English response to Wagner’s music dramas’.\(^98\) As will be seen, for contemporary critics the influence of Wagner was manifest chiefly in a composer’s use of ‘representative themes’ and his ability to handle them organically; they did not perceive a broader project – an English *Ring*, perhaps – behind *The Apostles* and its sequel (or sequels, as Elgar had once envisaged).

In studies of individual composers, the writings of commentators may be drawn on for evidence, whereas in this thesis the focus is on these writings themselves in their totality. Thus, for example, the concern here is with the views of Parry formed by commentators – a view quite different from the one looking over the composer’s shoulder, as it were, as he grappled with compositional problems as well as the difficulties of his private life. Nevertheless, various points of intersection with studies of individual composers are noted in this chapter.

### 4.3 1887: the prospects for English composition

‘We are full of fervour and appreciative power, we only want the heaven-sent flash to illuminate one of these distinguished and cultured musical countrymen of ours, and all England shall pour out before him the homage the musical progress of the Victorian era
will have taught it how worthily to pay’. This expression of qualified hope appeared in one of a series of books celebrating Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in 1887.

At the end of that year there was more optimism amongst critics than ever before about the prospects for native composition. Four indicators fed this optimism: first, more native works were being accepted by festival committees and concert and opera givers; second, some recent compositions had been judged achievements rather than merely signs of promise; third, some British works were being heard in Germany; fourth, composers appeared to be shaking off the disturbing tendencies that had, in the opinion of some critics, disfigured their earlier efforts. Some writers saw England as about to eclipse Germany. However, although Hughes and Stradling take these indicators as evidence of the early progress of the EMR, there was still much doubt amongst critics as to whether a national school was emerging.

4.3.1 Signs of progress

Some recent oratorios, especially Mackenzie’s *The Rose of Sharon* (1884) had elicited almost universal praise. Sullivan’s *The Golden Legend* (1886) was immediately popular with both critics and public. Even Hueffer, not normally an admirer of Sullivan, was complimentary; although not a work of genius, he thought it ‘likely to survive till our long-expected English Beethoven appears on the scene’. (This was the specifically English version of the ‘messianic hope’ noted in the previous chapter.) Several critics remarked on the ‘Englishness’ of the work, Henry Hiles noting its ‘simplicity of thought, of workmanship, of delivery; a straightforwardness of purpose, a preservation of fresh diatonic melody’. This characterisation of ‘Englishness’ was also a persistent thread in debate. ‘So should all music be written’, said the *Musical Times*, implying that English composition was to be an antidote to current tendencies.

99 Taylor 1887: 202. The ‘distinguished countrymen’ were Cowen, Corder, Mackenzie, Stanford, Goring Thomas and Sullivan (Parry was not mentioned); in the writer’s opinion they had yet to match the standard of Sterndale Bennett, the only Victorian composer in the very highest rank.

100 *Ath* 1884.10.25

101 *MW* 1886.10.23b

102 *Ath* 1886.10.23b, *Ac* 1886.10.23b, *QMR* 1886.11
towards complexity, obscurity and chromaticism.\textsuperscript{103} Other works that received high praise were Cowen’s ‘Scandinavian’ Symphony (1880) and Stanford’s ‘Irish’ Symphony (1887).\textsuperscript{104} The latter was one of three new English symphonies premiered in 1887. It went into the repertoire and, as Paul Rodmell observes, was the work that did most for Stanford’s reputation abroad.\textsuperscript{105}

However, critics were less confident about English opera, on which earlier hopes for a national school had been fixed. All of the English operas produced up to 1887 had a very mixed reception, although Goring Thomas’s \textit{Esmeralda} became quite popular (see below, p.156). The influence of Wagner was inevitable, as J.S. Shedlock observed, but it posed ‘the difficult and intricate problem how to make use of this musical legacy’.\textsuperscript{106} Here Shedlock put his finger on the fundamental difficulty posed for English composers who saw the merits of the ‘modern’ approach but were expected to generate a peculiarly ‘English’ form of opera free alike from the influence of Italian, German and former English models.

Performances in Germany provided further evidence of progress. The success there of a number of operas and a symphony between 1880 and 1884 prompted Joseph Bennett to prophesy that musical leadership could soon pass from Germany to either England or the Slavonic countries, where Dvořák, for example, was coming to the fore.\textsuperscript{107} E.H. Turpin too saw England as in the vanguard, but warned of the twin dangers of rigid adherence to classical models and ‘flirtations with the advanced German school, with its dangerous intellectual conceits and repudiation of the laws of beauty’.\textsuperscript{108} According to H.F. Frost, the migration of English operas to Germany was due in part to the dearth of new German works since Wagner.\textsuperscript{109} Hueffer, surveying the growth of musical activity in England over the previous fifty years, opined that although for the time being the race

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{MT}\textsuperscript{1886.10c}
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Cowen}: \textit{MW}\textsuperscript{1880.12.25}, \textit{Ac}\textsuperscript{1880.12.24}, \textit{Ath}\textsuperscript{1880.12.25}, \textit{MMR}\textsuperscript{1881.01}, \textit{Or}\textsuperscript{1881.01}, \textit{Ex}\textsuperscript{1880.12.25}; \textit{Stanford}: \textit{Ath}\textsuperscript{1887.07.02}, \textit{Ti}\textsuperscript{1887.07.01}, \textit{MW}\textsuperscript{1887.07.02}
\textsuperscript{105} Rodmell 2002: 125
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ac}\textsuperscript{1884.07.12}
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{MT}\textsuperscript{1884.06}
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{MS}\textsuperscript{1885.09.12}
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ath}\textsuperscript{1884.02.02}
\end{flushright}
of great composers was extinct everywhere, England offered as favourable an environment as any for a future appearance of genius.\textsuperscript{110}

4.3.2 ‘Repentant sinners’: Parry, Stanford, Mackenzie

The composers later identified by Fuller Maitland and Hadow as ‘leaders of the renaissance’ acquired their standing only after they had repented of their early obeisance to Wagner. Parry presents the clearest example of the move from heresy to sainthood. His Piano Concerto (1880) divided critical opinion, but Bennett was uncompromisingly negative, describing it as an ‘advanced’ work by ‘an almost unknown man who was artistically more German than English’ and ‘an alarming phenomenon in the little world of English music’.\textsuperscript{111} Bennett, away in Ireland, missed Parry’s cantata \textit{Prometheus Unbound} (1880), but others did his work for him.\textsuperscript{112} Wagner’s influence was deprecated; it was ‘a borrowed garb which sits but badly upon him’.\textsuperscript{113} Two years later, in the Symphony in G (1882), Parry was perceived by several critics to have moved over to Brahms: clarity, intellectuality, scholarship and, in one case, Englishness, were commented on.\textsuperscript{114} Bennett, taking Parry’s symphony and a serenade by Stanford together, found ‘capital proof that English music has arrived at a Renaissance period’; Parry had matured and ‘returned to ways of pleasantness and paths of peace’.\textsuperscript{115} By 1887, with \textit{Blest Pair of Sirens}, the transformation was complete: harmonies were ‘pure and chaste’ and the ideas expressed with ‘lucidity and straightforwardness’.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{FR}\textsuperscript{1887.06}
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{MW}\textsuperscript{1880.05.15}
\textsuperscript{112} Bennett 1908: 294
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{MP}\textsuperscript{1880.09.09}. See also \textit{MT}\textsuperscript{1880.10}, \textit{MMR}\textsuperscript{1880.10}, \textit{SR}\textsuperscript{1880.09.11}, \textit{MS}\textsuperscript{1880.09.18}, \textit{Or}\textsuperscript{1880.10}. The \textit{Athenæum} was complimentary but noted the influence of \textit{Tristan} (\textit{Ath}\textsuperscript{1880.09.11}).
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ath}\textsuperscript{1882.09.09}, \textit{MS}\textsuperscript{1882.09.09}, \textit{MMR}\textsuperscript{1882.10}, \textit{MS}\textsuperscript{1883.04.14}, \textit{MT}\textsuperscript{1883.05}, \textit{SR}\textsuperscript{1882.09.16}
\textsuperscript{115} Bennett’s use of the term ‘renaissance’ is taken by Hughes and Stradling as the ‘christening’ of the EMR.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{MS}\textsuperscript{1887.05.21}, \textit{Ath}\textsuperscript{1887.05.21}. Dibble attributes the ‘English’ sound of this work to Parry’s reverting to the diatonicism of the cathedral music of composers such as S.S. Wesley (Dibble 1992: 258). See also below, p. 149, n. 165.
Similar changes in the styles of Stanford and Mackenzie were noted and welcomed. Stanford’s redemption came with his oratorio *The Three Holy Children* (1885). But it was *The Revenge* (1886) that cemented his reputation. Although Mackenzie’s cantata *The Story of Sayid* (1886) failed to repeat the success of *The Rose of Sharon*, the *Musical Times* welcomed the relative absence of representative themes and a greater melodiousness.

It is not suggested here that critics’ opinions prompted composers to change style. However, the early influence of Wagner was later something of an embarrassment to the principal torchbearer for the RCM composers, Fuller Maitland, who tried to write Wagner out of the script, claiming that future historians would find the episode of English dalliance with Wagner ‘curious’. He was mistaken: Wagner’s popularity continued – Friday nights were ‘Wagner Nights’ in the Proms until well into the 1930s.

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117 *MT* 1885.10, *MW* 1885.08.29

118 *Ath* 1886.10.23a, *Ac* 1886.10.23a, *MT* 1886.10a, *MW* 1886.10.23a. The only negative review appeared in *MMR* 1886.11. The reasons for the work’s popularity are discussed in Rodmell 2002: 119–20.

119 *MT* 1886.10b Similar views were expressed in the *Musical Standard*, the *Orchestra Musical Review* and the *Athenæum*.

120 Fuller Maitland 1902: 154. Hadow later castigated the critics who had failed to respond to the beauties of *Prometheus*, saying that they were led by ‘an English Beckmesser’. It is a
4.3.3  A national school?

Several critics noted the signs of progress described above. Some went further and asked whether a national school of composition had at last arrived. But there were sceptics. An anonymous writer in *Musical Opinion* argued that music sprang from more southerly countries and that English music was mostly imitative; if a ‘school’ meant musical expression determined by the circumstances and men of the time, ‘it is only in the slightest degree perceptible’. W.A. Barrett, writing before the sinners had shaken off Wagner, understood a ‘school’ to be the result of people thinking in a similar, and recognisable, way and thereby influencing their own and later generations. He believed that England had never possessed such a school and saw no future prospect of one so long as composers forsook established traditions and followed fashion.

Nationalism appeared in a bad light when it took the form of chauvinism. An anti-Wagner demonstration in Paris in December 1885 was condemned in a *Times* editorial and contrasted with the situation in England, where free trade had reigned in music even before it became national policy; calls by a few ‘patriotic enthusiasts’ for a bar to foreign competition implied a low opinion of native talent. The writer condemned nationalism in art, holding that national origin was aesthetically irrelevant. But others disagreed: a writer in the *Musical Times* in 1887 held that music was ‘necessarily and strongly national’ and it was in the interests of the art for each nation to cultivate its own. He adduced the usual evidence for national qualities in music – the melancholy north, the sunny south, etc., – but he had to counter two objections. Against the first, the pre-eminence in England of German music – a preference that owed much to common Teutonic ancestry – he could only reassert the necessity for each nation to have its own music: ‘the conquest of one country’s music by that of another has never yet been achieved, and we venture to say, never will be’. (The emotive word ‘conquest’ discloses the writer’s faith that English music would free itself from the influence of German.) To

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121 CJ1883.12.08, MS1884.01.05, MS1884.02.09, MO1884.02, MT1884.06, T1885.03
122 MO1884.11
123 QMR1885.02
124 MW1886.01.02
125 MT1887.01. There are echoes of Herder here.
meet the other objection – the belief that English music, unlike, say, Scottish or Irish, had no national characteristics – he looked to folk-songs: ‘the tunes are simply constructed, of a manly and straightforward character, emphasised by definite, well-marked rhythms and regularity of phrase; and they combine strength and tenderness to a degree approached by no other national airs, save the kindred German, in which, however, sentiment prevails over strength’. The writer claimed the qualities listed were found in the music of the most popular English composers (Bishop, Balfe, Dibdin), but contemporary students were taught to despise simple tunefulness; instead they imitated the alien characteristics of foreign models. The writer called on composers to create an English school by using the technical aspects of composition – which were in his view artificial and not national – on material of a national type.126 He added that to achieve this, the key positions in the world of English music should be held by English people.

F.W. Crowest went further, with a call for a boycott of foreign music; this drew a scathing riposte from Charles L. Graves, who saw insular mediocrity as the only possible consequence: ‘the only true Nationalism in music is Internationalism’.127 This view was frequently asserted in the subsequent debate about the development of English music.

The foregoing account of the critical commentary on English music during the year 1887 shows a great deal of optimism, although contemporaries (apart from Bennett) did not yet use the language of ‘renaissance’ and none attributed the progress to a concerted effort to found a national music. Neither did critics distinguish a group of composers as ‘leaders’, that being a retrospective construction initiated by Fuller Maitland ten years later. Sullivan, whose claim to be a ‘leader’ was to be rejected in the EMR narrative, received as much praise as any other composer and in fact produced the choral work that was to eclipse all others in popularity. It is possible that some of this optimism was fed by a sense that the supply of high-quality German music was falling: apart from

126 This was an idea well ahead of its time: Vaughan Williams’s Norfolk Rhapsodies and Delius’s Brigg Fair, for example, did not appear until twenty years later.
127 NR1887.04, NR1887.05
Brahms, the only living Austro-German composers represented by orchestral works in Philharmonic concerts in 1886–8 were Bruch, Goetz and Raff.¹²⁸

Many of the issues that were to be debated during the subsequent period can be detected in this commentary: Englishness in music, a national school, nationalism versus cosmopolitanism, English opera, folk-song, the influence of Wagner. With the exception of the last two, all of these had been on the agenda for many years, demonstrating once again the continuity of the topics of major interest through the century.

4.4 1888–92

As was shown in §4.3, in 1888 critics were more confident than ever before that English music was improving. Now they were looking for greatness – works that would not sink into oblivion but live on and be acknowledged by foreigners, especially Germans. They were also looking for signs that English music was becoming more distinctively English.

Frederick Corder, reviewing the state of contemporary music early in 1888, claimed that German music, as shown in such composers as Brahms, was in decline: it had become obsessed with harmony, had no feeling for rhythm, and left melody ‘weak and emasculated’.¹²⁹ The greatest vitality was being shown by music from Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and Russia. English music had shaken off the influence of Mendelssohn but was exhibiting the same ‘artistic flabbiness’ as German music, except that unlike German music it was improving. Corder judged Blest Pair of Sirens to be the best that English music had shown so far: it was not novel but it showed ‘a moving away from the moribund schools of Mendelssohn and Schumann’. The next step was to found a national style; like the Musical Times writer cited above, he believed that this should be done by studying English folk music, just as Grieg and Dvořák had reflected the folk music of their countries. This was, as noted above, an idea before its time.¹³⁰ Critics continued to discuss Englishness by reference to putative national traits like

¹²⁸ Birket Foster 1912: 403–15
¹²⁹ MT1888.02b
‘straightforwardness’ or to the composer regarded as the quintessence of Englishness – Purcell.

The influence of Wagner, especially on younger composers, had come to be accepted as inevitable. Some critics continued to regard it as baneful: for the *Musical Times*, imitating Wagner led to ‘an absence of beauty and charm’. Critics saw composers attempting to deploy Wagnerian methods but without the master’s touch. The general attitude could be summed up in a remark by Shedlock: ‘the genius of that composer has certainly made it difficult for those coming immediately after him, but composers attempted the Symphony even after Beethoven’.

### 4.4.1 A national school?

There was some hope that a national school, even if not yet formed, was in the process of formation. ‘Have we an English school of music?’ asked a leading article in the *Musical Standard* in February 1889. The writer observed that the Italian school was spoken of as ‘florid’, the French ‘light, airy, and graceful, but not profound’, and the German ‘solid’; but the composers who were in the process of forming the English school were impossible to characterise because they were ‘solid, florid, and light in turn, as the occasion requires’. Moreover, as with the great German composers, who wrote without the idea of founding a school, the common characteristics of English composers would be discerned only in retrospect. E.H. Turpin, writing in the same periodical, praised the noble efforts of composers to restore the nation’s prestige and saw a ‘worthy national school’ being formed.

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130 Hueffer had made this suggestion several years earlier. See above, pp. 121–2.
131 *MT*1889.11b
132 *Ac*1889.10.19b
133 *MS*1889.02.09b
134 *MS*1890.01.04b
John Stainer, in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Music at Oxford, identified two broad schools of critical opinion about music in England: the pessimistic view saw England as incapable of becoming musical, whereas the flattering and complacent view saw England as a most musical country, but unrecognised owing to foreign prejudice.\footnote{MS1890.01.18b} As has already been noted, the pessimistic view had been around for a long time, and in spite of increasing confidence musicians still felt a need to challenge it. Contemporary evidence was inconclusive, as the appreciation of serious music was still largely undeveloped. So musicians set great store by past achievements, especially any for which England could be shown as actually ahead of the foreigner. W.H. Cummings claimed to show that a diatonic major scale of eight notes was in use in England in the earliest centuries of the Christian era, but was suppressed in favour of the Gregorian modes brought from Rome.\footnote{MN1892.05.13} He also claimed that the 13th century round ‘Sumer is icumen in’ (which featured in many stories of England’s musical prowess) could not have been the work of one monk but indicated a high level of musical cultivation long before the Norman Conquest.\footnote{MN1892.05.20} These however, were extreme claims; most writers stuck to the Elizabethan madrigalists and Purcell as evidence of England’s one-time equality with the Continent. But the fact that the argument from past glory to present potentiality was so universally accepted shows an underlying belief in the continuity of stable ‘national characteristics’. Stainer saw the contemporary situation as ‘a decadence
from which we are only just beginning to recover’, and hoped that the eventual establishment of a national school would convince the sceptics. He agreed with Hueffer’s view that if the race of musical geniuses was extinct, this was just as true of other countries as of England.\textsuperscript{138}

Turpin, who, as noted above, had recently welcomed the signs that a national school was being formed, became less convinced of its desirability. Noting a growing tendency towards cosmopolitanism in music he saw ‘the assumption of a national manner’ as ‘merely a sort of pleasant musical masquerading’.\textsuperscript{139} He returned later to the dilemma facing advocates of a national school.\textsuperscript{140} He singled out Sullivan’s light opera \textit{Haddon Hall} as an exemplar, seeing in Sullivan’s ‘specially English’ music the resuscitation of the national style: ‘a manly reliance upon diatonic progressions which Beethoven declared and practically showed, contain the greatest and noblest of musical idioms, and naturalness of expression’.\textsuperscript{141} (The ethical undercurrent is apparent here in the association of ‘diatonic’ with manliness and nobility.) Turpin observed that some commentators claimed that the best English music reflected the national character: ‘simple earnestness, straightforward naturalness, and prompt, but unexaggerated expression’. His own view was that good music was more cosmopolitan than national: national characteristics were subsidiary and more a matter of association. He called on English composers to be widely cosmopolitan, but at the same time to embody the natural characteristics of English music.\textsuperscript{142} Turpin’s remarks illustrate the dilemma facing those who believed that national characteristics lessened the universal value of a work of art, and yet wanted to see something specifically English; one way out of this dilemma was to claim that English art exhibited qualities – ‘naturalness’, etc. – that were those of great art generally. The national element in English music was represented in such broad terms as to be good for music in general.

\textsuperscript{138} MS1890.02.01. Hueffer’s view had been expressed in FR1887.06.
\textsuperscript{139} MS1890.08.09
\textsuperscript{140} MN1892.10.07
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.: 345
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.: 347
The most sustained theorising about national characteristics came from the critic F. Gilbert Webb in a paper presented to the Musical Association in 1891. Webb invoked T.H. Huxley’s theory of racial types to trace national characteristics in the rhythmic patterns found in folk music. English music, he claimed, was characterised by notes of equal value and large intervals. He believed that it had long been denied that England had any national style, because music had been associated with effeminacy. But characteristically English music reflected the character of English people. The English hated display and lacked passion, but were magnanimous and chivalrous, emotional on social subjects, patriotic and home-loving. ‘What should be the music of such a people? Just what it is; good, honest, bold straightforward strains, rich in melody, and breathing strong, healthy, human affection or simple-hearted gaiety, but innocent alike of exaggerated sentimentality, intellectual subtleties, or maddening mysticism’. By contrast, Slavonic music was ‘the language of unstable impulsive passion, deep and fierce, of inexpressible tenderness and unbridled fury; in a word, the very antithesis of English’.

The Celts, in Webb’s scheme, were represented by the ‘Scottish snap’, read as originally a sign of ‘determination of mind and quick decision’, but one that later came to represent a ‘petulant, wayward character; but it still reflects its origin – determinative selfishness.’ This disdain for the Celt contrasts with the view presented by Webb’s contemporary Grant Allen, who emphasised the mixture of Celtic and Teutonic elements in ‘our complex nationality’, contrasting the Teutonic (‘muscle’, ‘hard-headed intellect’, ‘organisation’, etc.) and Celtic (‘lightness’, ‘imagination’, ‘sense of beauty and of mystery’, etc.). Although this was also a stereotyping, it was less deprecatory than the ‘wayward Celt/solid Saxon’ one and is further evidence of the diverse currents of thought of the period.

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143 *PMA*1891.03
144 An analogue of this racial characterising of music can be found in the linguist Otto Jespersen’s characterising of the English language as strong and masculine in comparison with the languages of southern Europe (Jespersen 1905: 2–3, cited in Pinker 2002: 14).
145 Derek B. Scott links this paper to the issue, also identified by Kumar, of the distinction between English and Celtic racial characteristics (Scott 2006).
146 *FR*1891.02. Allen argued that the English were of mixed descent and more Celt than Teuton (Allen 1881).
Webb’s paper had little impact; *Musical News* reprinted it but no journal commented on it. Nevertheless the characteristics of English music that Webb identified were those that many critics found in the works of Parry and others (see below). By linking them to traits of human behaviour, Webb made explicit what had been implicit all along: that these were not merely aesthetic but also ethical determinants. Webb’s notion of ‘English character’ was ethically charged.

It is tempting to see this ‘ethical nationalism’ as a manifestation of a more pervasive political nationalism engendered by the growing political and economic rivalry between England and Germany. However, the interest of critics was tightly focused on the musical world, where the situation was quite different: England had been under a German hegemony but until recently had accepted it as justifiable and even beneficial.147 However, in the view of several critics Germany had lately lost its claim to leadership and its former satellite was ready for self-government. But the tone in which critics applauded ‘Englishness’ was far from strident. A xenophobic rant against German music by J.F. Rowbotham in the *New Review* met with scathing criticism both from other contributors and from T.L. Southgate.148 In spite of complaints about the neglect of English music at home, critics remained even-handed in their treatment of native and foreign compositions.

If Webb’s theorising were correct, then audiences would be expected to have a profound rapport with sober ‘English’ music and distaste for the emotional excesses of Slavs and others. But this was far from being the case: audiences enjoyed the piquant otherness of the music of Bohemia, Scandinavia and Russia. Shaw was concerned lest English composers be tempted to yield to its influence: ‘The adolescent enthusiasms, the revolutionary ardours, the belated romanticism of Slav and Czech can produce nothing for England except toys for her young people’.149 But the distinct possibility remained that the music commended by critics as ‘English national music’ would fail to ignite the enthusiasm of English audiences, and the old struggle of native composers to compete with foreign would continue. It was even possible that the apparent flowering of native composition reflected a temporary falling off in the supply of attractive foreign compositions.

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147 The high regard in which German culture was held before WW1 is charted in Dibble 2001b.
148 *NR*1891.04, *MN*1891.05.01
music – in which case it would only need a renewal of that supply to render it out of favour again.

The idea of drawing on folk music, put forward earlier by Corder and others, was raised again by W.W. Cobbett. He detected a national flavour emerging in contemporary Scottish music, but regarded English composers as for the moment too heavily influenced by Wagner and others to be national.\textsuperscript{150}

4.4.2 Comparisons with Germany

The focusing of much existing scholarship on English music can give the impression that Germany was only of interest to critics as a reference point for English music. The previous chapter demonstrates that this was far from being the case: German music, and foreign music generally, was of great interest in its own right. However, Germany also remained the chief point of comparison. Corder’s claim that English music was advancing whilst German was in decline (above, p. 141) was echoed by other critics. The editor of the \textit{Musical Standard}, reacting strongly to disparaging remarks about English music in a Berlin paper, claimed that there were no German opera composers since Wagner, and his works, based on false principles, had a very limited appeal.\textsuperscript{151} He claimed that English opera had improved and that the works of Mackenzie, Stanford and Goring Thomas were given in Germany, ‘in default, no doubt, of suitable modern German ones’. As for symphonies, only Brahms and Moszkowski (actually Polish) could compare with Cowen, Stanford, Prout, Gadsby, Wingham, Corder, Barnett and others. (The periodical received several letters applauding its defence of English music.)\textsuperscript{152} Shedlock thought it was going too far to claim that English music rivalled the best from abroad, but leaving aside Brahms, Dvořák and a few others, it compared favourably with the rest.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{SM2}: 55
\textsuperscript{150} \textit{MN}1892.02.05
\textsuperscript{151} \textit{MS}1888.08.25
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{MS}1888.09.01
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ac}1888.12.15
The *Musical Times* reported that a German paper had put Stanford ‘in the front rank of the composers of the day’ after a performance of his Fourth Symphony.\(^{154}\) Surprisingly, Southgate discounted this praise for a work that he actually liked, claiming that German music was showing ‘dullness, obscurantism, and barrenness’, and so ‘the English world of music is healthily indifferent to any verdict the music critics of Deutschland may deliver’.\(^{155}\) However, for most other critics German praise was important.\(^{156}\) The *Musical Standard* claimed that the success of *Esmeralda* in Germany had lessened the disdain for English music.\(^{157}\) Praise also came from the German critic Otto Lessmann: reporting on the 1889 Leeds Festival, he observed that a new day had dawned and that certain young English composers, although educated in Germany or by German masters and ‘endowed with all the ability which the German school requires from its own adherents’, recognised that they owed it to the honour of their own country to go their own way.\(^{158}\) (Lessmann later found the results disappointing and deprecated the academic direction that had been taken. See below, p. 193.)

These favourable comparisons of English music with German were made early in the period 1888–92. However, this optimism had begun to recede by end of the period. Three years after praising English music at the expense of German, the *Musical Standard* had become pessimistic about the prospects of England matching Germany, predicting that it would be at least a century before the appearance of ‘the English giants who will worthily carry on the work begun by the “royal line of German giants”’.\(^{159}\) To see whether this erosion of optimism was widespread it is necessary to examine the course of critical opinion about new English works appearing during the period.

### 4.4.3 Work-specific commentary: choral and orchestral music

Critics’ views about the development of English composition were often reflected in reviews of individual works. This section and the next examine a selection of works that elicited most comments of this kind.

\(^{154}\) *MT*1889.03b
\(^{155}\) *MS*1889.03.02b
\(^{156}\) *MT*1888.03
\(^{157}\) *MO*1892.04c
\(^{158}\) *MT*1889.11a
Ethical desiderata

The ethical desiderata of masculinity, dignity, restraint, purity, etc., were frequently reflected in appraisals of new native works. Parry’s *Judith* (1888) was described by the *Spectator* as ‘the most masculine and dignified’ oratorio of the generation. Barclay Squire thought it recalled ‘the restraint and reserve of the Greek drama’. The *Musical Standard*’s correspondent judged the choral music ‘classically pure throughout, and in certain passages might conceivably have been signed Mendelssohn’. (This last remark shows that the reaction against Mendelssohn was not universal.) Shaw disputed the masculinity, dismissing the work as ‘emasculated Handel and watered Mendelssohn, even with all the modern adulterations’.

Englishness

Stanford claimed for *Judith* a ‘distinctly English, national atmosphere’. But for him this national character was not ‘folkish’, but influenced by earlier English composers, including S.S. Wesley. Stanford argued that the fact that this earlier tradition could lead to a work of the quality of *Judith* showed that a recognisable national taste had survived in spite of foreign influence. However, he was alone in putting forward this argument.

For the *Musical Times* critic, Parry’s *Ode on St Cecilia’s Day* (1889) had ‘a perceptible English flavour, and, so to speak, introduces the national muse gloriously attired in the robes of classic art’. He believed English music needed not imitators of Wagner, Brahms or Mendelssohn, but ‘men who can work out for us ideas suggested by the national musical spirit and taste’. He found in the work many passages that could have been by Purcell, while other numbers had ‘the true English ring’. Purcell was also

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159 *MS1892.01.02*
160 *MO1889.10*
161 *SR1888.12.15*
162 *MS1888.09.08*
163 *MT1888.10a, MO1889.02a, SM1: 537*
164 *FR1888.10*
165 See above, p 138, n. 113, for Dibble’s similar comment on *Blest Pair of Sirens*. Dibble notes that Stanford was dismissive of *Judith* during its composition (Dibble 1992: 267).
166 *MT1889.11c*
invoked by Barclay Squire, who saw a ‘thoroughly English’ style, sometimes recalling Purcell and Arne but never archaic. Southgate thought Parry was finding his own, English, voice: ‘turns of melody, quaint bits of orchestration, vigorous straightforwardness, joined to breadth of tone, dramatic truth, and simple pathos that stamp it as a work of a native writer’. But he also detected something rare in English composition: ‘a diablerie, a tragic intensity and passion’. For H.F. Frost the work showed ‘breadth of outline and a certain heartiness which perhaps may be regarded as characteristic of the best school of English music’. Frost found another characteristic of English music in Cowen’s cantata *St John’s Eve* (1889): a ‘sparing use of discords requiring accidentals’ and a conspicuous absence of ‘modern harmonic progressions’. English music, it appeared, was an antidote to chromaticism.

The programme notes for Parry’s Third Symphony (1889) suggested the name ‘English’ symphony and most critics agreed. The *Musical Times* declared that the way was now open for other composers to give their works a distinctly English cachet. Frost again applauded Parry’s change of style: he ‘has now conquered the tendency […] to follow subserviently the lines of the modern German school’. Critics detected the same ‘English’ qualities – especially ‘straightforwardness’ – as in the choral music. Shedlock saw a strong national character in the themes of all except the slow movement and noted the clear and straightforward development. Barclay Squire found ‘that fresh, vigorous, and straightforward character which no national music but our own possesses’. Southgate saw Englishness in the ‘simplicity of structure, directness and rhythmical vigour […] The first theme of the opening movement has a bold swing, and indeed might have been taken from some old national sea-song’. The ‘thoroughly English’ theme of the finale reminded him of ‘one of the rollicking sea melodies in Sullivan’s *Pinafore*’. The symphony marked ‘yet another advance of the rising English school of music’. But not all agreed with this verdict. For J.B.K. in *Musical Opinion*, the

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167 *SR*1889.10.26
168 *MS*1889.10.19
169 *Ath*1889.11.16
170 *Ath*1889.12.21
171 *MT*1889.06
172 *Ath*1889.06.01
173 *SR*1889.06.01
174 *MS*1889.06.01
symphony was ‘an unhappy mixture of the ancient and modern styles of writing’. 175 Shaw was scathing: ‘I protest against the cruelty of these professional exercises in four mortal movements’. 176

The combination of older and modern styles in Parry’s cantata L’Allegro ed il Pensieroso (1890) impressed many of the critics, and Purcell was invoked again. Barclay Squire found ‘true English melody, the melody of the schools of Purcell and Arne’ combined with ‘the breadth and force’ of modern German masters. 177 The Musical Times called it a work ‘such as Purcell or Handel might have done could they have lived on till now’. 178 Frost feared that the complex blend of styles threatened the work’s popularity, but believed its ‘strength and virility’ would make it last. 179 Parry’s setting even pleased Shaw: ‘happy, ingenious, as full of contrapuntal liveliness as Judith was full of contrapuntal deadlines, and genuine in feeling throughout’. 180

Frederick Cliffe’s First Symphony (1889) – his opus 1 – appeared at about the same time as Parry’s two symphonies. Several critics, including Bennett and Shaw, were highly impressed. 181 Southgate detected English qualities in the work: intensity, directness and strong rhythm (although, as he acknowledged, it had been inspired by a visit to Norway). 182 This remark shows Englishness again being perceived in the manner of composition and not in programmatic subject-matter. Cliffe’s Second Symphony (1892) was also highly praised (except by Shaw). 183 Frost found ‘sentiment and passion’, which set the composer apart from Brahms’s ‘lofty intellectuality’, Dvořák’s ‘piquant national colouring’ and Parry’s ‘general breadth and English directness of utterance’. 184 Here, then, was a critic effectively disagreeing with the ethical view put forward by Webb (above, pp. 145ff) that English music should be

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175 MO1889.07
176 SM1: 638
177 SR1890.10.25a
178 MT1890.11. Handel was frequently treated as an epitome of Englishness, and had been from very early in the century. See, for example, QMMR1818.01b. Handel was often referred to as a ‘Saxon’, a usage that chimed with the ‘Teutonic’ racial theory. See above, pp. 128f.
179 Ath1889.10.25
180 SM2: 225
181 DT1889.04.22, MO1889.05, SM1: 655, Ac1889.04.27, Ath1889.04.27, MT1889.05b
182 MS1889.04.27
183 SM2: 754, MS1892.10.15, MN1892.10.14, MN1893.01.07, Ac1892.10.15
184 Ath1892.11.05
reticent. As will be seen below, English composition was later increasingly criticised for its lack of emotional expression.

Head and heart

In an appraisal of Judith some time after its premiere, Hueffer invoked an antithesis that cut across the ethically charged but fundamentally poietic terms in which the composition had been discussed. He judged Judith as scholarly and earnest but lacking in spontaneity and hence appealing to the head rather than the heart.\(^{185}\) He implied that critics tended to over-value technique and workmanship. This was also Shaw’s complaint against ‘academic’ music, which he mocked unrelentingly. Another term for it was Kapellmeistermusik; an epithet that summed it up was ‘dry’. Parry’s Fourth Symphony, for example, had a very different reception from the Third: the Musical Standard critic called it ‘a rather poor affair, dull and devoid of the divine afflatus’.\(^{186}\) However, he expected that ‘the admirers of “all the native talents” will be gushing in their enthusiastic laudations’. But he was wrong, as opinions were muted.\(^{187}\)

Critical opinion about Stanford’s Fourth Symphony (1889) was highly diverse. The Musical Times judged it the composer’s best work, with ‘head and heart’ balanced better than ever before.\(^{188}\) But for other commentators the ‘head’ was still too prominent. Frost called the first movement ‘Kapellmeister music’; the Academy too thought it appealed chiefly to the intellect.\(^{189}\) The Musical Standard critic found nothing but academicism: ‘vague, obscure, and uninteresting, devoid of original ideas, and as if carefully calculated on mechanical or it may be mathematical principles’.\(^{190}\)

Stanford’s major choral work in this period, Eden (1891), was somewhat coolly received; the unstinting praise of the Musical News was the exception.\(^{191}\) The eclectic mixture of styles – variously identified as Wagner, Beethoven and sixteenth century –

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\(^{185}\) MO1889.02b
\(^{186}\) MS1889.07.06a
\(^{187}\) MT1889.09, MO1889.08, Ac1889.07.06, SR1889.07.06
\(^{188}\) MT1889.03a. Also generally positive: SR1889.11.02, MO1889.03
\(^{189}\) Ath1889.03.02, Ac1889.03.02
\(^{190}\) MS1889.03.02a. The paper also published a positive review by Southgate.
\(^{191}\) MN1891.10.09, MN1891.10.16
drew much comment.\textsuperscript{192} Eden gave Shaw another opportunity to mock pretentious ‘academic’ music. He observed that the three eminent academics would vouch for the quality of each other’s ‘sham classics’\textsuperscript{193}. This time Shaw’s judgement, although extreme, was not quite so far from the general hesitant opinion. But Shaw was once again a lone voice in his low opinion of The Dream of Jubal (1890) by his third ‘eminent academic’, Mackenzie.\textsuperscript{194} Several critics thought it contained some of the best music yet written by a native composer, although none commented on anything that marked it as English.\textsuperscript{195}

**The influence of Wagner**

As the previous chapter has shown, views about the influence of Wagner on music in general were still diverse at this time. Critics with strong reservations about Wagner’s compositional approach saw it as a foreign influence in the stronger sense of ‘foreign’ identified earlier. Commenting on Corder’s cantata The Sword of Agantyr (1889), the *Musical Times* held that cleverness did not make up for the defects of ‘a system which sacrifices the fundamental obligation to art to a form of expression than which nothing is more artificial’.\textsuperscript{196} However, not all critics regarded the Wagnerian influence as inevitably malign.\textsuperscript{197} Moreover, the view of Wagner’s compositional approach as a ‘system’ – an intellectual construct riding roughshod over the canons of beauty – was retreating, as has been shown in the response to Le Rêve (see above, p. 68).

Several critics saw Parry’s Job (1892) as innovative.\textsuperscript{198} For Shedlock it combined a Wagnerian spirit with part-writing influenced by Bach.\textsuperscript{199} Joseph Bennett characteristically emphasised the latter influence, calling Parry ‘our “English Bach”’.\textsuperscript{199} But the Wagnerian influence still concerned the *Musical Times* reviewer. Seeing a

\textsuperscript{192} MS1891.10.10, Ac1891.10.10, Ath1891.10.17
\textsuperscript{193} SM2: 428–9
\textsuperscript{194} SM2: 311
\textsuperscript{195} MS1889.09.14. See also MS1889.02.09a, MT1889.04, MO1889.10, Ac1889.03.02, Ath1889.09.07
\textsuperscript{196} MT1889.11b
\textsuperscript{197} Ac1889.10.19a, MS1889.10.12
\textsuperscript{198} Ath1892.09.17; ‘one of the greatest works in the whole range of modern music’ was the verdict after a later performance (Ath1893.09.23).
\textsuperscript{199} Ac1893.04.29
movement away from the ‘solid and dignified classic style’ towards ‘advanced’ music, he assured his readers that the composer had not overstepped the bounds, unlike those who worshipped the unconventional and tended towards ‘extravagance and license’. A few voices were raised against the paean of praise. J.B.K. saw the work as endless declamation devoid of the genius of Wagner. Shaw was withering: ‘the most utter failure ever achieved’. ‘It is the old academic story – an attempt to bedizen a dramatic poem with scraps of sonata music’.

The ‘coming man’

From time to time commentators would express the hope that a genius would emerge to be the natural leader of the next generation of native composers: this was the local version of the ‘ messianic hope’. The young Scottish composer Hamish MacCunn was regarded as the most promising ‘coming man’ during this period. But he did not live up to early expectations.

MacCunn’s career between 1888 and 1892 can be traced through the pages of the Saturday Review. The overture The Land of the Mountain and the Flood and a choral work Lord Ullin’s Daughter impressed Barclay Squire early in 1888 and other new works performed later that year drew fulsome praise. But MacCunn did not maintain this level. The cantata The Lay of the Last Minstrel was judged uneven and the critic warned against overpraising the composer. Later compositions showed that ‘his early defects bid fair to become rooted habits’, one being described as unoriginal and another as strong in orchestration but weak in choral writing, in which the composer had ‘almost everything to learn’. Barclay Squire’s last review of a work by MacCunn left no doubt as to his disappointment with the composer. By and large the same narrative can be traced elsewhere, including Shaw’s reviews. For example, early in 1889 the

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201 MT1892.10
202 MO1893.06
203 SM2: 869–76
204 Ibid.: 875
205 SR1888.02.25, SR1888.04.28, SR1888.10.27
206 SR1888.02.23
207 SR1890.03.15, SR1890.10.25b, SR1890.12.13
208 SR1892.03.12
Musical Standard devoted an article to MacCunn, hailing him as a ‘coming man’, trained wholly in Britain. But the praise was not sustained: Southgate considered The Cameronian’s Dream good enough for a school concert but not for the Crystal Palace.209

There is no mention of this hope for a ‘coming man’ in Hughes and Stradling: from the point of view of the RCM the men had already come. But the critics who looked for a ‘coming man’ were already anxious about the succession, so for them MacCunn was a severe disappointment.

The foregoing commentary shows that Parry’s choral music represented for most critics the chief source of hope for the advance of English composition not only to greatness, but to a distinctively English greatness, led by a new Purcell (or even Bach) with the resources of modern technique at his command. Some detected a reversion to the ‘advanced’ ideas with which his career had started and it was not clear whether this development, if pursued further, would be welcomed by all commentators.

The expressions of approval of ‘Englishness’ show that the desire for a distinctively English music was not centred on folksong and antedated by several years the emergence of the so-called ‘Pastoral’ school. The English qualities detected can be summed up in the term ‘straightforwardness’. Some critics welcomed what they saw as a repudiation of the harmonic, melodic and rhythmic complexity they deprecated in post-Wagnerian composition; for them a gap was opening up between English and foreign music. The reference points they cited in reviews of Parry’s music – Purcell, Handel, Bach – were backward-looking, the first two having only local relevance. It is noticeable that Brahms – according to Hughes and Stradling the EMR’s model – was not mentioned. However, the mood of optimism evident immediately before the period 1888–92 was not sustained. Shaw was not the only critic to complain of academicism and dryness and there were warnings from critics who thought nationalism a limitation.

209 MS1890.12.20. See also Ac1888.02.25, Ac1889.02.23
4.4.4 Work-specific commentary: opera

Most of the commentary on opera was work-specific, as few new English works appeared. Opera had been a focus of hopes for a national school, and the lack of a repertoire of English serious opera was an embarrassment. The *Speaker* observed that the Carl Rosa season of 1890 included works of the Balfe era but that recent works by Mackenzie and Stanford ‘have met with the fate which invariably attends the operatic experiments of doctors and professors of music’. However, the writer acknowledged the difficulty: a Wagnerian approach did not appeal to the audience for English opera, and writing tunes like those of Balfe and Wallace was beneath composers’ dignity. The only recent opera to survive was *Esmeralda*, a revised version of which appeared in 1890. With so little to show, a great deal was at stake whenever a new work appeared.

![Fig. 14 Frederic H. Cowen](image)

Opinions about Cowen’s *Thorgrim* (1890) varied widely. The *Musical Times* predicted great success, and Shedlock was generally positive. But other critics did not share this confidence. Shaw was uncompromising: ‘bad – desperately bad, confoundedly bad,

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210 *Sp*1890.04.05
211 *Ath*1890.07.19
212 *MT*1890.05, *Ac*1890.04.26
213 *Ath*1890.05.03. Similarly mixed views were expressed in: *MS*1890.04.26, *MO*1890.06a.
unbearably bad, infernally bad; and everybody knows it’.214 Barclay Squire regretted the choice of the work when a success was essential to the cause of English opera.215 This was an important criticism, as one of the arguments later advanced against a subsidised English national opera was the paucity of works worth performing. No critic commented on the un-English subject-matter: the appearance of viable native operas was more important than the expression of nationality.

Sullivan’s *Ivanhoe* (1891) was regarded as an event of enormous importance. It appeared to satisfy every requirement of an English opera: an English story, set to music ‘above and before everything English’, and performed in a gorgeous new English opera house.216 *Ivanhoe* was generally well-received: although several critics had reservations, they felt that strengths far outweighed weaknesses.217 However, some serious doubts were voiced about the work’s artistic value; the *National Observer* judged it not elevated enough to merit the title ‘grand opera’.218

In the widespread discussion about *Ivanhoe*, the lack of consensus about desiderata for English opera was exposed. The two reference points were the extremes of ballad opera – old-fashioned but tuneful – and Wagnerian music drama. For some critics, the Englishness of *Ivanhoe* was manifested in a rejection of Wagnerian methods.219 The *Musical Standard* declared the composer to be a legitimate successor of Purcell and Arne and praised Sullivan for abjuring ‘the latest craze of the “advanced” school’.220 The *Pall Mall Gazette* saw the mixture of ‘modern’ through-composition and the older practice of division into numbers as ‘a most happy medium’.221 However, the *Times* critic predicted that ‘modern’ methods would gain universal acceptance, so a compromise with an old-fashioned approach would struggle for recognition.222 But whatever its artistic weaknesses, *Ivanhoe* was popular enough to run for 155

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214 SM2: 41
215 SR1890.05.03
216 MO1891.03a
217 Ath1891.02.14, MT1891.03, MMR1891.03
218 Ac1891.02.07, SM2: 253–60, T1891.03, MuM1891.03, Th1891.03, NO1891.02.14
219 MP1891.02.02, DN1891.02.02
220 MS1891.02.07
221 PMG1891.02.02
222 Ti1891.02.02
performances. (These lasted into the period covered by §4.4 and the subsequent history is taken up there.)

Hughes and Stradling’s treatment of *Ivanhoe* exemplifies the limitations of their study. *Ivanhoe* appears as an episode in the story of the efforts of the RCM and its supporters to disparage Sullivan’s contribution to the renaissance and deny him a place in the ‘canon’. *Ivanhoe* was Sullivan’s ‘belated act of atonement’ for his lapse into comic opera, but ‘its popular success could not reverse his isolation from the mainstream’.223 This ‘mainstream’ was, as Hughes and Stradling make clear, a construction of the RCM leaders themselves or, to be more accurate, the authors’ own construction. But it did not determine the thinking of critics generally and by narrowing their focus to the RCM’s putative obsession with its aesthetic authority Hughes and Stradling give only a partial account of the wide-ranging debate that was taking place.

Isidore de Lara’s *The Light of Asia* (1892) was judged by Shaw to be a more hopeful sign of an advance in English composition than the oratorios written by professors for provincial festivals.224 But his was almost a lone voice.225 Granville Bantock’s one-act opera *Cædmar* (1892) was seen as an indicator of where the next generation was turning to for ideas. For Shaw and others it was simply another imitation of Wagner, but a few critics detected promising signs of originality.226

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223 Hughes and Stradling: 224
224 SM2: 657
225 MS1892.06.18, Ac1892.06.18, Ath1892.06.18
226 SM3: 38–9, MO1892.12, Sp1892.11.05, SR1892.10.29, Ac1892.10.29, MS1892.10.29, MS1892.11.05
To sum up, Bantock’s effort was not seen to have any great significance; *Thorgrim* had failed and although *Ivanhoe* had been a popular success, its lessons for the future of English opera were not clear.

### 4.5 1893–7

During this period opinions about the music of the established names markedly diverged, not so much because critics changed their minds, but because new voices entered the debate.

As Hughes and Stradling observe, Fuller Maitland continued to give Parry unstinted praise in the *Times*. But their assertion that press support for the EMR ‘remained secure for the rest of the decade’ and that Shaw’s ‘carping’ was untypical cannot be substantiated.227 Although Shaw had been a lone voice, others now joined him. One of the newcomers, John F. Runciman of the *Saturday Review*, was regarded as the most prominent representative of what his detractors called ‘the new criticism’.228 As the *Magazine of Music* observed, ‘new’ was often used by conservatively-minded writers as a term of abuse; ‘new critics’ expressed personal feelings, whereas ‘old’ critics claimed

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227 Hughes and Stradling: 54. Arthur Johnstone (Manchester Guardian) is named as ‘successor’ to Shaw (58).
228 *MN*1895.01.19, *MN*1895.02.02, *MN*1895.02.09, *MO*1895.05
– unjustifiably – to be giving an objective ‘abstract opinion’. Runciman expressed himself in as forthright a manner as Shaw, but without the latter’s touch of geniality. A far more measured commentary was provided by E.A. Baughan, who became editor of the *Musical Standard* during the period.

### 4.5.1 Whither English music?

Charles Willeby’s *Masters of English Music* (1893) was severely criticised for giving very little space to Parry and Stanford: ‘with these two composers lies much of the hope for contemporary music in England’. For W.H. Hadow, this hope lay definitely with Parry: he as good as named him as the English Messiah in language that had an almost biblical ring: ‘now, at last, the period of our decadence has ended. There has arisen among us a Composer who is capable of restoring our national Music to its true place in the art of Europe’. But even those who had a high opinion of Parry were unclear about the path he and his fellow-composers should follow.

**Oratorio: for and against**

According to Walther Bernhard ‘our crying requirement is an oratorio to alternate with Handel and Mendelssohn’. (He was clearly dissatisfied with what had been produced so far.) British composers had invested much effort in oratorio, but some critics, including Shaw, were questioning whether this was the right direction. A defence was mounted by E.D. Rendall, who argued that oratorio had to remain the English composer’s route to greatness as this is what festivals demanded and there was no tradition of instrumental music. He claimed that oratorio had been ill-served by the succession of foreign composers whose musical styles were unsuited to the English language. The truly English style was to be found in Parry, who had replicated the

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229 *Ma*1893.07  
230 Neither Baughan nor Runciman is mentioned in Hughes and Stradling.  
231 *Sp*1893.07.08. Similar views were expressed in: *MO*1893.08b, *Ac*1893.09.09, *NQMRR*1893.08e.  
232 Hadow 1893: 66–7. The reference is clearly to Parry, the book’s dedicatee.  
233 *MO* 1894.01  
235 *MT*1894.09
achievement of Purcell. This was the style to be followed in order to give English music
the national individuality that was, according to Wagner, essential to all real music.
(Citing in support the composer whose influence was said to be leading English music
astray was a deft touch.) But after King Saul (1895), Rendall thought Parry himself was
going astray: concentration on dramatic incident rather than reflective comment resulted
in a monotonous unstaged opera.236 Shedlock, also reflecting on King Saul, concluded
that oratorio could not compete for popularity with more exciting fare – Wagner’s
music dramas and the new short sensational Italian operas – and appeared dull.237
Dullness was also a charge made by a Speaker critic who after attending a light opera
by Delibes thought English composers could profit from his example and refrain from
the exhibitions of learning that made their works dull.238

The expression of feeling

However, according to Stainer, more was at stake than popularity; in his thirty-five
years experience of music education he had seen a notable advance in technical skill,
but none in the expression of feeling: ‘Englishmen had not that délicatesse of
temperament which was the primary qualification for an artistic nation.’239 He saw that
the expression of feeling – absolutely essential in the field of art – was represented as
weak and contemptible in the English educational system. Although Stainer was
referring to performers rather than composers, other commentators addressed
composition in much the same terms – technique without inspiration.240 Joseph Barnby
echoed Stainer’s remarks, identifying a lack of emotional expression as the weak point
of British music. Commenting on Barnby’s lecture, E.A. Baughan observed that in
poetry, where English writers excelled, there was an intellectual strength deriving from
self-restraint, but this did not imply a lack of feeling.241 But British composers put form
over feeling: they did not accept that music arose from feeling and was intended to
arouse feeling. Baughan took issue with Hadow’s view that music should be judged

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236 MS1895.03.30
237 Ac1894.10.06
238 Sp1894.12.22
239 MT1893.02b
240 MS1894.01.27; the work in question was Stanford’s Mass in G.
241 MS1894.12.08
from an intellectual rather than emotional point of view. As Hadow was one of the principal supporters of Parry, this disagreement was highly significant in the debate about the development of English composition.

*Fig. 16* Joseph Barnby

Baughan saw a promising sign for the future of English composition in the increasing popularity of high-class music amongst ordinary people. Native composers had hitherto provided only for cultured *dilettante*. But ‘the first British composer who leaves the arid wastes of academic pedantry and fares forth into the world of men and women, reflecting the passion and the suffering and the joy of mankind, shall find that men will bow down to him and that he will be proclaimed as great among the sons of his native land’. Baughan frequently reiterated this view, which had earlier been forcefully expressed by Shaw.

Baughan regarded the British attitude to music as too serious and superior. Although some composers – Stanford in *Shamus O’Bien* and Edward German – had moved into light music, the others, apart from Sullivan, ‘still discourse solemnly in wearisome platitudes and deck out the barrenness of their ideas with all the pomp of musicianship’. Baughan thought highly of Parry’s musicianship but had never been moved by his

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242 Hadow 1895; *MS*1895.01.26. Hadow reiterated his view in *PMA*1897.12.
243 *MS*1895.11.16
244 *MS*1896.06.20
245 *MS*1896.08.08
music; he believed that the composer had yet to express his true self. Mackenzie’s vitality was shown in his smaller works, but otherwise ‘he wears the academic gown and that impedes his stride’. MacCunn was another who had been stifled by academicism. Stanford had shown humanity in *Shamus*, but was probably back to planning ‘something more decently academic’. In Baughan’s view only three men had found their vocation in composition and had not hobbled their individuality by becoming professors – German, Sullivan and Cowen: ‘they have been in the sun; the others work, ghoul-like, in the shadow cast by the mountains of Wagner, Beethoven and Brahms’.

### 4.5.2 English composition in retrospect

Writers on the recent history of English composition had a polemical purpose, as is shown by their willingness to abandon the conventional refusal of historians to comment on recent events and living people. In his *History of English Music* (1895), Henry Davey asserted that neither Parry, Stanford nor Mackenzie had invented an original style. Moreover, he believed that German composers had said all they had to say and that it was very unlikely that a future genius would appear. Shedlock accepted that Davey may have been right, but to say so was discouraging for English music.²⁴⁶ Fuller Maitland accused Davey of aligning himself with critics who refused to acknowledge any progress.²⁴⁷ Runciman, clearly one of the latter, added his own appraisals of contemporary composers, identifying academic office – ‘drudgery’ – as the bane of composition. He was especially saddened by the case of Mackenzie, a man of musical and poetical temperament whose career ended when he became Principal of the Royal Academy.²⁴⁸ A performance of Mackenzie’s *The Rose of Sharon* at the Norwich Festival of 1896 prompted Runciman to give his own account of the regeneration of English music. In his narrative a crucial part was played by Gounod’s oratorio *Redemption*, which had convinced native composers that dramatic oratorio was the form of the future.²⁴⁹ Several, including *The Rose of Sharon* quickly appeared; despite a weak libretto it was ‘a work of art of distinct importance in the history of

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²⁴⁶ *Ac* 1896.01.04
²⁴⁷ *NQMR* 1895.11b
²⁴⁸ *SR* 1896.01.04
²⁴⁹ *SR* 1896.10.10
English music […] the choral writing is beyond anything attempted by an Englishman (saving our great Purcell, of course’). But it had been by-passed by the coming of Wagner, and Runciman thought it would be some time before it could be judged again on its own terms.

In 1897 Fuller Maitland gave the lecture series that gave birth to the EMR narrative; he compared the musical development in England with the Italian renaissance, in that both involved the revival of interest in the classics. He claimed that the revival of English composition had been based on a widespread love of classical music that dated from the late 1860s, but that the main difference between then and now was that the appeal of music had spread to all classes. He claimed that the fact that composers now came from the better-educated upper classes of society was one factor in this development. Fuller Maitland’s chronology of the renaissance implied a beginning in 1880. He claimed that none of the leaders – Mackenzie, Parry, Stanford, Goring Thomas and Cowen – had been consciously associated with any new movement or had influenced one another. Sullivan he regarded as a follower: his *Golden Legend* built on the work of others and showed Sullivan’s ‘ultimate countenance of the renaissance movement’. (It was clearly an embarrassment to Fuller Maitland that in its popularity *The Golden Legend* had eclipsed all of the works of the ‘leaders’.) Fuller Maitland claimed that currently there were about twenty to thirty composers of great promise, but few opportunities: English opera was not in demand and provincial festivals were wary of novelties. He recounted Brahms’s expressed conviction that the next development would come from England, where composition teaching was now the best.

Reviewing the lectures, Baughan agreed with Fuller Maitland that popular taste had advanced, but did not see this as a factor in the renaissance, as British music was not in public demand. He also differed from Fuller Maitland in his appraisal of Sullivan, regarding him as one of the leaders along with Mackenzie, Stanford, Parry and other younger composers.

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250 MS1897.06.12
251 MS1897.06.19b
4.5.3 A national school?

The question remark remains as it was still a common opinion that a national school had not yet been formed. Moreover, there was no consensus about the national character that English music was supposed to embody. Sometimes a critic revealed his own desiderata *en passant*, as in this review of a choral ballad: ‘It is quite refreshing amid the deluge of music which comes to us, as it were, with the stamp “made in Germany” on every page, to come across this breezy piece of music “Whose limbs were made in England”, as King Harry says before Harfleur’.\(^{253}\) The term ‘breezy’ suggests an ‘out-of-doors’ quality often taken to be characteristically English. Another instance was Shedlock’s remark in a review of Parry’s incidental music to *Hypatia* that the composer was striving towards simplicity: ‘it is his honest determination not to enshroud himself in mystery of either form, harmony, or rhythm, which is raising him to a foremost place among English composers’.\(^{254}\) Remarks like these continued the line of thinking identified in §4.3.1, in which ‘Englishness’ was said to reside in broad melody, in straightforward achievement of an appropriate effect without resort to harmonic and melodic complexity and, above all, in rejection of foreign models. However, to this strand were added others relating to folk-song, to religion, to literature and other arts, and to outdoor pursuits. These lines of thought emerged in a complex interchange of assertion and counter-assertion, starting with a series of lectures given by Mackenzie in 1895 on nationality in music.\(^{255}\)

The first of Mackenzie’s lectures touched only lightly on English music. Even so, it prompted the *Musical News* to observe that ‘English Opera’ and ‘English School of Composition’ had become ‘veritable fetishes to most of us, and are as ardently longed for as a sight of the Temple was by the captive Hebrews in Babylon’.\(^{256}\) The writer suggested that as the British nation was multi-ethnic, the future might lie in a separate development of each subdivision. Stanford (Irish) and MacCunn (Scottish) had made a start, but their style was still cosmopolitan – MacCunn, for example, treated Scottish

\(^{252}\) Ibid.
\(^{253}\) *NQMR*1894.05
\(^{254}\) *Ac*1893.03.18
\(^{255}\) *MT*1895.03
\(^{256}\) *MN*1895.02.16
melodies in a Wagnerian manner. But for English music the way was not so clear. The writer noted that Parry was generally regarded as ‘our leader and national saviour’, but the reason was difficult to pin down. It might be that Parry’s organ-like orchestration reflected the ‘essentially English instrument’; or it could be that ‘honesty and straightforward manliness’ were reflected in his music. But he believed these were superficial observations – the answer would be more likely to emerge empirically than through theorising. The future might lie not in developing ethnic characteristics but in the emergence of composers of strong individual character: ‘theories have never founded schools; for that great work, living, emotional men are requisite, nay, giants’. This writer was unusual at the time in prioritising individuality over nationality while other commentators debated competing versions of ‘Englishness’.

In one of his lectures Mackenzie dealt with English country songs and the desirability of incorporating national characteristics into art music. He believed that a national school, such as the Russian or Bohemian, needed to be grounded in a deep knowledge and love of the people’s music. Although an English school was being called for, it was difficult to decide what qualities it should have. Mackenzie commended the collection of folk songs and regarded this activity as better than pressurising English composers to be national. Commenting on this lecture, Baughan argued that it was anachronistic to attempt to incorporate such songs into art-music, and that in any case the majority of them were ‘entirely devoid of the deeper feelings of mankind: in a word, they are fresh, healthy and – bourgeoise, prosperous, bucolic’. He accepted that the music of different nationalities reflected their different temperaments, but this was a distinct issue from that of incorporating folk songs into composition. English folk music had had little influence on composition, so it was difficult to identify the national characteristics of English music. The influence of church music was its most prominent feature, unsurprising given the number of organists. Opera was imported and there were too few orchestras to support orchestral composers. The country was rich enough to support music, but without the necessary enthusiasm ‘how in the world can there ever be a School of British Music?’

257 MS1895.02.23
258 Ibid.: 148
The growing popularity of Slav composers, especially Dvořák and Tchaikovsky, lay in the background of the desire for a national school. Mackenzie observed that the roughnesses in British folk music had long been eroded and prettified, but the untouched folk music of other countries had great appeal. Nevertheless, he suggested that British composers should as a body try to evolve a national style by taking an active interest in British folk music. They would need to fuse the hitherto separate English, Scottish and Irish traditions into a British School of Music. But at present there was little sign of interest in such a project, as ‘our best composer-birds were living in a cathedral turret, within easy flight to some provincial musical festival’. With popular music declining rapidly in quality, what was needed was ‘the preservation and exaltation to artistic dignity of the traditional and national element in our British folk music’.259 Mackenzie returned to this theme in a speech given at the 1895 Royal Academy Banquet, when he drew attention – without naming names – to a small band of composers representing the different nationalities in Britain who were working in the service of a national music.260

The lack of national characteristics was seen by a writer in the Musical Standard as the chief failing of native composition. He thought English composers were too heavily influenced by Brahms and hoped they would turn more to opera; but the difficulty lay in selecting suitable English subjects, as historical incidents did not make for good libretti.261 But if operas could be written that portrayed ‘the strength, courage and imagination which have made the British nation what it is’ there would arise a ‘New National School of Music’. This was merely a restatement of what had once been a common view that the future of a national school lay in opera. But in the view of W.H. Sonley Johnstone neither folk-song nor opera could be a basis for English national music.262 Basing national art music on folk songs was ludicrous, as the social conditions they reflected in no way resembled modern life. He accepted that music reflected national character – sentimentalism (France), sensuousness (Italy), romance (Germany) – and claimed seriousness as the basis of English character. The English needed to find a serious purpose in every activity and were unwilling to countenance art for art’s sake.

259 MS1895.03.02
260 MS1895.05.11
261 MS1895.06.22
262 TC1895.08
From this premise he argued that church music was the national music of England. The English could not produce operas and even found them ridiculous: ‘It is in Dr Parry’s *Job* and not Mr Cowen’s *Harold* that we must look for the new and fertile development of our own art’.  

Johnstone’s contention that the cold English temperament excluded ‘sentimentalism, sensuousness and romance’ was dismissed by Baughan, who cited English achievement in poetry, literature, painting and sculpture, where religion was not prominent. He argued that English music was orientated towards religion for economic reasons: this was the only music that paid. (It was estimated that there were 25,000 church organists in the country.) Baughan claimed that the popularity of oratorio and cantata was largely due to their religious, not their musical, content, but when eventually English music came to reflect the national temperament, the qualities found in English literature and art – ‘romance of feeling, passion of a restrained and dignified sort, and intense imagination’ – would be echoed in music.

Baughan mused about the lack of English feeling in English music, where only orchestral suites founded on dance rhythms showed any vitality. Having rejected folk-song as a basis, he suggested that composers of orchestral music should turn to the qualities appreciated in choral music: ‘majestic themes as if sung by thousands of voices, and to rhythms that are not directly borrowed from the dance’. Baughan thought that the quintessential English qualities that had made the nation what it was – strength, self-control, pluck, inventive power, etc. – had never yet been expressed in music. Neither had ‘English freshness […] our love of out-of-door things; of the fresh verdure of our island and the healthiness of our golden lads and lasses’. Subjection to Mendelssohn had left ‘a washed out lethargic sentimentality alternating with a hectic gaiety’. Brahms had replaced Mendelssohn, and although his influence had been good for musicianship, it had made ‘several of our composers very dull dogs indeed’.

Baughan judged that the most recent Russian music had outgrown the limitations of nationalism: *Scheherazade*, for example, was ‘full of an energy which seems to have disappeared from the music of more Western races […] it was picturesque, stirring,

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263 Ibid.: 465
264 MS1895.08.10
265 Ibid.: 89
266 MS1896.04.18
breezy, invigorating, and yet with an artistic design that bound it all together.\textsuperscript{267} Baughan predicted that the next great composer would be Russian or English, as Russia and England were the ‘least civilised of nations – in sentiment, at least’. But English music needed to reflect the English spirit and break free of the Mendelssohn-Brahms influence.

The debate recounted above shows a lack of agreement about the ‘national character’ that English music was to embody. At one extreme there were those who saw this character as essentially religious: their demands were almost exactly met by oratorio as developed by Parry. Some found a specifically English ‘no nonsense’ trait in the manner of composition itself. Others, like Baughan and Runciman, wanted English music to express modern life. Baughan’s desiderata were derived in part from English literature, in part from an idealised view of British history and in part from outdoor pursuits. But neither Baughan nor Runciman was clear at this stage of the debate as to how music was to show these traits. In general they, and others who were dissatisfied with what had been produced so far, were more certain of what they did not want. Only one critic asserted the pointlessness of theorising about national traits, as composers of any worth would show strong individuality.

\subsection*{4.5.4 English music abroad}

Successes abroad continued to be reported as evidence that English composition was advancing. Cowen conducted two of his own works at Leipzig in 1894 – works that, according to the \textit{Musical News}, bore no resemblance to ‘the modern German type’.\textsuperscript{268} Frost reported an enthusiastic reception and was surprised that so un-Teutonic a composer was the most popular contemporary English composer in Germany.\textsuperscript{269} (The report suggests that Germans, like the English, were partial to ‘otherness’.) Two years later the press reception of a Berlin concert of music by Parry, Stanford and Mackenzie gave evidence that German prejudice was breaking down.\textsuperscript{270} \textit{Musical Opinion} remarked that ‘the gallant British trio [Stanford and two soloists] have undeniably taken the war

\begin{footnotes}{\footnotesize
\item[267] MS1897.02.06. Contrast this with Shedlock’s view cited above, p 89.
\item[268] MN1894.03.17
\item[269] Ath1894.03.24. The positive reception was also noted in MT1894.04.
\item[270] MT1896.02, MN1896.01.11
}\end{footnotes}
into the enemy’s camp and emerged with triumphant success’ – a remark that shows how deeply rooted was the sense of Anglo-German competition in the field of music. The *Musical Times* expressed sadness that prophets were honoured only in foreign lands, implying that the composers represented were being neglected in England at that time. Several other successful concerts in Germany were also reported. The appreciative reception of a concert of British orchestral works at Düsseldorf in 1896 led Baughan to try to explain the general ignorance of British music in Germany, which he put down to the prominence in England of church music and oratorio, the latter being of little interest in Germany. But these were the only areas in which English composers could make a living: ‘a symphony spells starvation to the composer’ and the leading musical society, the Philharmonic, did little for native music. In the following year he reported that a concert of British music was to be given in Brussels and hoped it would not consist entirely of works by the ‘Academic circle’.

However, not all migrations resulted in success. Cowen’s oratorio *Ruth* failed in Germany, just as Sullivan’s *Golden Legend* had failed there some years before. Frost attributed both failures to the relative unpopularity of oratorio; moreover, as Germany had no large choirs, performances were by ‘scratch’ choirs. However, he went a great deal further and claimed that England was again the most musical nation in Europe, as she had been three centuries earlier, and was ‘far ahead of Germany, Austria and France in all the higher forms of the art save opera, and Italy in all’. But this view, which had occasionally been expressed in the preceding few years, was receding as English composition was increasingly criticised and the music of Strauss gained admirers.

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271 *MO*1896.02  
272 *MS*1896.12.05  
273 *MS*1897.09.04a  
274 *Ath*1897.11.04
4.5.5 Work-specific commentary: choral and orchestral music

Englishness

As Parry’s mixing of styles continued, critics said less about his ‘Englishness’. Criticisms of the stylistic mixture of Handel and Wagner were brought to the fore in opinions about *King Saul* and marred the work for several critics. The *Musical Standard* opined that ‘Dr Parry cannot be quite modern, even though he tries so very hard’.  

Stanford, in Shaw’s opinion, had an individual talent that was constantly in danger of being extinguished by academicism. But his *Requiem* (1897), the most important and most discussed of his works during this period, received high praise from almost all critics. The *Times* detected a strong Italian influence (appropriate in a memorial to Leighton, who revered Italian art); the *Daily Telegraph* described the work as ‘a blend of French sentiment with Italian fire and impetuosity’. Baughan saw the influence of *Parsifal*. Nevertheless, in spite of all of these decidedly ‘unEnglish’ influences Baughan saw in the work a hope for the future of British music. He welcomed Stanford’s refusal to adopt a ‘sham austerity’, but to compose in a natural style befitting the commemoration of a painter. However, he experienced the work as ‘a picture that you admire and praise although it does not often move you’. In one respect it is noteworthy that so many critics responded warmly to Stanford’s *Requiem*. A work ‘charged with the sensuous attraction, the ornate expression, the pictorial glow of Roman worship’ could hardly be said to embody the supposedly ‘English’ qualities that some critics had earlier demanded.

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275 *MT*1894.11, *MO*1895.03b  
276 *MS*1895.02.16. There is an unconscious irony in this remark, as although Parry in his early years as a composer found it difficult to shed Mendelssohnian conservatism, he did eventually break free with works like *Prometheus* (Dibble 1992: 70).  
277 *SM2*: 884. The same view was expressed in *NQMR*1895.11c.  
278 *Ath*1897.12.18, *Sp*1897.10.09, *MT*1897.11b, *MS*1897.10.09, *MN*1897.10.09a  
279 *MN*1897.10.09b  
280 *MS*1897.10.16  
281 *MS*1897.12.25  
282 *MS*1898.03.02
The continuing influence of Wagner

A concert of pieces by Bantock and other young English composers did not impress critics, although Frost thought Bantock’s pieces an encouraging improvement on Cædmar. Runciman predicted a struggle between younger composers and established academics, who would fight to retain their positions. He saw the influence of Wagner in all the compositions but did not, like other critics, think that in itself a bad thing – he was looking for the new use to which Wagner’s methods could be put. He was, however, very critical of the subject matter of the pieces, which he thought untouched by modern thought and merely variations on standard Romantic themes of seventy years earlier. But he acknowledged that originality could not be expected unless composers were able to hear their own works often enough to learn how to master the modern idiom.

The admiration for the ‘symphonic’ Wagner that was overtaking the ‘degenerate’ image previously associated with him (see above, p. 68) was reflected in Frost’s comments on Elgar’s short oratorio The Light of Life (1896). Although not the first work of the composer to be noticed, it was the first to attract serious attention.

Fig. 17 Edward Elgar

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283 The quotation is from the Daily Telegraph review (Joseph Bennett?).
284 MS1896.12.19, MN1896.12.19, Ath1897.02.13
285 SR1896.12.19
286 SR1896.12.26
Frost judged the score to be ‘of exceptional merit’ and observed that Elgar used representative themes ‘which in their suggestiveness and in their development are almost, if not quite, worthy of the name of Richard Wagner’. However, the *Musical Times* was still somewhat hesitant, finding the use of representative themes excessive and criticising the composer for giving the interest to the orchestra and not the voices.

**The popularity of Tchaikovsky**

The huge popularity of the music of Tchaikovsky, along with that of Dvořák and Wagner, was putting British efforts in the shade. This situation was satirised in Runciman’s review of the premiere of Stanford’s Piano Concerto, which had followed works by Tchaikovsky and Wagner: ‘Professor Stanford’s new concerto […] is a great work, assuredly a very great work. It contains clouds of arpeggios, miles of scales, tons of chords, and a whole Czerny study as a cadenza. […] Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony […] is of course not to be compared with Stanford’s masterpiece, but it has its good points. It is pure colour, gorgeous, sometimes glaring, but generally harmonious, and though the work is long one follows it with interest and pleasure throughout’.

**4.5.6 Work-specific commentary: opera**

*Ivanhoe* proved not to be the vanguard of a revivified English opera. No new English work being available, the Royal English Opera House mounted a French comic opera; within a short time the venture failed and the building became a music hall. However, in spite of the frequently expressed view that the odds were stacked against English opera, Stanford, Cowen and de Lara continued to work in the field and were joined by new entrants MacCunn and Maclean.

Stanford’s *The Veiled Prophet* was performed once, in Italian, in 1893, twelve years after its appearance in Germany. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with only

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287 *Ath*1896.11.07b
288 *MT*1896.10
289 *SR*1895.06.08. Other critics found the concerto uninspired (*MS*1895.06.01, *Ac*1895.06.01).
a couple of complaints about lack of inspiration.290 ‘Tritone’, the pseudonymous critic of *Musical Opinion*, thought the delay in performance had resulted in a serious loss to music, as Stanford had abandoned the promising manner shown in the opera. Frost congratulated Stanford on his early recognition of the importance of Wagner’s ideas, which had resulted in a work that now stood a chance of acceptability. This comment is significant in that Fuller Maitland and Hadow later named *The Veiled Prophet* along with *Prometheus Unbound* as the first-fruits of the EMR, providing further evidence that Wagner was more of a stimulus at that point than they were willing to acknowledge (see above, p. 138). A writer in the New Quarterly Musical Review hailed the work as an artistic success that proved that the materials for founding a national opera were in place.291 But it was never performed again.

By contrast, Stanford’s comic opera *Shamus O’Brien* (1896) was performed fifty times in its first two months.292 The *Musical Times* critic thought the work might come to be seen as inaugurating a native school of opera – or rather native schools, one for each part of the United Kingdom.293 However, he was insistent that national characteristics were irrelevant to the highest forms of art, so the most that could be hoped for was the equivalent of the best French opéra-comique.

Cowen’s *Signa*, which first appeared in Italy, was performed in a revised version in 1894 to a generally muted response.294 Although based on an English novel, the action was set in Italy, but, as with *Thorgrim*, no comment was made on this lack of ‘Englishness’. His *Harold* (1895) was the first opera to be given in English at Covent Garden. The *Musical Times* thought it did justice to ‘the style of the English school of music’ with melodies that were ‘direct and English in character’.295 Frost was impressed by Cowen’s new masculinity: ‘delicate piquancy and prettiness’ had been replaced by ‘a

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290 Positive: *Ath*1893.08.05, *MT*1893.08, *MO*1893.09a, *MN*1893.08.05, *Ac*1893.07.29, *SR*1893.07.29; Negative: *MS*1893.07.29b, *MO*1893.09b
291 *NQMR*1893.08a
292 After London, the opera toured throughout the British Isles, meeting a warm reception in Ireland (Dibble 2002: 273–5).
293 R.A. Streatfeild saw the work as possibly the *Freischütz* of a new British school of opera (Dibble 2002: 275).
295 *MT*1895.07
manly, vigorous style’. Shedlock agreed that Cowen had advanced, but thought him too lyrical to succeed in opera. Baughan was disappointed, having hoped for a work that would convince foreigners of England’s musicality. Nevertheless he thought Cowen’s melodic charm and spontaneity were ‘infinitely superior to the academic pedantry’ of other native composers. But after Harold, Cowen quit the operatic stage.

No reviewer saw De Lara’s Amy Robsart (1893) as advancing the cause of English opera. MacCunn’s Jeanie Deans (Glasgow, 1894; London, 1896) disappointed by its lack of melody: the Speaker critic believed that native composers eschewed melodies for fear of appearing commonplace. For Shedlock it was more like an updated kind of ballad opera than a modern work. MacCunn’s Diarmid (1897) was accused of ‘second-hand Wagnerism’ by the Speaker critic, who remarked that Wagner’s influence seemed to crush rather than inspire English composers. (It would be left to Elgar to refute this assertion.) Baughan suggested MacCunn write a light opera rather than ‘a pretentious Palais-Royal music-drama’. Only Frost praised the work warmly. It drew qualified praise from ‘H.W.’ in the Musician, but he thought it as unlikely as Shamus O’Brien to be the long sought-after foundation of a national British school. Petruchio (1895) by the 23-year old Alick Maclean, the prizewinner in a competition for a one-act opera, was seen by all critics as an attempt to emulate Mascagni. The competition attracted forty-three entries; the Times commented that if there were another forty-two worse operas then the future of English music was bleak.

After a further five years, English composers had still failed to make a mark in serious opera. The Speaker critic observed that none of the ‘Wagner imitations’ of Stanford, Mackenzie, Cowen or MacCunn had managed more than three performances.

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296 Ath1895.06.15
297 Ac1895.06.29
298 MS1895.06.15. A similar view was expressed in MN1895.06.15.
299 MS1893.07.29a
300 Sp1896.01.18, MN1894.11.24
301 Ac1896.01.25
302 Sp1897.10.30
303 MS1897.10.30
304 Ath1897.10.30
305 Mu1897.10.27
306 MO1895.08
307 Sp1897.10.30
Views about the development of English music diverged considerably during the period 1893–7. Hughes and Stradling argue that there was a growing concern that the EMR had backed the wrong horse – Brahms – and was appearing old-fashioned, and that Wagner was where progress was perceived to lie, yet critics who likened Parry to Purcell saw this reflection of the past as a strength. However, as the foregoing account shows, the issues debated ranged well beyond the EMR. The narrow focus of Hughes and Stradling on a struggle for the leadership of English music distorts the picture, as does the attitude criticised by Frogley of indifference towards the music itself. Critics were intensely interested in the qualities of the music itself. They did not on the whole line up as ‘backers’ of particular composers, but identified weaknesses as well as strengths in composers whose work they generally liked. The issue of Englishness – what it was and how to express it musically – was still high on the agenda, although some commentators were beginning to see it as a distraction. The other chief concern was with the failure of English works to engage feeling. It was at this time that the works of Tchaikovsky and other Slav composers such as Rimsky-Korsakov were being heard, and native compositions were being judged ponderous and dull by comparison. If the music of the EMR was being challenged it was not so much by Wagner-influenced native composers as by new works from abroad. In opera, too, the new Italian works and Hänsel und Gretel had made the greatest impact; the only successful British work was a comic opera set in Ireland. Cowen’s Harold, with its English subject, appeared to be the next step after Ivanhoe. Its failure would seem to indicate how different were the audiences for opera at the time. (It is doubtful whether Ivanhoe would have succeeded with a Covent Garden audience.) In spite of such failures a conviction remained that high class opera could succeed if it were not forced to meet the requirements of the habitués of Covent Garden (see below, §5.3).

4.6 1898–1902

By this time Shaw had ceased writing music criticism, but Ernest Newman and the pseudonymous critic ‘Common Time’ (henceforward abbreviated to CT), who wrote for Musical Opinion, joined Baughan and Runciman in diatribes against ‘academic’ music. Baughan’s paper, the Musical Standard, continued to provide the most sustained –

308 Hughes and Stradling: 53
albeit somewhat repetitious – critical commentary on the course of British composition. The focus of attention moved from choral to orchestral music, for which public demand had been both stimulated and supplied by the Newman-Wood partnership at the Queen’s Hall. (See §5.2.1.) Elgar received a great deal of comment; younger composers attracted increasing attention. Critics still discussed the desiderata for ‘English’ music, but it became clear that the future lay in the hands of these younger composers. During this period further competing accounts of the recent history of British composition emerged, especially in response to Fuller Maitland’s *English Music in the XIXth Century*. 309

### 4.6.1 Whither English music?

The debate became even more divergent, as advocates of national music were challenged by those who argued for cosmopolitanism. (The ‘Brahms vs Wagner’ theme, around which Hughes and Stradling’s account of this phase of the EMR is centred, hardly appeared.) Some critics, unable to specify the distinctively national characteristics they wished to see, settled for at least an end to the imitation of foreign models. Some were just as insistent on the rejection of the models bequeathed by the ‘leaders of the renaissance’, which had in their view given native composition a bad name. The idea that English art music might draw on folk music was hotly debated, although it would be some time before any concrete examples appeared.

**Form vs feeling**

Form was at this time one of the prominent issues in the debate about the general development of music recounted in chapter 3. Threats to form came on the one hand from giving priority to emotional expression and on the other from following an extra-musical programme. In the debate about English music the first of these issues was more prominent.

Parry held that it was entirely appropriate for British composers to focus on the formal aspects of composition: British music had always shown ‘a degree of caution and

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309 Fuller Maitland 1902
deliberation’ which prevented it from having the ‘warmth and passion’ of that of some other nations.\textsuperscript{310} As noted above, Stainer had complained some time previously that English education disparaged feeling; Parry by contrast appeared here to be endorsing the product of such an education. He claimed that the English gift was for ‘organisation, which is the formal part of an art’, and suggested that when the reign of the ‘wild and intoxicating’ ended, then it could be the turn of ‘the more staid and deliberate race’.\textsuperscript{311} Then, if England were to produce great music, its form would have to comprise ‘those high artistic qualities which represent subtle and comprehensive faculties of organisation’. For Parry, a concern with form reflected the national genius for organisation in the affairs of life.\textsuperscript{312} At the time it was widely held that possession of this genius – supposedly demonstrated in Britain’s immunity from revolutions – justified Britain’s imperial role. Parry appeared to be saying that only music with strong formal properties would be appropriate for such a nation. Moreover, like critics who saw a new dawn ahead for Brahms (above, pp. 107ff), Parry expected composition to return to sanity when audiences had grown tired of current excesses.

Baughan saw the situation very differently: he saw many British composers trying to eliminate all human qualities from their music.\textsuperscript{313} Composers like Sullivan and Elgar were successful because they did not affect superiority but wrote ‘naturally and melodiously’, and if composers thought it unmanly to be emotional and poetic, they had better quit music altogether. He regarded Cowen as the only one of the older generation who was writing music that was more than academic.\textsuperscript{314} (Cowen, unlike Parry or Stanford, had not been to university and did not take up an academic post.) But it was ‘the more modern and younger school, […] which owes no allegiance either to Brahms or to Wagner, to which we look for our music of the future, and not to the Stanfords or

\textsuperscript{310} MS1899.01.21. As Dibble notes, Parry had said much the same in an address to students after the death of Brahms in 1897 (Dibble 1992: 345–6).
\textsuperscript{311} Dibble’s study of Parry depicts a composer most often concerned with matters of design and coherence (Dibble 1992). ‘Design’ was a key idea in Parry’s The Art of Music (Parry 1893). For Parry’s adherence to the racial concept of Anglo-Saxon/Teutonic superiority, see Dibble 2001b: 73.
\textsuperscript{312} Dibble notes that Parry’s belief in musical architecture was as much ethical as artistic (Dibble 1992: 284).
\textsuperscript{313} MS1899.02.25
\textsuperscript{314} MS1899.04.01
the Parrys’. Baughan acknowledged the part that Parry and Stanford had played in the renaissance, but found in their music ‘a certain stiff necked dullness’. Challenged to find an instance of ‘greatness’ in contemporary foreign music, Baughan suggested that some of the works of Massenet, Saint-Saëns, D’Indy, Strauss, Dvořák and Grieg came closer to greatness than any British work: ‘the fault of the British School in the past has been that it has attempted a greatness beyond the individual powers of its composers’. Composers had wrongly thought greatness was a matter of style, whereas Stanford’s Variations on ‘Down Among the Dead Men’ was much greater than his symphonies, his Revenge in some ways greater than his Requiem or Te Deum, and Elgar’s Enigma Variations greater than his Light of Life or Caractacus. Fortunately British composers, including Parry and Stanford themselves, were abandoning pretentious efforts at greatness: ‘the day of Bethlehem and King Saul has passed, let us hope. […] We have passed, or are passing, out of the imitative period […] and we are beginning to have a music of our own’.

What Runciman demanded of music, and of English music in particular, was that it should reflect an engagement with the conditions of modern life. He claimed that artistic creators should be concerned with ‘the tremendous problem of existence’, posed by the fact that science had, through medicine, extended life, and simultaneously shortened it through ‘underground and electric railways, electrical cabs, automobiles, the telegraph and telephones […] the bustle and haste of existence’. Runciman saw English composers as divided into academics, trying to repeat the best of the past, and innovators, who were not trying to express what they deeply felt but were just out to do something new. (Parry he saw as moving from the second group to the first.) Like

315 MS1899.12.02  
316 Ibid.: 352  
317 MS1899.12.09  
318 Ibid.: 368  
319 SR1899.09.16. Runciman’s demand that English music should, in the form of opera, engage with the realities of modern life became somewhat hollow, as he disdained the theatre – where the plays of Shaw, Granville Barker and others were doing precisely what he was asking for, especially in the three seasons at the Court Theatre in 1904–7 (SR1904.01.16). For theatre, see Trewin 1976: 72–6.  
320 This was also the view of Ernest Walker, who remarked on the freshness of Parry’s early works, such as Prometheus (Walker 1907: 300). Dibble’s analysis of Prometheus leads to a similar conclusion: ‘its most “modern” traits are precisely those which Parry chose to jettison’ (Dibble 1992: 194).
many other critics, Runciman entertained the messianic hope: the ‘small men’ of the present should master the newest techniques for eventual use by a ‘divinely gifted one’. Baughan observed that mastering the newest techniques was precisely what younger composers were doing in the field of orchestration.\(^{321}\)

### National vs cosmopolitan

Baughan and Runciman were not arguing that English music should be distinctively English, but that it should certainly shed the character it had acquired so far. But other commentators insisted on nationalism. As chapter 3 has shown, most English critics were as interested in foreign as in native music and continued to see music as a unified, cosmopolitan art. On the issue of nationalism, broadly speaking three positions were emerging: the first, that nationalism was irrelevant; the second, that a national colouring was inevitable but of minor interest; the third, that national expression was a desideratum. No writer suggested that music should be national in order to evoke or reinforce a sense of belonging to the nation.

One writer representative of the third position argued that only a national music would appeal to English audiences, and to be national it had to draw on folk songs.\(^{322}\) This view, in part reminiscent of that put forward by Webb (see above, p. 145) was roundly rejected by a writer in the *Musical Standard* (almost certainly Baughan) who argued that folk music was not the basis of a nation’s music, citing Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner and Purcell.\(^{323}\) Russian use of folk music, by such as Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov, was not encouraging, and the greatest Russian, Tchaikovsky, had been cosmopolitan. In Britain only Scottish and Irish folk-songs were distinctive, English being ‘almost beneath contempt as music’. The great German composers had ignored folk music and their music was not particularly German.\(^{324}\) The idea of founding a national style on folk music had no future. However, Baughan found a ‘national sentiment’ in the music of younger native composers: ‘it is English in straightforwardness and healthiness –

\(^{321}\) *MS*1900.01.20

\(^{322}\) *MS*1900.03.24b

\(^{323}\) Ibid.

\(^{324}\) Howes, for whom liberation from German methods was the achievement of the EMR, saw sonata form as a peculiarly German product (Howes 1966: 69).
and, above all, it is cosmopolitan in style, for we are a cosmopolitan nation’. This was the second of the stances identified above.

However, excessive cosmopolitanism was, for C. Fred Kenyon, the reason why English composition had not advanced. Composers should not try to emulate Tchaikovsky, Grieg or Dvořák; ‘what we require is honest British feeling and sentiment’. Kenyon thought that the growing patriotic feeling in the country (the Boer War was being fought at the time) might stimulate composers: ‘as soon as we are able to express our national independence, our national pride and our national manliness in our music we shall be so much nearer producing a great musician’ – the new Purcell. In response, Baughan pointed out that the supposed ‘national characteristics’ of the English were unclear, but agreed that English music should not reflect foreign characteristics; he believed that the music of younger composers was not German, Italian or Russian, but ‘without any childish throw-back to the folk music of these islands’. Runciman, who held that only in opera could there ever be a specifically English school of composers, saw no signs of Englishness in younger composers – such signs could only come when composers set English words in musical phrases attuned to the English language. Ernest Newman expressed a nostalgic regard for the operas of Balfe and Wallace, whose best music conveyed ‘a picture of a fair and strong and pleasant England; of a race that ate well and drank well and slept well, that had sturdy physical health and cool, clean nerves, and was sometimes stirred to moods of tenderness or philosophic contemplation, without, however, letting the emotions interfere with the main facts and business of life’. The strong element of romantic fantasy here, with its hankering after a pre-industrial paradise, is perhaps surprising coming from Newman, especially as Balfe’s most famous opera was set in Austria amongst gypsies and Wallace’s in Spain (and both composers were Irish).

Kenyon, like others, yearned for a national Messiah ‘of powerful, masterful, and compelling genius who shall fuse together all the varied elements of English thought
and feeling’. He restated his view that British composers were too cosmopolitan, their imitation of foreign music showing ‘a childish weakness incapable of independent thought and action’; there ought to emerge a genius who would do for England what Chopin had done for Poland. However, Kenyon admitted to being unable to specify the national characteristics of English music and looked to the genius to come to reconcile English, Scottish and Irish characteristics. He believed that the qualities shared by the Celts and the English – independence and manliness – had still not been adequately expressed in music. Vivian Carter defended cosmopolitanism against Kenyon’s attack. He saw no future for a composer in trying to hark back to national song: any chance of developing a national tradition of composition was lost when Romanticism conquered. ‘Thus it is among the cosmopolitans that we must look for our musical Messiah […] England, being unhampered by any national drag-weight, should produce world-music, great not because it is distinctively British, but because it absorbs and rises above all the conflicting elements of the various schools and says something as yet unsaid by its forerunners’. Carter thought it was obvious that contemporary British music was being influenced by Wagner and Tchaikovsky. Elgar had shown ‘great power of selection and rejection, and in his works speaks in something like an impersonal, universal phraseology’, whilst Coleridge-Taylor showed ‘a nationalism which is anything but British’. In his view the composer who came closest to being an English Grieg or Chopin was Edward German, but even his Henry VIII dances and other pieces were not national music in the same sense as theirs. German owed his success to melodiousness, not Britishness. Carter hoped that British composers would not be affected by the nationalism stirred up by the Boer War: ‘if England is to produce a musical genius the only one worthy of her will not be a glorified thinker of Tom Bowlings and Bay of Biscays, but one who will speak to the world in the world’s language, and triumph by the sheer force of genius over all its welded idioms’.

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329 MO1901.01: 252  
This more positive evaluation of the Celt – as compared with Webb’s – appears to reflect the confluence of English and Celtic characters detected by Mandler. See above, p. 129.  
330 MS1901.01.26  
Carter later hailed Elgar as the long-awaited great English composer (EIM1906.02). The reference to the songs is interesting: folk-song enthusiasts were generally interested in pastoral rather than seafaring songs, in spite of the strong English seafaring tradition.
Imitation vs individuality

Ernest Newman, whose writing began to appear in this period, was as scathing as Shaw, Runciman and Baughan about ‘perpetual academic exercises’.\footnote{MS1900.05.05} He offered an amusing evolutionary narrative of recent English music.\footnote{CR1901.11} The primeval slime of fifty years earlier was followed by a period of ‘mammoths and mastodons’ whose stodgy symphonies and oratorios followed German models, then a brief period of ‘songbirds’, who restored melody and grace, and, most recently, the rise of new men such as Elgar, Bantock and Holbrooke, who were producing work of very high quality that did not imitate foreign models: ‘it will not be long before we shall have an English school that will incarnate the life and very being of our race and culture, that will speak for us as Wagner does to the German, or Tchaikovsky to the Russian, with a sense of intimacy that no nation can experience in the music of another nation, no matter how fine or universal it may be’.\footnote{Ibid.: 743–4} But Newman feared that progress would be hindered by the poor quality of English music criticism, as new work in art depended for its propagation on a generally friendly attitude amongst critics.
Commenting on Newman’s article, CT thought it undeniable that the native ‘modern school’ – which he, like Newman, admired – was influenced by Wagner and Tchaikovsky; it was no more British than the ‘Brahms loving school’ – a fact that did not worry him, as he was not a musical nationalist. Elgar, in his view, showed more individuality than Parry or Stanford, but this did not make his music more British.\footnote{336} Baughan agreed that it was inaccurate to judge Elgar, Bantock and Holbrooke as having shaken off the imitation of foreigners, but in any case independence of foreign influence was not important: ‘we are glad to say our British school is not purely native. It could not be without stultifying itself.’\footnote{337}

Newman, surveying works by contemporary British composers, complained that recognition of their good work was being impeded by the ‘preposterous habit’ of comparing it with the greatest music of the past and sandwiching performances between two masterpieces.\footnote{338} He believed the important question was not how these younger composers compared with Beethoven or Wagner, but whether they were saying things Beethoven and Wagner had not said. In effect he was downplaying his earlier wish for a school that would incarnate Englishness, and looking instead for individuality. Elgar, in Newman’s view, had suffered from provincial festivals – ‘the curse of British music’ – and their requirement for oratorio, ‘the stalest, most pedantic, most unhappy form that was ever known in music’. Newman regarded \textit{Gerontius} as the only first-rate oratorio, but his hopes were for Elgar the orchestral composer. He thought Elgar, of all the composers he reviewed, the most thoroughly English in feeling: his music suggested ‘a broad and open relation to life, a moral purpose deep, steady and universal – something peculiarly characteristic, one loves to think, of English poetry at its best, from Shakespeare to Wordsworth’. Bantock, he noted, had abandoned opera as a hopeless cause and progressed in the symphonic poem – in Newman’s view the only other live form for the modern composer.\footnote{339} About Holbrooke’s music Newman was unreservedly enthusiastic, judging his works ‘a landmark in our English Renaissance […] I feel that England has at last given birth to a musician who, from his earliest days, seems marked
out to be an honour and a glory to his land’. Summing up his survey, Newman was discouraged by the fact that very little of the music had been published, rendering fruitless most of the effort to advance English music.

*Fig. 20* Joseph Holbrooke

For CT, the growing attention paid to native composers was the one bright spot in the musical year 1901 and had been largely due to ‘the strides which British composition itself has made’. He welcomed a concert of works by several young English composers at the 1902 Conference of the Incorporated Society of Musicians, singling out works by Boughton and Holbrooke for special mention. Baughan selected the same works for comment and saw the concert as a remarkable event that could not have happened ten years earlier. CT noted the influence of Tchaikovsky on the young composers but was impressed with ‘the vitality of the British school of composition’. The use of the term ‘school’ here is of interest: it shows a critic accepting the existence of a British school *de facto* once a sufficient number of composers of quality had emerged, and downplaying the *de jure* issue of whether their music had the appropriate national character. The concert and the critical appraisals together show a growing interest in the development of the younger generation of composers. The foreign

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340 *Sp1903.02.15*
341 *MO1902.01*
342 *MS1902.01.04*
343 *MO1902.02*
influences on them – Wagner, Tchaikovsky – were acknowledged, but the focus was on their individuality rather than their ‘Englishness’.

4.6.2 Competing histories

Fuller Maitland’s book *English Music in the XIXth Century* incorporated the EMR narrative first presented in 1897 (see above, p 165). 344 In this narrative, English music, which since the time of Purcell had been under the foreign domination of, first, Handel and then Mendelssohn, experienced a renaissance from about 1880 onwards under the leadership of Parry, Stanford and others. The book was well-received by some critics. Borland was complimentary but thought the treatment of Elgar totally inadequate. 345 Shedlock disputed the reasons given for the popularity of Handel and Mendelssohn, and although agreeing with Fuller Maitland’s choice of ‘leaders’, he thought the eulogistic treatment of Parry and Stanford out of place in a historical account. 346

The book also drew trenchant criticism, especially from critics who regarded the adulation of Parry and the older generation of composers as even less justifiable than when first set in motion. In Baughan’s view, Fuller Maitland had not clearly decided whether he was making an impartial record or presenting a thesis: the scheme of ‘before and after the Renaissance’ suggested the second approach but was problematic, since the definition of the ‘Renaissance’ was disputable. It was one thing to speak casually about a Renaissance in English music, but quite another to use the term to define periods in art history. Moreover, within the main topic – the Renaissance and its followers – Baughan saw a severe disproportion: Elgar received less than a page, but Stanford ten, and Somervell, a comparatively unimportant composer, more than Elgar. A book that did not acknowledge the importance of Elgar was of little value. Fundamentally, Baughan thought the book outdated: it did not deal at all adequately with the younger composers ‘who have certainly begun a Renaissance of their own’. 347

344 Fuller Maitland 1902
345 MN1902.04.05
346 Ath1902.07.19.
347 MS1902.03.22
Baughan also found Fuller Maitland’s account of ‘foreign dominations’ confused: it did not distinguish between public reception and influences on composers. His own view was that native music had been sterile until recently, and English composers had virtually been in the position of having to learn an unfamiliar language. Fuller Maitland had discounted the influence of Brahms because the composer was not popular with the public, whereas Brahms had a huge influence on Parry and Stanford and although Brahms was himself a genius, ‘second-hand Brahms was unbearable’. But for Baughan, ‘the real Renaissance has only just begun – only of late have we had music which is neither German, French, Italian or Scandinavian’. Fuller Maitland’s nomination of Mackenzie, Parry, Cowen and Stanford as leaders, with Elgar and others followers, he regarded as totally inadequate, given that Elgar was only five years younger than Stanford and the works of both that broke away from ‘the ultra-German and Brahmsian influences’ – Elgar’s Caractacus and Stanford’s Requiem and Te Deum – appeared at the same time. Parry, in Baughan’s opinion, had not yet joined the Renaissance, as his music was still largely influenced by Brahms and Bach and was only English as far as it was Handelian. Mackenzie, too, had recently come into line with the new movement, and Cowen, who had never belonged to the German School, had merely developed his talents. In Baughan’s view, Fuller Maitland’s ‘renaissance’ was ‘merely a lull in the development of British music’. The real renaissance was showing ‘imagination, emotion and a sane romance. It has not the love of abstract profundity of the German school of Brahms and Schumann; it is not crudely passionate as the Italian; and it is more full-blooded than the Scandinavian. Above all the new school has learnt how to use the orchestra’. Baughan pointed out that this latter skill could not have been learnt from Fuller Maitland’s ‘leaders’, who did not possess it themselves. Overall Baughan found Fuller Maitland’s thesis ridiculous: ‘it is only of quite recent date that real progress towards a national art has been made, and that progress has been a reaction from and not a consequence of the earlier aims and achievements of Mr Maitland’s leaders of the Renaissance’.

CT found the book formless – facts and statements without explanations. Fuller Maitland had made no attempt to explain why English music had submitted to foreign

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348 Ibid.: 183
349 MO1902.04a
domination; moreover his claim that the domination ceased after Mendelssohn was unsustainable, since composers had followed Brahms when there was no public pressure to do so, as Brahms, unlike Handel and Mendelssohn, was not popular. For CT, the domination by Brahms marked a clear stage in the development of English music, and although it counteracted the Mendelssohn influence it went to an extreme and was largely responsible for the public neglect of native composition. Moreover, Fuller Maitland was entirely wrong in his contention that the renaissance produced music that was newly English in character: Mackenzie, Cowen, Parry and Goring Thomas were all strongly influenced by foreigners. CT was prepared to agree that Stanford was largely the leader of the renaissance – but not the Stanford of the 1880s but the later Celtic Stanford. He suggested Shamus O’Brien as marking the start of the renaissance; from then on English music became less German, and ‘in the later works of Elgar and the brilliant younger men there is a distinct note of national characteristics. Our music is no longer German, nor is it French or Russian (though Tchaikovsky with his Pathetic Symphony in 1894 has had much to do with the new romantic trend of English music)’.

Ernest Newman was amused by the ‘heroic’ attempt to portray Parry, Stanford, Mackenzie and Cowen as leaders of an English musical renaissance: ‘Mr Maitland reminds us of some chivalrous knight sallying forth, lance in hand, to avenge all the insults, real and imaginary, that have turned grey the hair of four elderly and faded spinsters, whose charms have never made their due impression on a harsh, unfeeling world’. Fuller Maitland had castigated those who regarded ‘Academic’ as a term of abuse; but for Newman the issue was not workmanship or form but the substance of these composers’ music. They represented an influence inimical to English art and were in no sense leaders of a Renaissance: ‘Mr Maitland might as well hope to hatch a brood of chickens from four ancient hard-boiled eggs as to derive a new school of English music from the four Academics of his adoration […] Music in England has become almost a merely parochial affair; we want to bring it into line with the general intellectual and artistic movements of Europe’. For Newman, as noted in chapter 3, the mainstream of this intellectual and artistic movement was represented by Strauss; the music Fuller Maitland commended represented a mere backwater.
Runciman’s view was, as might be expected, similarly dismissive. But his chief concern was that Fuller Maitland’s opinions were shared by people who were in a position to advance music.\textsuperscript{351} He did not doubt that there had been a renaissance as far as public interest and taste were concerned and that more composers were producing ‘admirable, but not great’ work. But Fuller Maitland’s ‘three mediocrities’, whose works had been ‘boomed’ in the press for years, were called upon whenever there was money available for music.

The foregoing account reveals a counter-narrative to Fuller Maitland’s in which the so-called ‘leaders’ had thrown off the Mendelssohn influence only to yield to that of the least attractive qualities of Brahms, thereby retarding the cause of English composition. In this account, if there was a renaissance it was only just beginning and was a reaction against, not a continuation of what had preceded it. Fuller Maitland’s narrative was essentially repeated by Frank Howes, a later Times music critic, in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{352} Hughes and Stradling do not uncritically endorse the narrative; however, by carrying the same title, they reinforce what Baughan had contested: the elevation of a disputable value-laden account into a periodisation of art history. Ernest Newman was strongest in his dismissal of Fuller Maitland’s ‘renaissance’, seeing in its products merely a backwater to the main stream of European music.

### 4.6.3 English music abroad

‘From time to time […] come pleasant reminders that our native composers are not so wholly contemptible in foreign eyes as some would have us suppose’. On this occasion the remark was prompted by the reception of de Lara’s opera \textit{Messaline} at Monte Carlo.\textsuperscript{353} Reports of such successes abroad are further evidence that it was important for English music to be seen as in the mainstream of a cosmopolitan art. The fact that in this case it was Francophone recognition shows that Germany was not the only focus of interest, although it remained the most important one. What was noticeable about Elgar’s works was the speed with which they migrated to Germany. Cowen’s oratorio

\begin{footnotes}
\item[350] SP1902.07.02
\item[351] SR1902.03.05
\item[352] Howes 1966
\item[353] MT1899.08
\end{footnotes}
Ruth, for example, had taken ten years to reach Berlin. By contrast, the first German performance of Enigma came only six months after its premiere and the work was immediately scheduled for repetition. Gerontius took just over a year to reach the same city.

The reception of Elgar’s works in Germany – or at least that part of it reported in Britain – was highly enthusiastic. Lessmann saw in Elgar the hope for England’s musical progress and placed Enigma on the same level as Brahms’s Haydn Variations, and even higher in its orchestration. The most celebrated of German endorsements of Elgar was that of Strauss, following a performance of Gerontius at the Lower Rhine Festival in 1902. Jaeger reported that Strauss – in his view the greatest living German composer – had toasted Elgar as ‘the first English Progressivist’ and had extended the toast to the success of ‘the young progressive School of English composers’, although the latter were not identified. In another account of Strauss’s remarks, Strauss attributed England’s backwardness in music to the absence, ever since the Middle Ages, of an avant-garde; he toasted ‘the health of the British musical renaissance, and especially of Dr Elgar’. These remarks drew the ire of the Daily Telegraph critic – presumably Bennett – who accused Strauss of ignorance of the fact that the present renaissance had been dated by a British writer (i.e. Fuller Maitland) to the time when Parry, Stanford and others came to the front. Baughan, as might be expected from his review of Fuller Maitland’s book (above, pp. 186f), thought Strauss had understood the situation well: that ‘the real renaissance dates from Elgar and the younger men’. Previous British music ‘had practically nothing to say’ and ‘in one phase consisted of dull imitations of Brahms, himself a man who marked time and did not lead any advance. These facts are known to all British musicians who possess open minds and refuse to belong to mutual admiration cliques’. CT agreed that Strauss was right and composers like Parry and Stanford were hopelessly old-fashioned. Interviewed by the Allgemeine musikalische
Zeitung, Strauss hailed Elgar as the first English composer since the Middle Ages to
deserve a hearing on the Continent – a remark strongly resented by Shedlock, who
claimed that there had been great English masters, the equal of any in Germany, in the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\textsuperscript{363} Shedlock seemed unconscious of the irony in
this rejoinder.

This German praise was expressed at a time when the German press and public opinion
were strongly Anglophobic, largely because of the Boer War.\textsuperscript{364} This is further evidence
that the musical and political worlds operated more or less independently.

4.6.4 Work-specific commentary: choral and orchestral music

Ethical qualities and Englishness

Parry’s choral music still had admirers, who continued to praise it in strongly ethical
terms and compared the composer to Bach. His Te Deum (1900), written to
commemorate ‘the noble achievements of the British forces in South Africa’, was
reviewed from the score by Jaeger in the Musical Times.\textsuperscript{365} Jaeger was an employee of
Novello, the publisher of both the score and the journal, so the review was hardly
disinterested; nevertheless it is noteworthy for the strongly ethical terms in which Parry
was praised. Jaeger called Parry ‘the strong man in British music, […] the master whose
contributions to our art seem as if hewn in granite, noble structures erected in the
architectural style of Bach’, and praised Parry’s ‘virile’ counterpoint. Of the Te Deum in
particular Jaeger wrote: ‘here, as in all previous works by our “English Bach”, a notable
fact is the absence of everything that savours in the least of weak sentimentality,
chromatic mellifluence, or hysterical “Zeitgeist” whimpering.’\textsuperscript{366} (It is not clear what
particular targets Jaeger had in mind.) Virility and the Bach comparison also appeared

\textsuperscript{363} Borland’s view was similar (MN1902.05.31).
\textsuperscript{364} Mommsen 1991: 389. Contemporary accounts include: MR1901.04, BEM1901.04,
RR1902.01.
\textsuperscript{365} MT1900.09. The war was mistakenly believed to have been won; in fact the conflict dragged
\textsuperscript{366} That Jaeger’s review was not entirely disinterested is confirmed by the dismissive remarks he
made about Parry at the time (Hughes and Stradling: 62).
in the *Musical News* review. The critic of the *Outlook* also praised the work, but regarded the music as ‘well read and professorial rather than spontaneous and human’.  

Straightforwardness – the ethical quality so often extolled as an indicator of Englishness – was evident in Elgar’s *Variations on an Original Theme* (1899), according to the *Musical Times* critic, who approved the absence of its opposites: profundity, learning, affectation. Baughan welcomed the work as an indication that British composers had moved away from the Straussian type of symphonic poem (the later manifestations of which he was soon to praise), as the *Variations* had both a clear programme and a clear form. Like Newman, he saw the composer’s future to lie in absolute music rather than oratorio. Runciman called Elgar ‘the most purely English composer we have produced in modern days’. He found an unostentatious English element in the theme and, even more, the variations. But he then enunciated what amounted to a tautology: that an English composer, once he had mastered the means of expression, was bound to express English feeling.

### Defining ‘modern’

By contrast with the backward-looking comparison of Parry to Bach, Elgar’s music, like Strauss’s, was clarifying for critics what it meant for music to be ‘modern’. Parts of Elgar’s *Caractacus* so impressed Baughan at a first hearing that he hailed Elgar as ‘the first of modern British composers’. However, in the event he was disappointed, finding the realism that he objected to in programme music (above, p. 92) just as unacceptable here. But he and other critics were impressed by Elgar’s masterful use of Wagnerian representative themes. For the *Musical Times* it showed that the influence

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367 *MN*1900.09.15. See also *MS*1900.09.15, *Ath*1900.09.15.
368 *Ou*1900.09.15
369 *MT*1899.07
370 *MS*1899.06.24
371 *SR*1899.06.24
372 *MS*1898.10.01a
373 *MS*1898.10.08
of Wagner did not inhibit inspiration, as had been frequently asserted; moreover, Elgar had an entirely original voice.\textsuperscript{374}

*The Dream of Gerontius* (1900) showed, even more than *Caractacus*, that the influence of Wagner could be benign and not such as to stifle originality. It was the latter that particularly impressed the *Musical Times*: ‘the boldness with which Mr Elgar has throughout shaken himself free from all conventionality is most admirable, since it is the outcome of conviction – not of a desperate desire to be different from other people at all costs’.\textsuperscript{375} It was this freedom from convention that, in the terms of the period, made an artist a ‘modern’ (and, when the term ‘modernist’ was used, at first it meant no more than this).\textsuperscript{376} However, to be modern was not in itself a commendation: what made it such were the crucial ethical qualities of conviction and sincerity, which again and again were bestowed on Elgar, even by those who had reservations about his later oratorios. What the *Musical Times* reviewer reviled was the ‘modern’ who was out to grab attention.

Baughan judged *Gerontius* as ‘the most complete example of the modern British school. It owes nothing to pedantic formation; it is no imitation of Bach or Brahms or Wagner; and from first bar to last it is MUSIC’.\textsuperscript{377} Baughan took issue with Fuller Maitland, who had made ‘the absurd comparison’ of Elgar with Parry and Stanford, taking various aspects of Elgar’s score and noting how Parry or Stanford would have done better.\textsuperscript{378} Other critics did not share Fuller Maitland’s partisanship. Lessmann aligned himself with those who saw academicism as the bane of English music, and named Elgar as England’s ‘coming man’, who had ‘instinctively freed himself from the scholasticism which, till now, has held English art firmly bound in its fetters’.\textsuperscript{379} Presumably

\textsuperscript{374} *MT*1898.11. F. Gilbert Webb’s opinion was similar (*MN*1898.10.15).

\textsuperscript{375} *MT*1900.11

\textsuperscript{376} The song-writer Ernest Austin was described as ‘an apostle of modernism’ on account of his ‘indefinite tonality and rhythm’ (*MT*1909.03). A quartet by Vaughan Williams represented ‘the extreme development of modernism’ (*MT*1909.12). The increasing disquiet of ‘liberal’ commentators in the face of iconoclastic modernism is noted in Riley 2010.

\textsuperscript{377} *MS*1900.10.06. Several years later Baughan was reacting against the work’s Catholicism, finding it ‘almost grovelling in its anguish of remorse’ (Adams 2004: 89). Other positive reviews appeared in *MN*1900.10.13, *Sp*1900.10.13.

\textsuperscript{378} *MS*1900.10.13b; *Ti*1900.10.04. See also Thomson 2007b: 196.

\textsuperscript{379} *MT*1901.01
Lessmann regarded Parry and Stanford as having declined into scholasticism, since eleven years earlier he had praised them (above, p.148).

The response to *Gerontius* confirms the observation made in the previous chapter (pp. 68, 89) that most critics had ceased to regard Wagner’s musical language as a signifier of degeneration. Byron Adams disputes this, setting up a chain of references linking – admittedly fortuitously – the ‘decadence’ of *Parsifal* and Oscar Wilde’s fascination with Newman and Catholicism to *Gerontius*. To support the claim that Wagner was perceived as decadent, Adams cites, first, remarks made by Edmund Gurney in 1883, at a time when Wagner was still regarded by some English critics as a retrogressive force; second, remarks made over twenty years later by E.A. Baughan, after his ‘apostasy’ from Wagner; third, the anti-Wagnerian views of the conservative critic Charles Maclean (see below, §4.7.4). But none of the contemporary reviewers cited above suggested any whiff of decadence in *Gerontius*; neither was the work’s overt Catholicism a hindrance to their judgement of its artistry.

**The ‘younger school’: a mixed reception**

The early compositions of the younger generation met with a mixed reception. Baughan welcomed the vitality shown in some new native works and the signs that composers were freeing themselves from the sole influence of Wagner, Brahms or Tchaikovsky. However, when the Philharmonic Society performed Bantock’s *Jaga-Naut* in 1900, Baughan regretted that a rare opportunity had been wasted on a poor composition. Shedlock considered the novelties in the 1900 London Festival, which included three English works, to be the weakest in the programme. Bantock’s *Thalaba*, for example, ‘was not a healthy specimen of English musical art, but a pseudo-mixture of Wagner and Liszt’.

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380 Adams 2004
381 MS1900.03.17
382 MS1900.03.24a
383 Ath1900.05.12
4.6.5 Work-specific commentary: opera

Runciman’s wish to see English opera at Covent Garden was rewarded by the première of Stanford’s *Much Ado about Nothing* in 1901; but he thought the work was nowhere near as good as *Shamus O’Brien* and merely confirmed that ‘no British composer is capable of anything less dull than a tenth-rate imitation oratorio’. But the *Musical Times* hailed the production as the event of the season and praised Stanford for keeping the influence of Wagner within bounds whilst making good use of characterful representative themes. The *Daily Telegraph* (probably Lionel Monckton in this instance) praised him for turning away from Brahms, who had provided him in the past with ‘so many profitless pages’.

Overall the press reception of the work was highly complimentary. However, in the opinion of several critics, Stanford lacked an individual voice. CT thought the music of *Much Ado* clever but too eclectic: Stanford plagiarised the styles of various composers, including Wagner, Gounod and Verdi, but showed no individuality. For Baughan, none of Stanford’s output, apart from *The Revenge* and *Shamus O’Brien*, showed an individual voice. Moreover, Baughan threw Stanford’s lack of dramatic talent into relief by comparing *Much Ado* with Puccini’s *La Bohème*, performed soon afterwards. Although Stanford’s music was of a higher kind than Puccini’s, *La Bohème* had the ‘heart and life’ that *Much Ado* lacked.

*Much Ado* was the only opera in English appearing during this period; it was performed only twice and was poorly attended. Other English composers set foreign texts and mostly worked abroad. Herbert Bunning’s *La Princesse Osra* and Ethel Smyth’s *Der Wald* appeared as a double bill in 1902. CT thought Smyth’s work, although imitative of Wagner, was ‘the one English opera of any importance […] which has been produced

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384 SR1901.06.08
385 MT1901.07
386 MN1901.06.08
387 Ibid.
388 MO1901.07; see also Ath1901.06.08.
389 MS1901.06.08
390 MS1901.06.15
391 Rodmell 2002: 207, MO1901.08
at Covent Garden’ and other critics were also impressed.\textsuperscript{392} Cobbett praised the concerted music, but deplored the Wagnerian manner of the rest; he thought Wagner a dangerous model and in any case unsuited to a female composer.\textsuperscript{393} Maclean found both works disappointing: ‘neither have anything whatever to do with our native art […] The last forward step was Stanford’s \textit{Much Ado About Nothing}.\textsuperscript{394}

There were seasons of ‘English opera’ – which generally meant foreign opera in translation – in London and elsewhere. In the 1902 London season the only operas by English composers were the three old favourites from the 1840s: \textit{The Bohemian Girl}, \textit{Maritana} and \textit{Lily of Killarney}. Nothing written since then had survived.

\textbf{4.7 1903: the National Festival of British Music}

In January 1903 it was announced that Mackenzie would be touring Canada that year, giving concerts of British music. The tour was promoted by a Canadian; the \textit{Musical Times} pleaded: ‘Will not someone in the old country show as much enthusiasm in the cause of British Music?’.\textsuperscript{395} As it happened, support for the cause at home was soon announced. By 1903, about twenty-five years after the start of the supposed renaissance, confidence in the progress of native composition had, in some quarters, reached the point where British music could be celebrated in a Festival exclusively devoted to it. A plan was put into action to showcase the achievements of native composers and consolidate the renaissance in the eyes of the public. The announcement of a National Festival of British Music stimulated critics to air their widely differing views about the state of music in England. The Festival was intended to increase public awareness of the richness of British composition, both past and present. Critics argued about how it should be organised, who should take part, which composers should be represented and which works performed. The place of Elgar in the line-up was a particular issue, as the organisers did not want to give too much weight to prominent composers. The debate

\textsuperscript{392} MO1902.08, MS1902.07.26, SR1902.07.26
\textsuperscript{393} MN1902.07.26. The perceived Wagnerism of Smyth’s work is of interest, given that the composer had been violently anti-Wagner in the 1880s (Dibble 1992: 197).
\textsuperscript{394} MN1902.09.27.
\textsuperscript{395} MT1903.01a
brought out a resentment directed at the Royal College of Music and a fear lest the Festival programme be dominated by its members and friends.

As reported by E.A. Baughan in the Daily News in January 1903, the proposal was for a series of six concerts aiming to show the work of living British composers and how this related to earlier British composition. Baughan felt that the result would be educationally valuable if the programmes were arranged chronologically and included the best work of composers, including the ‘younger men’; it would at least show the astonishing variety of British music. Already this first announcement shows a critic setting out to influence the content of the Festival. Baughan thought that given the importance in England of choral music, much of the Festival should be devoted to excerpts from oratorios and cantatas and sixteenth and seventeenth century church music, widely regarded as a high point in English music history. However, a Festival devoted exclusively to British music was not, in Baughan’s view, the best way ‘to attract the British public to its own music’, because audiences would not be interested in the history of one school of composition. Nevertheless, British music was so seldom performed that music-lovers did not realise ‘the strength of our past music and the promise of the present renaissance’, hence a Festival was needed ‘to arouse the public from its lethargy of interest’.

The Musical Standard reported later that a guarantee fund of £5000 was to be raised. It was also reported that Gerontius, which had yet to be given in London, would be included. Shedlock believed that a truly representative Festival would stimulate native talent, even if it did not produce epoch-making works. The Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour (known to be a passionate lover of music, especially that of Handel), was confirmed as president of the organising committee. The executive committee was chaired by Sir Kenneth Muir-Mackenzie, who, along with most of the other members, had a purely amateur interest in music. (The exceptions were W.H. Hadow, editor of the Oxford History of Music, and Amherst Webber, a composer; the secretary was also a professional musician.) Information about the Festival was disseminated through other

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396 DN1903.01.28
397 MS1903.02.07
398 Ath1903.02.07
periodicals; the *Musical Times* carried only a brief mention, as if the Festival were already common knowledge.  

CT believed that although the Festival would help publicise excellent British compositions, it was actually a mistake: what was needed was not concerts entirely devoted to British music, but merely that the latter be given ‘a fair field and no prejudice’. Nevertheless, he hoped the Festival would help to remove the prejudice against British music. He saw the task of choosing composers and works as unenviable. Given the available time, only selections from oratorios and cantatas would be possible. In his view, the choice of composers should not be restricted to the well-known ones – Parry, Stanford, Cowen, Elgar, Mackenzie, Coleridge-Taylor. CT’s own suggestion was one concert of old music and five of modern, united by a chronological scheme. He thought church composers should be excluded, as there were too many of them.

The *Times* reported that the Festival would take place in November. The writer, probably Fuller Maitland, hoped that London audiences would at last hear some of the beautiful modern choral works not yet adequately heard there. (The reference was clearly not to *Gerontius*, which had not been heard in London at all.) He offered the fact that neither the executive committee nor the general committee included prominent professional musicians (although in fact Fuller Maitland was on the general committee) as a sign that ‘the scheme is to be worked with commendable freedom from party spirit’. He also noted that £2000 had already been subscribed to the guarantee fund and hoped that as news spread the rest of the money would be forthcoming. The *Musical Standard* thought it would be difficult to ensure adequate representation in only six concerts. Composers of earlier times, such as Byrd and Purcell, deserved half of the available time, as few people were aware of the beauty of their music. Between Purcell and ‘the rise of the modern school’ there was nothing worth including, and were it not for the fact that England’s greatest claim to be a musical nation lay in the older music, there was a case for limiting coverage to the nineteenth century. However, recognising

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399 *MT* 1903.03  
400 *MO* 1903.03b  
401 A correspondent to *Musical Opinion* put forward the claims of Algernon Ashton as a composer of genius whose exclusion would be unthinkable (*MO* 1903.03a).  
402 *Ti* 1903.03.20
that the historical perspective was only of specialist interest, the writer recommended that the concerts should focus on the present: ‘that living present of ours in music is just what the public should be made to understand’. (The phrase ‘should be made to’ says much about the public attitude to native composition.)

In April, CT returned to the issue of the supposed prejudice against British music. He observed that concert givers were being implored in the press to consider native composers. The fault, he believed, lay with composers, who had been ‘too pedantic and superior’: the public would admire any really interesting native work. What particularly concerned CT was factionalism. He feared that the Festival would be dominated by the Royal College of Music and its friends, and observed that many musicians resented the activity of a ‘set’ that furthered each other’s interests. He questioned the claim made in the *Times* that the membership of the executive committee ensured impartiality, as some members had close connections with the RCM. So although he accepted that Stanford and Parry should be fairly represented, he did not want to see a lot of space given to RCM performers and minor composers. Other prominent composers – Sullivan, Cowen, Mackenzie, Elgar and Coleridge-Taylor – had to be represented. He noted that the *Times* had insisted that no prominent composer be given undue attention, but the fact remained that ‘Elgar is the one British composer that the British public will hear’.

Younger composers should also be heard: ‘no Festival would be complete without examples of Granville Bantock, William Wallace, Arthur Hinton, Reginald Steggall, Frederic Cliffe, Josef Holbrooke, Percy Pitt, W.H. Bell, Rutland Boughton, Cyril Scott, and Ernest Blake. And there are others’. There should also be at least one work from a composer who had as yet had nothing performed. The objection that these younger composers would not attract an audience was met with the observation that the Festival was not expected to be a commercial success ‘and artistically no good idea can be given of our national music unless the young school is fully represented’.

The next communication to the general public was a letter to the *Times* from Muir-Mackenzie stating the aims of the Festival and listing the members of the executive and

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403 MS1903.03.28
404 MO1903.04
The general committee ran to over 120 names of the great and the good, including the Lord Chief Justice, the Poet Laureate, major and minor aristocrats, bishops, academics, scientists, etc. Fuller Maitland was the only music critic in the list. Commending the Festival, Muir-Mackenzie drew attention to the wealth of music being produced and pointed to parallel events – exhibitions – in the fields of art and industry. He emphasised the impartiality of the executive committee: it would draw on external expertise before finalising the programme but would make its own decisions. He added an appeal for support from foreign musicians in England, which regretfully had not so far been forthcoming. Their support would be invaluable because ‘their judgement is incontestable in the field of music’. He believed that they acknowledged how much they owed to ‘unstinted encouragement from British audiences’ and would ‘enter heartily into the musical aspirations of the country in whose midst they live’.

Muir-Mackenzie felt it necessary to make a specific statement about *Gerontius*: that the Festival would not be complete without a performance of that ‘great work’, even if other London performances were to take place. However, the *Musical Standard* was not so impressed by the work: ‘it has many good qualities, but [we] quite fail to believe at present that it has any genius or remarkable originality’.

The most forthright criticism of the Festival was made, in characteristically mocking tones, by Runciman. Stripped of its rhetoric, his contention was that the effort would be better directed towards a national opera. Runciman was suspicious of the whole enterprise: the organisers were not musicians and were to rely on advice from ‘eminent authorities’ – he had a pretty good idea who these would be. Moreover he thought the Festival format – several concerts crammed into a few days – would be indigestible, and even more so if all the music were British. Some other journals appeared to be lukewarm towards the Festival. The *Monthly Musical Record* carried a very brief mention embedded in a paragraph of miscellaneous notices of London events. No information about the guarantee fund was given.

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405 Ti1903.04.06. The letter was reprinted in *Musical Opinion* (MO1903.05).
406 MS1903.04.11. (By this time J.H.G. Baughan had replaced E.A. Baughan as editor.)
407 SR1903.04.18a
408 MMR1903.05
In May, Muir-Mackenzie reported that it was impossible to finalise the concert programmes until the guarantee fund had reached its target; over half had already been subscribed and a closing date had been set. The Committee expected shortly to be able to make definite arrangements; in the meantime they were issuing a list of the material under consideration. The list was immensely long, citing existing works by composers from Byrd to Coleridge-Taylor and adding names of younger composers from whom new works could be expected. A rumour began to circulate that the Festival was to be postponed until the following year. The Musical Standard saw the chairman’s statement as evidence against this, but Musical Opinion reported that the response to the appeal for funds had been disappointing and the Festival was to be postponed until February 1904, or abandoned altogether if more money was not forthcoming. Musical Opinion took this outcome as confirmation of the view that the Festival was seen, rightly or wrongly, as emanating from a clique.\textsuperscript{409} The Musical Herald also reported that the Festival had been postponed and that its future was in doubt, but attributed this to the committee’s policy of excluding the best-informed from its ranks.\textsuperscript{410} In July the Musical Standard reported that the Festival had indeed been postponed, but to March 1904. It also carried the Committee’s latest announcement, which stated that nearly £3000 had already been guaranteed and appealed to more guarantors to come forward.\textsuperscript{411} The Musical Times also carried this appeal.\textsuperscript{412}

When the usual season of Queen’s Hall Proms began in August, the Musical Standard reported that the prospectus promised that British composers would not be neglected. A contemporary was quoted with approval as saying that the occasional inclusion of native works in regular concerts was ‘more to the point than a stodgy Festival of British music’.\textsuperscript{413} This was the last reference to the Festival in any of the music periodicals. It was never formally announced that the project had been abandoned. No guarantor had stepped forward, as Edgar Speyer had done to save the Proms a year earlier (below, p. 237, n. 86). (It is noticeable that the failure was not paraded by critics as yet another

\textsuperscript{409} MO1903.06
\textsuperscript{410} MH1903.06
\textsuperscript{411} MS1903.07.25a
\textsuperscript{412} MT1903.08. The appeal also appeared in the Violin Times, but too late to be of use.
\textsuperscript{413} MS1903.08.08
demonstration of the lack of public interest in native composers: perhaps the critics, quick to bemoan the lack of support on other occasions, had not themselves subscribed.)

From whichever way it is viewed, the failure of the festival shows that the ‘renaissance’ had achieved little recognition with the public. In spite of the illustrious names lined up in the ‘general committee’, the festival failed to attract sufficient guarantors. People expected it to make a loss; moreover, they did not regard the potential boost to British music as sufficient compensation. It is not known whether Musical Opinion’s denunciation of the Festival as the work of a Royal College ‘clique’ had any effect. If it did, then it would be evidence of disaffection with what Hughes and Stradling term the ‘official’ renaissance.

In the absence of public funding there was no way of conferring ‘official’ status on enterprises; success or failure depended on public approbation. (Even events on a huge scale, such as the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1901, were projects of private enterprise, underwritten by guarantors.) As it happened, there was a three-day festival of British music in London in March 1904, but the music was that of one composer alone. The Elgar Festival took place at Covent Garden and was organised by the syndicate that ran the opera season. The choir involved was the same Sheffield Festival Chorus that was to have been engaged for the National Festival, but the orchestra was the Hallé Orchestra from Manchester under the celebrated Hans Richter. Most critics judged this festival to have been an artistic success; Ernest Newman was especially gratified by Elgar’s triumph as it was that of ‘a provincial composer – owing nothing to Academic training, and having no official connection with any of the metropolitan academies – supported by a provincial band and chorus, giving London a pretty straight object lesson on the subject of its own deficiencies, and London taking it like a lamb’.  

Although there was resentment of the RCM’s role in musical politics at this time, the chief issues of debate continued to be the attributes of English music itself. There were still critics wishing to see a distinctive Englishness and pointing to folksong as a source, but those who wished to see English music contributing to the cosmopolitan mainstream
roundly opposed this line of development. (Commercial or political rivalry with Germany was not mentioned.) Parry, who by this time was Principal of the RCM, believed that the English contribution to the development of music should concentrate on form. As chapter 3 has shown, form was certainly a topic of much debate – a debate stimulated largely by the music of Strauss. But prominent critics like Baughan, Newman and the pseudonymous ‘Common Time’ were increasingly of the view that formal considerations were of little moment if music failed to engage the listener’s feelings. It was clear from remarks made when the 1903 festival was announced that native music was being neglected by concert-givers (and chapter 5 will amply confirm this). The non-festival itself (unmentioned by Hughes and Stradling) shows that the national music was still far from entering the national consciousness. Little needs to be said about Elgar, whose career and output are well covered in existing scholarship. Suffice it to say that he stood out as a composer who could engage feeling just as foreign composers such as Tchaikovsky had done. Critics were turning their attention towards the younger generation and naming promising newcomers. It is significant that none of these was named as a successor to Parry or Stanford, which is what would be expected if the latter were truly regarded as the founders of a national school. But neither was the younger generation seen as influenced by Elgar – rather influenced, like him, by foreign music.

Hopes for a viable English opera were not yet extinguished, but *Much Ado* achieved only a *succès d’estime*. Failures like this raise the question of where the money came from to mount the production and to sustain the considerable loss.

4.8 1903–7

Although Elgar retained a high profile, there was a growing interest in the younger generation of composers. Calls for a specifically English or British national music were less frequent; many critics accepted the younger generation of individualists as constituting a ‘young British school’. Anti-academic critics were increasingly insistent that the so-called ‘leaders of the renaissance’ had led English music down the wrong path. Complaints about the neglect of native composers continued to be made; although

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414 *Sp1904.03.04*
more opportunities were given for a first hearing, further performances and publication were rare.

4.8.1 Whither English music?

A writer in *Musical Opinion* complained that a recent concert series had given little encouragement to native composers, having been given over to the worship of ‘the Slav, the Russian, and the ultra German school’. (The latter is a reference to Strauss.) He called on native composers ‘not to be hypnotised by the barbaric din of the foreigners’ but to return to melody and classic forms. Another insisted that all great artistic movements were rooted in nationality; other nations were challenging the dominance of Italy and Germany, and England needed to be given its chance. Runciman, commenting on the proposed Festival in 1903, doubted whether there was any real British music: ‘There is not a composer living who does not speak his native tongue with a German accent’. He thought Elgar seemed to be moving towards an English idiom, but had not yet got there. (But a few months later his judgement was uncompromising: ‘Elgar’s music is German music.’) He observed that some composers thought an English music could be obtained by removing something from German music; he, however, believed it was necessary to keep what Germany had given and ‘gradually infuse our own life into our music by nourishing it from our own literature and poetry’. He lambasted Mackenzie’s *The Witch’s Daughter* (1904) as another stale subject treated in a thoroughly old-fashioned way, and called again for an end to festival oratorios and cantatas. This, as Rosa Newmarch observed, was already happening, as English composition turned away from choral towards orchestral music; the rise of interest in the latter constituted a ‘secular renaissance’ – a reaction to the sacred music that had ‘overwhelmed and choked all that was bright and promising in our native talent’. She credited Henry Wood with this development; *Musical Opinion*
agreed that Wood was ‘unquestionably the central figure in the English musical life of today’. 421

Elgar added his voice to those of critics of academicism, saying in his inaugural lecture in 1905 that with a few (unnamed) exceptions the English music of 1880–1900 had been written more for musicians than for audiences and, even when technically virtuosic, was cold. 422 Everything he said had been said, over many years, by critics such as Shaw, Baughan and Runciman, but, as Shedlock acknowledged, Elgar’s position as a prominent composer was a difficult one; yet even so, in Shedlock’s opinion, some of his comments ‘scarcely showed a catholic spirit’, although his remarks about the younger generation had been encouraging. 423 Elgar had observed that, with one exception, younger composers had been selected for the new works at the most recent provincial festivals – an indication that the future of English music lay with them. The exception was Parry, about whom Elgar spoke warmly: ‘With him no cloud of formality could dim the healthy and broad influence he exerted, and, it was to be hoped, might long continue to exert’. 424 (In the typescript of the lecture he added that Parry had too often been regarded as ‘the figure head and apologist of the formal school’. 425) Elgar called for native composers to cease imitating foreigners and draw inspiration from their own literature, especially Shakespeare, and even their own climate. The future he looked for would ‘grow out of our own soil, something broad, noble, chivalrous, healthy and above all, an out-of-doors sort of spirit’. Here he was echoing the desiderata that Baughan, for example, had put forward (above, p. 168) (but which could hardly be said to apply to such works as Gerontius or The Apostles).

Hughes and Stradling, looking at the lecture as an event in their story of the EMR, see it as a repudiation of everything the EMR stood for. 426 Throughout their account, the

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421 MO1904.05b
422 Elgar’s lectures, complete with drafts, can be found in Young 1968. The focus in the present study is on the critical reaction to the lectures.
423 Ath1905.03.25
424 MN1905.03.25b. Hughes and Stradling take Elgar’s appreciative remarks about Parry as insincere, and see Elgar’s lecture as a repudiation of everything the EMR stood for (67ff). However, as Dibble recounts, Elgar’s regard for Parry was genuine and the friendship begun in 1899 lasted (Dibble 1992: 358; 382–3; 402; 421).
426 Stanford, rather than Parry, was the chief target, according to Dibble (Dibble 1992: 272).
EMR is represented as an organised movement, even termed the ‘official’ Renaissance. (However, it is far from clear from their account whether Parry and the RCM regarded themselves in this way, or whether this is rather the authors’ construction.) Most critics did not share this perception of the EMR. It is remarkable that Elgar’s lecture drew little comment from critics, showing that ‘challenges to the EMR’ did not weigh with them. Shedlock’s remarks have been noted. The lecture went unreported in the *Musical Standard*, apart from one flippant remark.\(^{427}\) The *Musical Times* and *Musical News* reprinted reports but made no comment.\(^{428}\) Colles seized on the tribute to Parry, hoping it would encourage people to investigate Parry’s music, but otherwise made no comment.\(^{429}\) CT agreed with Elgar that the renaissance had produced music that audiences found dry.\(^{430}\) In his view, composers had failed to make best use of the opportunities provided by provincial festivals, acting rather as ‘tradesmen’ supplying a product tailored to the requirements of choirs. Brahms had been entirely the wrong model to follow: ‘it is difficult to think of a composer whose spirit is more antipathetic to the British spirit’. CT believed Wagner’s popularity had led some composers, such as Mackenzie, to attempt a middle course between Mendelssohn and Wagner, but with no greater success. There had been no composer of genius able to break free of sterile imitation. CT did not rate Elgar as a genius, but as exceptionally talented – yet now, having had the advantage of freedom from academic duties, he was about to dig his own grave.

Calls for a distinctively national English music fell off somewhat during this period. Many new native composers were appearing and critics were more interested in their individual styles. Nevertheless, some writers were still concerned about Englishness (or Britishness). Kenyon believed that although native composers were learning skills of orchestration from such as Berlioz and Strauss, they were also imitating their worst faults, so that native music showed ‘the influence of the national life of every country but our own’.\(^{431}\) Elizabeth A. Sharp opined that England had yet to produce a composer of distinctively national music; none of Elgar’s great works could be so described. She

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\(^{427}\) *MS1905.04.10*  
\(^{428}\) *MT1905.04, MN1905.03.25*  
\(^{429}\) *Ac1905.04.01*  
\(^{430}\) *MO1905.04*  
\(^{431}\) *MS1905.02.25*
thought most English composers composed from the brain and had not been able to match the expressive power of English poetry, so the distinctive British temperament—abundant in national songs—did not penetrate into composition. Henry Saint-George likened British music to a river that had gone underground and was now re-emerging: ‘but we find the stream swirling; spending itself in spray; tossed hither and thither at the mercy of every foreign body it encounters in a perfect ecstasy of eccentricity and extravagance […] this is not the English school of music for which we have been waiting’. He believed that British composers were being led astray by Strauss into an un-British emotionalism and away from ‘intellectuality’ and ‘pure absolute music’. For him the way forward lay in symphony, chamber-music and oratorio but not opera. He thought oratorio was more likely to develop along the lines of Coleridge-Taylor than Elgar. *Hiawatha* he found ‘abounding with a full measure of dramatic significance yet balanced with a scholarly restraint. Herein is it typically British’. He put Algernon Ashton forward as a model for symphony and chamber music: ‘it is the inherent simplicity, dignity and purity of Ashton’s methods that make him “so English, you know”’. A leading article in *Musical News* agreed with Saint-George that native composers failed to appeal because they imitated foreign art; they had to be ‘designedly and fixedly British in their style, and then a forward step will have been taken in the development of a British School of Music’. But the public, too, had to abandon its prejudice in favour of the foreigner—it had to wake up to its sense of duty, and its taste needed directing and educating. Walter Bernhard, writing in *Musical Opinion*, contested this view, arguing that nationality was irrelevant to a composer of genius. The *Musical News* countered that Bernhard had missed the point: composers who were not true to their origins courted disaster, as did Dvořák when he tried to write an oratorio in the ‘approved’ English style.

The stridency of these calls for a distinctive national music is evidence of what was not happening. Commenting on the foregoing debate, J.H.G. Baughan (JHGB) thought it absurd to require British music to be entirely British: he could not imagine a composer

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432 *Ac*1905.06.03. Elizabeth A. Sharp was the wife of William Sharp, poet and art critic. She contributed a short addendum on music history to her husband’s survey of art in the 19th century (Sharp 1906).
433 Ibid.: 810
434 *MN*1905.08.12
setting out to write a ‘British work’. He also disapproved of the suggestion that composers draw on folk-songs: that would merely show lack of invention. He thought the German influence on British music a good thing: ‘the Germans understand how to write music’. A composer could be left gradually to form his own style, as Elgar and others had done. What was wanted was ‘the advent of a great composer’ – nationality was irrelevant. JHGB reiterated his scepticism about the use of folk music when Vaughan Williams’s *Norfolk Rhapsody* was performed: ‘What we want in England is composers who feel deeply. Let nationality in music take care of itself. Let us not attempt to produce it by a hot-house system’. Others disagreed: *Musical News* suggested English composers should draw on the collections of the Folk Song Society, and by reflecting their spirit, ‘build up a national style by means of national feeling’.

Elgar gave the first of a series of public lectures – entitled ‘English Composers’ – in November 1905. He accused ‘some well-established coteries’ of complacency, as their works were neither popular nor respected abroad. Composers now had great freedom as to subjects and methods, but needed to think about their audience. If they could not enhance a text by music, then they should not set it; the qualities to be aimed for were ‘simplicity, manhood, clearness, finish and melody’. To the *Musical News* Elgar appeared to be criticising audiences for neglecting British music and simultaneously running down the music that they did not want to hear. The paper thought it would not help the cause of British music to stir up bitterness by criticising ‘parochial musicians and well-established coteries’. (Elgar’s view was, however, quite clear: the cause of British music could only be served by works that appealed to listeners.) Elgar’s later lecture on Brahms’s Third Symphony, as reported in the same paper, appeared uncontroversial, but a week later it was reported as having aroused a fruitless ‘programme versus absolute’ controversy in the press. Also, Elgar’s wish to see an occasional all-British concert programme had been taken as an anti-foreign declaration, which was another ludicrous deduction. The paper reprinted an article from *Truth* that

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435 MS1905.07.22
436 MS1906.09.01
437 MN1905.08.19
438 Ti1905.11.02. His remark about ‘no respect abroad’ drew an angry response from Stanford. After Elgar’s lectures, the two composers fell out (Dibble 2002: 372–3).
439 MN1905.11.11
440 MN1905.11.25. CT agreed that this was a ridiculous misinterpretation (MO1905.12).
defended Elgar against the unfair criticisms he had been subjected to: Elgar’s contention that absolute music represented a higher kind than programme music was quite consistent with the fact that he wrote the latter. However, Colles thought critics were now justified in scrutinising Elgar’s subsequent works in the light of his ideal. He looked forward to an Elgar symphony: it ‘should be a great event in the history of music’.

In a short dismissive article on national music, a contributor signing himself ‘T.D.’ (probably the composer Thomas Dunhill) argued that national music did not exist because the English temperament did not demand musical expression: ‘only that music which appeals to the nation generally could be truly called national: and this could hardly be said of the music of our best British composers’. Where English music was at its most artistic, it was individualistic rather than national. ‘Why […] do we harp on British, British? Is Elgar the finer for being English, or Strauss the worse for being foreign? National Music, do you say? Why, what music does the nation like? What does young England whistle in the street? What does his sister at home play? Purcell? Parry? Stanford?’ Behind Dunhill’s remarks lay the question that had not yet been seriously considered: who made up the ‘nation’ for whom ‘national music’ was supposed to be written?

4.8.2 The ‘young British school’

Three writers – Edwin Evans, Rutland Boughton and Joseph Holbrooke – contributed substantial surveys of younger British composers to the Musical Standard during the period. Evans was interested in two groups of composers: those who ‘breathe the modern spirit and write modern music’, and those who were ‘pioneers and innovators’. He saw Britain as emerging from a period of poverty of expression: contemporary composers had to have something new to say. He identified the organ –

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441 MN1905.12.09
442 Ac1905.11.25
443 MS1905.11.18
444 MS1903.05.23. Evans’s survey is of interest partly because of its wide scope and partly as an early piece of criticism from a future President of the International Society for Contemporary Music.
an inexpressive instrument that suited English distaste for emotion – as one of the principal hindrances to progress.\textsuperscript{445}

Evans commented on many young composers, only the most prominent of whom can be mentioned here. He observed that many of the most characterful of them (Holbrooke, for example) had been taught by Frederick Corder, who had played an important role in preparing the younger generation.\textsuperscript{446} Evans judged Holbrooke’s works to show enormous inventiveness, a tendency towards the morbid and bizarre, a phenomenal sense of rhythm, outstanding melodic ability; his extraordinary imagination had now been brought under control.\textsuperscript{447} Evans (wrongly) credited William Wallace with composing the first British symphonic poem, \textit{The Passing of Beatrice} (1892) – a type of work that had become characteristic of the new school.\textsuperscript{448} He noted Wallace’s facility for beautiful vocal melody, but observed a tendency to rhapsodise rather than develop his themes.\textsuperscript{449} Evans had a high opinion of Vaughan Williams’s compositions, and was pleased to find in the \textit{Bucolic Suite} pastoral music of a new kind: not that of ‘silk-clad shepherds and shepherdesses, but rather of brawny clod-hoppers in corduroys’.\textsuperscript{450} Cyril Scott was regarded by Evans as one of the most important of the younger generation (he was only twenty-three at the time). Scott had decided that every movement would be continuous, without cadences, and that he would not use key-signatures; nevertheless, his music did not sound over-chromatic.\textsuperscript{451} It will be noted that Evans treated each composer as an individual, without reference to nationalism.

Boughton’s articles on contemporary composers, each of which dealt with a single work, are interesting for the qualities he praised and his general remarks about the reception of native works. He hailed Bantock’s \textit{Sappho} songs as ‘one of the few lasting

\textsuperscript{445} MS1903.11.21. For similar criticisms of the organ see pp 249, 278.
\textsuperscript{446} MS1903.07.25b. Hughes and Stradling identify Corder as a significant influence on the younger generation, but claim that he produced Wagnerites (57). However, the Wagnerian influence had been absorbed by this time and composers like Bantock were finding their own styles.
\textsuperscript{447} MS1903.05.30
\textsuperscript{448} It featured as the key work in yet another ‘renaissance’ narrative, put forward by Constance Smedley, who thought it misleading to call the younger generation a ‘school’, as they were all individualists (\textit{MO}1905.10).
\textsuperscript{449} MS1903.06.13
\textsuperscript{450} MS1903.07.25c
\textsuperscript{451} MS1903.09.12
productions of the young British School’, but had ethical reservations about their eroticism. Comparing them with *Tristan*, he remarked, in words echoing Vernon Lee’s of many years earlier, that ‘such works as these have their place, but we must not have too many of them’.\(^{452}\) Manliness and nobility were important to Boughton. He praised a symphony by Edgar L. Bainton as ‘a worthy memorial of English manliness’;\(^{453}\) and found in Ashton’s music ‘a calm *Credo* of manly strength and noble beauty’.\(^{454}\) Boughton found it puzzling that music with the quintessential British qualities of ‘strength of purpose, restraint of deep feeling, and honesty of workmanship’ had so little appeal to English audiences; he thought this due to the strong intellectual element, which narrowed its appeal to a small minority.\(^{455}\) Boughton had a high regard for Vaughan Williams’ *Toward the Unknown Region*: ‘the strongest, noblest and purest’ of the choral works of the young British School, and ‘tainted only to a slight degree with the restlessness which spreads itself over the greater part of modern music’.\(^{456}\) Boughton regarded this restlessness as an inevitable feature of the period; although it militated against the highest in art, it was more truthful for contemporary art to reflect it. (In this judgement he agreed with Runciman: see below, p 277.) Boughton admitted that he did not respond to most of Holbrooke’s music, but appreciated the lyricism of the *Romantic Songs* and their simplicity when compared with the composer’s output generally.\(^{457}\)

In the earliest of his series of articles, Holbrooke was mainly concerned to expose the dominance of commerce over art in Britain and to criticise publishers for failing to support new native music.\(^{458}\) He saw the prospects of contemporary composers as blighted by the residual effects of the older generation: ‘our art is ruined today, for the stifling influence of *respectability* hovers over us still’; audiences, put off by such dull works, deserted serious music for musical comedy.\(^{459}\) Holbrooke regarded Delius as the greatest English composer.\(^{460}\) He wrote of *Three English Songs*, ‘I know of absolutely

\(^{452}\) MS1906.07.28  
\(^{453}\) MS1906.08.11  
\(^{454}\) MS1906.08.18  
\(^{455}\) Ibid.: 101  
\(^{456}\) MS1907.11.02  
\(^{457}\) MS1907.11.09  
\(^{458}\) MS1907.01.19  
\(^{459}\) MS1907.03.02  
\(^{460}\) MS1907.03.09
no English music like it. Emotional to a degree, with all a poet’s rapture, such harmonic
mastery is not exceeded by Richard Strauss and they contain all his loveliness!’. Holbrooke’s negative opinion of Elgar’s oratorios was similar to Boughton’s (see below, p. 214). However, he later singled Elgar out as the only composer who had mastered choral composition.

Boughton and Holbrooke, being themselves composers, expressed the views of insiders. Hadow’s views were those of a conservative commentator. He commended the talent, earnestness and experimentation of the new generation, and although he believed some experiments – ‘touched with conscious and exotic artifice’ – were on the wrong lines, he accepted that ‘in the clash of their conflicting counsels the truth will be established’. (From what Hadow had said elsewhere, the ‘truth’ was to be found by following Brahms.) Hadow was concerned that as England was a latecomer its composers would imitate foreigners, perceiving them as further forward. (He no doubt had Strauss in mind.) But ‘we have our own language to speak, our own message to deliver, we have our own ideals to maintain; our leaders have arisen to point the road, and it is to them that the younger men will most profitably look for direction and guidance’. This view was diametrically opposed to that of commentators who saw the ‘leaders’ as having taken the wrong path from the outset. The critic of the Nation observed that ‘the old gang’ were on the wane at the festivals of 1907, and that the younger composers ‘whatever musical creed they may profess, are not at all in sympathy with the heavy kind of art that was cultivated by the “leaders of the Renaissance” ten or twenty years ago’.  

461 MS1907.04.13  
462 MS1907.05.25  
463 MS1907.07.20  
464 ER1906.10g  
465 Na1907.10.05b
4.8.3 Work-specific commentary: choral and orchestral music

Elgar and oratorio

Elgar continued to dominate the critical commentary on compositions. From the reports in the *Musical Times* of the success of his oratorios abroad, especially in Germany, one would get the impression of an undisputed triumph. But although at home each of his oratorios received much praise, opinion was far from univocal and some commentators regarded the religious feeling in *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* as decidedly unEnglish.

The first London performance of *Gerontius* took place in June 1903. Ernest Newman thought it ‘among the greatest things in the library of music’. But others did not agree. For Runciman, *Gerontius* showed ‘the British oratorio, that most extraordinary musical growth, pushed to the very limits of absurdity by the sheer force of a composer who has brains, temperament, musicianly skill and a certain degree of musical invention’. He acknowledged Elgar’s sincerity, but thought he had wasted his time. After two hearings, J.H.G. Baughan remained unconvinced; he conceded that it was one of the best, if not the best, English oratorio, but was lacking in original inspiration.

As more performances took place, other critics expressed similar reservations.

*The Apostles* (1903) divided critics even more, although several remarked again on Elgar’s sincerity. The *Musical Standard* published two contrasting reviews. Louise Liebich was overwhelmingly positive and saw no point in comparing Elgar with Wagner, Brahms, or Strauss: ‘his personality is not in any way akin to theirs […] his genius is the product of a serious yet eminently genial English mind’. JHGB, however, found ‘little of the harmonic refinement of the great German School of Music – Bach, Beethoven, Wagner and Richard Strauss’. (Note the addition of Strauss to the

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466 *Sp*1903.06.13b
467 *Sr*1903.06.13
468 *Ms*1904.02.20
469 *Ath*1903.09.12, *Mo*1904.05a
471 *Ms*1905.02.18a
472 *Ms*1905.02.18b
list of ‘greats’.) The Kingdom (1906) had a similarly mixed reception.\footnote{MT1906.11b} Shedlock echoed remarks of Ernest Newman about The Apostles: that Elgar’s sympathy with the subject-matter was inhibiting self-criticism.\footnote{Ath1906.10.06b} Boughton, an agnostic humanist, saw Elgar as binding himself ever more tightly to Romanist dogma, with only the least sectarian sections of the work showing any loveliness.\footnote{MS1906.10.13} Colles saw a steady decline through Elgar’s three oratorios.\footnote{Ac1906.11.24}

Parry and Elgar contrasted

Hearing The Apostles alongside Parry’s cantata The Love that casteth out Fear, Baughan judged the treatment of religious feeling in the former as ‘far removed from the national character’.\footnote{MMR1904.10. This article is quoted in Young 1968: 49.} By contrast he praised the ‘manly reverence and force’ found in Parry’s cantata, where ‘man acknowledges the greatness of God without abasing himself. There is no sentimental whine in the music’. To this ethical appraisal he added an aesthetic one, finding in Parry ‘none of the wavering between realism and abstract thought’ that in his opinion marred not only The Apostles but many of Strauss’s symphonic poems.

Maclean also contrasted Parry and Elgar.\footnote{MT1903.10a} He described Parry’s music as ‘a flat countercheck to various salient foibles of the times’: its harmony was ‘free from decadent subtleties; indeed, almost absolutely diatonic, a trait in common, more or less, with all British composers who are true to themselves’. The ‘salient foibles’ were clearly those of Strauss, and Maclean was concerned to push Parry’s claim to recognition against Strauss’s advocacy of Elgar, whom he regarded as impulsive and lacking in intellect.\footnote{MN1903.09.26. The writer [Borland, if still editor] found the charge of lack of intellect surprising. On Maclean’s hostility to Elgar see Thomson 2007b: 198–9.} However, even Colles, a supporter of Parry, was forced to admit that the subject matter of Parry’s works, and the lack of obvious beauty in the music,
limited their appeal; they needed further hearings, but, unlike Elgar’s works, they were unlikely to receive them.\textsuperscript{480}

Ernest Newman had a profound respect for Parry’s scholarship, but his music did not move him: ‘now and again we get a fine page from him; but it is sad to think how much music-paper he has covered and with how little real result’.\textsuperscript{481} The critic of the \textit{Nation} was similarly dismissive, commenting on the boredom induced by \textit{The Love that casteth out Fear} (which Baughan had praised three years earlier) and the almost universal judgement that \textit{A Vision of Life} was extremely dull.\textsuperscript{482} He found the English predilection for oratorio curious: ‘we […] feel it that it is rather sinful to sing very ardently about love, and that we ought to enjoy a setting of a highly moral text even if the music be poor’. Noting that a writer (probably Maclean) had complained about Strauss’s \textit{Salome}, he remarked: ‘\textit{Salome}, after all, keeps us awake, while most of our ‘pure’ composers send us to sleep. There is not a line in \textit{The Vision of Life} that could offend the purest taste; but there is also not a page in it that anyone would go through fire and water to hear again’. But Parry had a faithful torch-bearer in Hadow, who regarded his English idiom ‘as distinctly national as that of Purcell himself’. In unashamedly ethical terms he described Parry as ‘the spokesman of all that is best in our age and country, its dignity, its manhood, its reverence’.\textsuperscript{483}

\section*{The ‘young British school’}

As noted in section 4.8.2, although composers of the younger generation were sometimes referred to as ‘the young British school’, they were seen as developing their own individual styles. Their works were examined for signs that they were becoming worthy representatives of British music. Bantock’s rhapsody \textit{The Time Spirit} (1904) impressed the \textit{Musical Times} reviewer, who praised its melodic charm and genuine poetic feeling.\textsuperscript{484} Shedlock was also very complimentary.\textsuperscript{485} Boughton was highly enthusiastic: the work showed that the young English school was ‘leaving the worn and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[480]{\textit{Ac}1907.01.12}
\footnotetext[481]{\textit{Sp}1904.10.15}
\footnotetext[482]{\textit{Na}1907.10.05a}
\footnotetext[483]{\textit{ER}1906.10e}
\footnotetext[484]{\textit{MT}1904.10}
\end{footnotes}
dusty ground of superstition for virgin paths in the wonderful forest of Life’. The 1904 Leeds Festival was notable for the large number of native works included. Two of them – Walford Davies’s *Everyman* and Holbrooke’s *Queen Mab* – received much attention (and were the works referred to in Elgar’s inaugural lecture). Ernest Newman was pleasantly surprised by *Everyman*, having expected a dry work from a member of ‘the academic clique’; he praised its ‘noble, austere sincerity’, and many others echoed this appraisal. Holbrooke’s work, too, was praised. Afterwards Davies failed to repeat the critical success of *Everyman*, but Holbrooke’s reputation grew. At first he tended to be criticised for extravagance. But several critics saw genius, or near-genius in *The Bells* (1906). Surprisingly, Maclean was one of the most complimentary critics: ‘a work of genius, nay, of high genius’.

### 4.8.4 Work-specific commentary: opera

Smyth’s *Der Wald* was performed again in London in 1903, but thereafter new works by English composers, finding no openings at home, migrated to Germany. Smyth’s *Les Naufrageurs (The Wreckers)* was given at Leipzig in 1906, in a German translation. Shedlock reported a remarkable success and praised the originality and power of the work, which showed a great advance on *Der Wald*. The *Musical Times* observed that yet again an eminent and experienced English composer had to go to Germany for a hearing. Delius’s *Koanga* was successfully produced at Elberfeld in 1904 and his *Romeo und Juliet auf dem Dorfe* at Berlin in 1907.

By the end of the twenty-year period under study, opera in English by English composers, which was seen throughout most of the nineteenth century as the locus of...
English musical rebirth, had almost died out. George Cecil gave a depressing account of its failure over the previous thirty years at the hands of composers whose ‘sense of the operatic fitness of things is practically nil’.  

4.9 Summary

Chapter 3 argued that the focus on English music found in existing scholarship has distorted the presentation of the critical debate about the development of music in general. In a similar way the EMR narrative has distorted the account of the debate about English music.

The first point to note is that ‘renaissance’, especially as used in connection with composition, is a value-laden, honorific label. It was recognised as such by critics who attacked Fuller Maitland’s narrative. But the narrative retained its hold and was treated by a succession of writers who concurred with its value judgements as if it were an accepted periodisation. Thus, for example, Cecil Forsyth, in a book co-authored with Stanford, wrote: ‘the national awakening in England is known there as the “renaissance”’. Acceptance of the periodisation is found in recent scholarship: for example, in Musgrave 1995 and Poston 2005. Once the trope had been introduced into the debate, then both at the time and subsequently writers critical of it have tended not to challenge it absolutely but to modify it; for example, for Michael Kennedy, ‘with the Variations and Gerontius the real renaissance of English music had begun’. (Even Schaarwächter, whose scepticism about the usefulness of the term was noted above, has his own preference for key composer: John Field.) In Hughes and Stradling’s version of events, the EMR was a movement to raise the standard of native composition whose claim to the honorific label was publicly endorsed by Joseph Bennett in 1882. From this point on, the ‘renaissance’ is treated as an identifiable agency in the development of

495 A one-act Wagnerian opera Greysteel by Nicholas Gatty appeared in London in 1907 (Ath1907.03.02).
496 Id1907.11
497 Stanford and Forsyth 1916: 313
499 Kennedy 1989: 295
500 Schaarwächter 2008: 55. Schaarwächter cites Percy Young’s nomination of Field.
501 Hughes and Stradling 2001: 42
native composition; Hughes 2002 describes how the Press supported it. But centring the
critical commentary on this agency distorts the commentary. As Leanne Langley points
out, Hughes examines ‘only a tiny proportion of the music activity that took place in
Victorian and Edwardian England, and an even tinier percentage of its press
coverage’. 502

Most critics did not see the musical art world as centred around a ‘mainstream’
renaissance movement, with leaders and followers, supporters and challengers, as in
Hughes and Stradling’s account. Before Fuller Maitland put forward the EMR narrative,
the works of native composers were generally judged both as works of art and as
indicators of progress – or lack of progress – in native composition. But the optimism
that existed at the outset of the period under study was not sustained, as orchestral
music grew in popularity and the music of foreign composers, especially Tchaikovsky
and Strauss, made its impact. When the EMR narrative was presented, it crystallised the
dissent of critics who strongly believed that the so-called ‘Renaissance’ composers had
led native music into a cul-de-sac.

Although Hughes and Stradling present the EMR as the construction of a national
music, they represent the principal aesthetic choice as Brahms vs Wagner and do not
address the expression of nationality until the formation of the so-called ‘Pastoral’
school. However, the question of what part nationality should play was central to the
debate about the direction of English music throughout the period of this study. Some
commentators were appalled that it was playing any part at all; in their view nationality
was irrelevant in art, where criteria of beauty and worth were universal. But for others
the sense of national rivalry was too strongly embedded. From at least the earliest years
of the century critics were aware of how backward England had become in music in
comparison with Germany and Italy. They could not dismiss this as simply a matter of
differing tastes, as the standards of taste had been set by German and Italian music and
English critics could see that whilst these were both advancing, native composition was
poor. By the doctrine of free trade this should not have mattered, but it disturbed the
English music community, even if no-one else was much concerned.

502 Langley 2003: 521
This chapter has shown that the debate about native composition continued to be internal to the art world of music: neither those who argued for a distinctive national music nor those who rejected it referred to external issues such as the growing economic competition with Germany and the vociferous calls for protection. It might be argued that the sense of international competition operated subliminally and would not necessarily emerge explicitly; however, calls for a distinctively national music receded over time (and in any case are indicative of its absence), whereas economic competition persisted. The sense of national inadequacy within the music community, which had existed well before the Anglo-German economic and political rivalry, was sufficient to generate a desire for the restoration of England to the position many believed it had occupied in the past. English composers and critics accepted that the forms of art music had been developed, and mastered, by Germans. Moreover, many expatriate Germans in London occupied important positions as conductors, instrumentalists or teachers – a constant reminder of German superiority. And, as critics noted from time to time, Germans were also disproportionately represented in audiences. In the early part of the period covered by this study, critics were looking for native compositions that matched up to German standards of form and workmanship, but that also showed distinctively English qualities – hence the efforts made to define these qualities. The ‘national music’ appeared to be conceived of as a stand in an imaginary international exhibition that would show the world that Britain had joined the ranks of truly musical nations.

The desiderata for English music were by and large ethical desiderata for personal character: straightforwardness, honesty, manliness, self-control, etc. – the qualities that public schools were meant to inculcate. Their musical analogues were seen as broad melody, diatonic harmony, clarity of form, steadiness of rhythm, etc., qualities that were the obverse of the degenerate features detected in much contemporary music: disjointed melody, obscurity, discordance, chromatic harmony, etc. For Parry, himself a product of the public school ethos, form was especially important as a means of expressing the national genius for organisation. Commentators assumed that there was such a thing as ‘the national character’, even though it was always defined as male, and musical

503 See Dibble 2001b.
504 MS1901.08.24, MS1904.11.12b, MS1905.02.25
qualities expressive of masculinity, manliness or virility were looked for; they gave the lie to the popular belief that musicians tended to be effeminate. There was a strong element of nostalgic fantasy in the references to breezy outdoor life: for example, Baughan’s call for English music to reflect ‘the healthiness of our golden lads and lasses’ did not chime with the reality of urban life.\footnote{MS1896.04.18. The slight misquotation is from Shakespeare, \textit{Cymbeline}. During the Boer War a high proportion of young army recruits were found to be unfit (Searle 2004: 305).}

Conceived of in ethical terms, the national music would have a mission to stand for and commend what was best and most wholesome in life: Parry’s ethical cantatas embodied this aim as, in Boughton’s opinion, did works like Bantock’s \textit{The Time Spirit}. The national music would, on this model, be the agnostic humanist equivalent of church music: a ‘sermon in sound’.\footnote{MT1900.03b} However, most of the critics who called for a national music, or a national school, did not go so far as to conceive it in ethical terms. Some looked for the analogue of, for example, Dvořák’s Bohemian flavour, but were unable to define what ‘Englishness’ in music amounted to. Some suggested drawing on folk-song – a suggestion derided by others. Eventually critics who were impressed by the emerging younger generation settled for a definition by negation: they sought music that did not simply imitate foreign models, although it was likely to be influenced by them. It was enough that the ‘modern British school’ was giving the world something new: this was for them the start of the real ‘renaissance’. However, new works could only be introduced sparingly into concert programmes, as the experience of provincial festivals had shown. Some critics held the EMR composers to blame for queering the pitch for their successors by their dull academic works. But although a novelty would sometimes give a concert a cachet that ensured coverage in the press, it was rare for a new native work to be successful enough to warrant repetition. The obvious exception was Elgar.

Critics were divided over almost every aspect of Elgar’s output – his choice of subjects and genres, his emotionalism, his descents into Straussian realism – and were equally divided about his ‘Englishness’, or lack of it. Jeremy Crump has argued that Elgar’s Englishness was ‘constructed’ at this time partly by emphasising his home in the country, but that it came about mainly through Elgar’s use of familiar English forms,
such as oratorio, and his ceremonial music. This hardly characterises ‘Englishness’, especially, as Crump himself acknowledges, Elgar’s music was also seen as mainstream European and ‘modern’, akin to Strauss’s. But, according to Crump, ‘Elgar was modern in a peculiarly English way’, as his popularity with the public testified – a circular argument.

Elgar’s success was undeniable and Elgar himself gave the key to it when he insisted that composers needed to consider their audience. The critic who came closest to explaining Elgar’s success was Vivian Carter (above, p. 182) who attributed it to the composer’s ‘great power of selection and rejection’ of the resources made available by Wagner, Tchaikovsky and others – a power that enabled him to speak in a universal language.

The efforts of supporters of the ‘Renaissance’ to convince the public about its achievements failed spectacularly when, in spite of the support of illustrious names, the projected National Festival of British Music came to nothing. Its failure contrasted with the success of the Elgar Festival, the first ever devoted to the work of a single living English composer.

Perhaps because Parry and Elgar have tended to predominate in accounts of the period, opera, apart from Ivanhoe, has not received much attention. This has also distorted the presentation of the critical debate, given that opera had earlier been the focus of aspirations towards a national music, and critics continued to treat native efforts seriously.

Native composition was not a topic that engaged the general public much, although there were occasional flurries of correspondence in newspapers. The lack of interest is demonstrated by a survey of the articles on music published in non-specialist monthly and quarterly periodicals in the period 1888–1907: about one-third dealt with broadly contemporary issues and the majority of these were about Wagner and other foreign composers; the profile of English composition was very low indeed. 

507 Crump 1986: 167–71
508 See Appendix 2, p. 376.
However, the level of interest shown in debate is only one indicator of the public profile of native music. The next chapter will examine the commentary on the demand for and supply of native music in performance, and on the factors – largely economic – that affected demand and supply. In order to reach a judgement about the profile of native music, it is necessary to place it in the wider context of the commentary on the demand for and supply of art music in general. Embedded in this commentary was the issue that since the early years of the century had been a troubling undercurrent in the debate about native composition: the question – admittedly ill-defined – as to whether England was a fundamentally unmusical nation. Only in the light of the material presented in the next chapter will it be possible to judge whether, and in what sense, it may be justified to talk of a musical renaissance.

509 This assertion is derived from the ‘prehistory’ described in ch. 1, p 21.
5 Demand and supply

5.1 Introduction

The musical ‘renaissance’ discussed by Howes, Pirie and Hughes and Stradling is concerned with composition, and was discussed at length in the previous chapter. Some writers have extended the term to refer to a significant advance in public interest in music (not specifically native music) during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As Colin Eatock observes, this secondary usage denotes ‘a much broader sociocultural movement for the promulgation of musical education and the dissemination of “art-music” throughout the British Isles. This movement was driven by a variety of forces, including envy of continental culture, and increased disposable income and leisure time among the middle classes’.¹ The term ‘movement’ suggests a concerted effort, but, as Eatock notes, multiple agencies were involved, including, for example, the Crystal Palace concerts, the numerous music colleges founded during the period, and the provision for music in schools.² Michael Kennedy sees the ‘so-called renaissance’ as a gradual process and 1880 a significant year not so much because of the appearance of *Prometheus Unbound* but because the Guildhall School of Music was founded, Grove’s *Dictionary* appeared and Stanford wrote an Evening Service for a Festival in St Paul’s Cathedral: ‘these unconnected events represented the coming to fruition of the gradual change in attitudes to music in Britain […] since 1850’.³

When contemporary critics used the term ‘renaissance’ or its cognates, they more often used it in the sense described above, referring to a growth in the scale of musical activity, a growth in interest and an advance in the public estimation of the art, rather than specifically to a rebirth of native composition. For example, John Hullah, who had played a prominent – and controversial – part in the field of elementary education, was said to have taken ‘a very leading part in bringing about the Musical Renaissance in this country’.⁴ A review of a collection of national songs observed that the older music of

¹ Eatock 2010: 90
² Although originally applied to religion, Roland Robertson’s distinction between a ‘movement’ and an ‘organisation’ is useful here (Robertson 1969: 114). The Tonic Sol-fa Association, which had a central leadership and a journal, exemplifies an organisation.
³ Kennedy 1989: 283
⁴ Ma1884.03
the British Isles had only received attention since ‘the renaissance of music […] within the last half-century’ and named William Chappell as the principal pioneer, thus dating the beginning of the renaissance back to the 1840s. In 1890 the *Musical Times* reported that music was more highly esteemed by all classes of society than ever before and its provision was evidence of ‘the great musical awakening which has taken place during the past few years’. However, this was by no means the first time in the century that it had appeared that the tide was turning. For example, in 1860 the *Musical World* looked back on the Royal Musical Festival of 1834 as ‘an event which may be believed to have induced an entire revolution in the state of music in England […] the initial step of the great advance of music in this country’. Also in 1860, a report on a large-scale choral event expressed the hope that ‘some musical Macaulay will do justice to the large share which the Tonic Sol-fa Association have had in the great musical renaissance they are so quietly, unostentatiously, working out’. And looking back on that same year, the *Athenæum* commented that ‘a growth of real and honest interest in Music has taken place in this country, and that something of a love of Art (as distinguished from mere fashionable imitation) is on the increase’.

Whereas in the specific field of composition a few critics (notably Fuller Maitland) claimed to be able to identify some key moment – but not necessarily the same one – signalling the start of a renaissance, the more generalised renaissance others referred to was a gradual process. The growth in musical activity in England during the nineteenth century is well documented in studies of musicians, festivals, provincial concerts, brass bands, choral societies, etc. As observed in chapter 1, this presentation of a flourishing musical life has been in part a response to the ‘land without music’ taunt. Taken together with the buoyant remarks quoted above, it might lead us to expect that contemporaries would continue to maintain an optimistic outlook. However, this chapter will show that throughout the period of this study there was a strong current of dissatisfaction mixed with the positive strain. For example, Pippa Drummond’s study of provincial festivals does not mention the severe reservations that several critics had about that institution. Just as the

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5 *Ath*1893.01.28
6 *MT*1890.08
7 *MW*1860.06.09
8 *TSF*1860.11 (emphasis in original)
9 *Ath*1860.12.22
11 Drummond 2011
renaissance of native composition was questioned, so too was the extent of this more general renaissance. For instance, many critics saw the commercial pressure on music provision as a brake on progress, and the appearance of flourishing concert life in London as deceptive. The account of the period is distorted if the sense of dissatisfaction and the reasons given for it are left out.

The term ‘movement’ used by Eatock implies a state of affairs to be altered, or even a resistance to be overcome. The most pessimistic reading of this state of affairs was that England was a fundamentally unmusical country – ‘Das Land ohne Musik’, as it was later described. Scholars frequently take this as a point of departure, as, for example, in the series editor’s foreword to a book on the development of amateur operatics: ‘The Germans called Britain in the nineteenth century “the land without music”. Nothing could have been further from the truth. There was music everywhere’. However, scholars construe ‘musicality’ in different ways. Ruth Solie, finding evidence for the centrality of music as a point of reference in many different kinds of writing, quotes with approval K. Theodore Hoppen’s remark that ‘nineteenth-century Britain was awash with music’ (although, as Hoppen added, it was only the foreign music that lasted). In her study of Macmillan’s Magazine for the years 1863–83, she notes that specialist articles on music assumed an extensive knowledge of music history on the part of readers of a general magazine. But although there were articles complaining about the lack of interest in music and England’s lack of creativity in the field, Solie believes that the contents of Macmillan’s reveals ‘music’s actual ubiquity, its iconic centrality in the reading culture […] Music is invoked as a signifying system at every level from probing exploration to the most casual of metaphoric references’. Solie notes the inclusion of musical activity – appropriate to the setting and to the class of the characters – in all except one of the serialised novels in the magazine. Although these representations were conventional, they were also drawn upon in articles on a wide variety of topics. For Temperley, Schmitz’s charge of unmusicality is easily refuted

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12 Richards 2005: ix. Schmitz 1904 is taken as the mouthpiece of the entire German nation.
13 Solie 2004b: 44; Hoppen 1998: 394
14 Solie 2004b: 63
15 Solie cites Peter Gay in support of the view that it was the interiority of the experience of listening to music that underpinned the centrality of music to Victorian culture. However, she does not follow Gay in his identification of an erotic or infantile-regressive basis to the experience of music (Gay 1998: 22).
by such things as the considerable growth in the sales of sheet music and pianos, the
number of church choirs and choral societies and the number of professional
musicians.\textsuperscript{16} However, Cyril Ehrlich, in his study of the growth of the music profession,
comes to a different conclusion: that ‘talk of an English “renaissance”, and loyal
resistance to the taunt of “Das Land ohne Musik”’ obscures the limitations under which
musicians had to operate in England – poor remuneration, insufficient rehearsal time,
etc., all arising from low demand.\textsuperscript{17}

This chapter focuses on the course of the contemporary debate about the level of public
interest in art music and in particular about the public reception of native music. For
many decades critics had been expressing concern about England’s lack of interest in art
music in general and its neglect of native composers, and for many contemporary
commentators it was not so easy to exonerate England from the charge of being
unmusical. Of course they were aware of the sheer amount of music around, but for
them this did not constitute musicality. Writing in 1883, H.R. Haweis agreed that the
English ‘cultivate music, they like it and pay for it’, but they were still unmusical, as
‘they do not produce anything to be compared with the works of the great masters on
the Continent. The national music is about “Champagne Charley”, “Tommy”, “Waking
the Baby”, “Grandfather’s Clock” and “Over the Garden Wall”’.\textsuperscript{18} However, Haweis
also acknowledged that singing in schools had improved and ‘the national ear has been
to a great extent cultivated’. He saw the task ahead as ‘the education of the nation, as a
whole, in music’. As will be seen, many commentators displayed a constant anxiety
that, in spite of occasional appearances to the contrary, the English did not value serious
music to the point where they deserved to be called a ‘musical nation’. In Hughes and
Stradling’s account, the receptivity or otherwise of the general public to art music –
including native music – or the economics of demand and supply, were unimportant;
only composition mattered: ‘behind the English Musical Renaissance lay profound
misgivings over whether England possessed the raw materials with which to make a
“musical nation” in the only sense that ultimately counted – creative composition’.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Temperley 1986: 7
\item[17] Ehrlich 1985: 75
\item[18] Haweis 1883: 159–60. Haweis was repeating what he had said fifteen years earlier. See
above, p. 24.
\end{footnotes}
But as will be shown below, most contemporary critics were as much concerned about the extent of the public’s taste for high-class music – foreign or native – and about the status of music in national life. A sense of the ‘mission’ of music can be detected in their writings. This mission was not an organised activity, like, for example, the Tonic Sol-fa movement, which had leaders, a central association and publications. As Charles McGuire has shown, that movement was underpinned by a strong belief in the moral power of evangelical Christianity and was centred on participation. The mission of art music was rather a shared interest in elevating public taste and advancing the public estimation of and interest in serious music. The benefits of amateur participation were acknowledged, but the mission was chiefly concerned to attract listeners appreciative of the best in music. It was not confined to home. When Cowen, as conductor, made a visit to Australia in 1888, the *Musical Times* reported that his ‘musical mission’ was ‘bearing excellent fruit […] the public seem to take the greatest delight in the best music, classical and modern’.

This chapter is concerned with contemporary views about the level of demand for serious music, as indicated by the patronage of concerts and opera, and the supply, as indicated by the extent of provision. It does not attempt to make an independent analysis along the lines of William Weber’s investigation of concert life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848, important as such a study would be (see below, p. 284). It focuses on critics’ views and how these fed into appraisals of the advance or otherwise of the appreciation of art music. Demand and supply were especially important indicators since provision took place in an economic environment with no public funding – a situation that many commentators deplored. Moreover, the genres that carried most weight – orchestral music (including choral music with orchestra) and opera – were expensive to perform, so composers were competing for scarce resources

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20 *The Musical Times* complained that music was unrepresented in the National Association for the Advancement of Art and its Application to Industry (*MT*1888.09).  
21 McGuire 2009  
22 For the growth of amateur activity in a number of fields see Gillett 2000b, Hyde 1984, Musgrave 1995, Bartley 2009, Weiner 1989. The number of choral societies may be gleaned from *Musical Opinion*’s column ‘By the Wayside’, which noticed miscellaneous musical events across the country: thirty-six societies were mentioned in the first six months of 1888 and the number grew throughout the period.  
23 *MT*1888.11a  
24 Weber 1975
in a market dominated by tried and tested works of the past – hence the fierceness of the critical debate about the merits of works and composers.

The patronage of concerts of high-class music was an indicator of English musicality, and the public reception of native music an indicator of the progress made in English composition. The public reception of English music is an essential, but hitherto neglected, counterpart to the critical reception examined in chapter 4, but it cannot be assessed except in relation to the overall level of interest in music generally, of which it was a part. For example, no significance could be attached to a neglect of native music if the overall level of interest in music were low. But if general interest grew but not the interest in native music, then that would be a significant finding. The focus in this chapter is mainly on London, where new works appeared (possibly after being heard at a provincial festival) and which critics regarded as a test case for appraising the level of interest in music. §§5.2 and 5.3 are about music in general: orchestral and operatic respectively; §5.4 looks at the provision of, and response to, English music; §5.5 is about music-hall, seen by some critics as a threat to the elevation of public taste; §5.6 examines critics’ preoccupation with the persistent question of England’s musicality; §5.7 makes some concluding observations and suggestions for further research.

5.2 Orchestral music

5.2.1 Concerts in London

Three phases can be detected in the contemporary commentary on concert life in London. Before 1895 the mood was gloomy, but in that year critics detected a growth in interest in orchestral music and the Queen’s Hall Proms were seen as capitalising on it. However, this optimism was not sustained, and although the Proms continued to be praised, complaints about poor support elsewhere were soon voiced again. Two topics recurred frequently in this commentary: comparisons with Germany and the price of concert tickets.²⁵

²⁵ Germany was also cited as a model by the science community, which had a similar lack of success in eliciting government support. See, e.g., Alter 1988.
Comparisons with Germany

Although Germany was often represented as the prime musical nation, accounts of the situation there were inconsistent. *Musical Opinion* reported the position in Germany in 1888 to be much the same as in London: there was a glut of concerts and although concert-going had become fashionable, audiences were often attracted by the performers. Even so, there was no doubt that music was better supported in Germany.\(^{26}\) The small audiences at a Henschel series in London in 1889 demonstrated to Barclay Squire that the city was unable to support the kind of winter series found in any German town of second- or third-rate importance.\(^{27}\) Further poor attendances the following year drew extensive correspondence (see below). The composer Algernon Ashton, who had lived in Germany, compared English audiences favourably with German, but another writer, also with experience of Germany, thought the English too preoccupied with money to appreciate art. A third believed that Germans took an intellectual interest in music, whereas ‘the Briton likes to have his ear tickled’.\(^{28}\)

Alfred Rodewald, a prominent citizen of Liverpool who later founded an orchestral society there (and became a friend and supporter of Elgar) compared Britain and Germany in a lecture given in 1892. Rodewald regarded Germany as the musical nation *par excellence*: nearly every town in Germany with over forty thousand inhabitants had its opera house and an excellent local orchestra. There was little or none of the rubbishy music heard in England – burlesques, nigger entertainments, music hall songs, etc. People in Germany liked good music, which was subsidised and cheap to hear. Rodewald acknowledged that the English were fond of music, but believed their taste undeveloped: ‘we must overcome the prejudices of the Puritan element and legislate more for art’.\(^{29}\) Soon after this lecture, J.B.K. (who was probably German) reported that Heidelberg had, ‘like indeed almost every fifth rate German town’, acquired a local opera. It also had a Bach Society, whose repertoire included works such as Liszt’s Gran Mass and Beethoven’s Ninth. ‘What says musical England?’ he asked.\(^{30}\) Several years

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\(^{26}\) *MO*1888.06  
\(^{27}\) *SR*1889.11.23  
\(^{28}\) *MO*1891.04b  
\(^{29}\) *MO*1891.05  
\(^{30}\) *MO*1892.11
later, Baughan was still expressing regret that in England ‘there is none of that steady love of music that in Germany, for instance, makes concert-giving a necessity of national life’.  

This view of Germany – and of ‘musicality’ in general – was strongly contested in a letter reprinted in *Musical Opinion* in 1903. It was the writer’s view that no country, as such, was musical. The English were far more interested in cricket and racing and the Scots in football. And in France and Germany, outside the state subsidised institutions there was no great demand for serious music. The musical geniuses that had appeared in Germany worked at their own risk – Mozart, for example, being so little appreciated that allegedly he was buried in a pauper’s grave. The composers working in German state-aided opera houses depended on their salaried posts. Wagner would have failed without the support of the Bavarian king and English and American subscriptions. ‘There is no such thing as a musical nation nowadays. There are individual dilettanti who are numerous enough to be of effect only where wealth and population are highly centralised’. Other writers also questioned the idealised portrait of German musicality that had so often been presented. An article entitled ‘The Germans an Unmusical Nation’ accepted that more Germans took music seriously but was surprised that, with Germany having supplied the greatest composers, the general level of musical taste was no higher than elsewhere. However, a writer in the *Nation* stuck to the conventional view of German musicality, but saw it as an adventitious phenomenon, not one rooted in national character. In his view, Germany scored over England not so much in its composers as in the large musical public wanting to listen, a situation traceable to the political decentralisation of the country in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One race was not inherently more musical than another, but merely acquired the music habit earlier: ‘here we have the beer habit and the billiard habit and the bridge habit at night, but not the music habit’. 

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31 *MS1898.03.26*  
32 *MO1903.11b*  
33 *MO1905.07*  
34 *Na1907.09.14*
Ticket prices

The cost of concerts represented a barrier to many people. The Musical Standard expressed concern about the high ticket prices, and although prices at the Crystal Palace were lower, in 1892 Shaw judged that the cost of going there from central London was beyond the reach of four out of five Londoners. Several years later, replying to remarks by Parry about the London public’s allegedly low level of taste, Baughan identified the price issue as still the main reason for poor attendance, although competing attractions and transport costs also had an effect.

It is convenient to split the commentary on concerts into three periods: before the Proms (1888–94); the Proms and immediately after (1895–7); the re-emergence of dissatisfaction (1898–1907).

1888–94: gloom and despondency

The period up to 1894 was dominated by concern over the poor support given to orchestral concerts. As Cyril Ehrlich notes, there was very limited personal patronage of music and no government support: provision was subject to the open market. Much depended on the attitudes of leading personages which in Britain ‘ranged from indifference to hostility.’ There were no permanent orchestras, and concert halls in London were inadequate in size and closed for much of the year. Contemporary critics and correspondents put forward reasons for the poor support. For many it was evidence of a fundamental lack of musicality in the population. At first sight this reasoning might appear tautological, but it was not so in the thinking of the period, where national traits were accorded a real existence.

35 MS1891.11.21, SM2: 708–10
36 MS1899.03.04, MS1900.01.06
37 Ehrlich 1985: 73
38 A first-class concert hall – the Queen’s Hall – was opened in 1893, but it did not add as much to provision as might appear, as the previous premier venue – St James’s Hall – languished and was finally demolished in 1905 (Elkin 1944: 29).
The main concert season in central London at this time was relatively short, from spring to summer. The Crystal Palace season began in October and, with a winter break, continued into the following year. A description of the 1890 main season gives an idea of the scale of music provision: within ten weeks there were to be four series of orchestral concerts (Philharmonic, Crystal Palace, Richter, Henschel), oratorio at the Albert Hall, instrumental/song recitals at the rate of two or three per day, Italian opera at Covent Garden and opera in English by the Carl Rosa Company at Drury Lane.\(^39\) After the main season, Covent Garden promenade concerts, more informal and with lighter programmes, attracted large numbers.\(^40\) Barclay Squire observed that the large number of concerts in London was often cited as evidence that England was one of the most musical of nations. He disagreed, observing that it was often merely fashion – such as a current fascination with infant prodigies – that attracted audiences.\(^41\)

Mounting classical concerts in London was risky. In 1888 the Crystal Palace concerts were in financial difficulties.\(^42\) Henschel’s annual series had been poorly supported in the previous two seasons, but he still mounted a further series in the winter of 1888.\(^43\) The poor attendance at concerts by Hallé’s visiting orchestra in 1890 was described as ‘a disgrace to the musical public of London’.\(^44\) Henschel’s fortunes temporarily improved, the recovery being attributed to the inclusion of Wagner.\(^45\) However, not all critics welcomed Wagner’s popularity. Barclay Squire believed it reflected badly on the musical culture and education of England: ‘Wagner’s highly-coloured orchestration and sensuous effects appeal to intellects which are incapable of appreciating the delicate workmanship and refined expression of a Mozart or a Haydn.’\(^46\)

Frost observed that public concerts were now competing with a large number of local enterprises, including a growing number of societies and musical clubs.\(^47\) According to the *Musical Times*, attendances at St James’s Hall, the chief central London venue, were

\(^{39}\) *Sp*1890.04.05
\(^{40}\) *SR*1888.09.15
\(^{41}\) *SR*1888.07.14
\(^{42}\) *MS*1888.04.28
\(^{43}\) *SR*1888.11.24
\(^{44}\) *SR*1890.02.01
\(^{45}\) *SR*1890.03.01, *Ac*1889.09.28
\(^{46}\) *SR*1891.02.21
\(^{47}\) *Ath*1890.02.01
falling and musical activity was migrating into the suburbs.⁴⁸ (To Shaw it was a telling fact that a venue as poor as St James’s Hall was accepted as adequate for London’s needs.⁴⁹) Some way into the 1890 season Barclay Squire reported a glut of concerts in London, with sometimes as many as four piano recitals per day. Even though few concerts paid their expenses, large numbers of musicians came expecting to make their fortunes, ‘though the public for the most part stays away’.⁵⁰ When Hallé abandoned his 1890 season, Barclay Squire castigated the London musical public for its lack of discernment and its attraction to fashion or sensationalism.⁵¹ At about this time, the autobiography of Anton Rubinstein appeared, in which the Russian composer assessed the proportion of genuine British music-lovers at two per cent; the *Musical Opinion* critic, J.B.K., commented wryly that the figure was too high.⁵²

The poor support attracted attention in the daily press: in December 1890 the *Standard* carried a lengthy correspondence – twenty-two letters in all – under the title ‘Are the English people unmusical?’⁵³ J.B.K. argued that none of the reasons for poor support suggested by what he termed ‘musical patriots’ stood up to scrutiny: the weather, for example, did not deter theatre and music-hall audiences. It had to be accepted that a city of five million people could not support a short winter series of interesting orchestral concerts.⁵⁴ The 1891 concert season was reported as financially the worst for many years.⁵⁵ In spite of his lack of success, Hallé announced another series for the winter of 1891–2, but attendances were low, and he decided not to come again.⁵⁶ Henschel’s concerts, however, picked up – by November 1892 they were, according to Barclay Squire, ‘well-established favourites’.⁵⁷

Shaw believed that much concert-going was due to social pressure; this was confirmed when attendances dropped after the death of the Duke of Clarence: ‘smart dressing was

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⁴⁸ *MT*1890.03
⁴⁹ *SM2*: 233
⁵⁰ *SR*1890.06.21
⁵¹ *SR*1890.12.20
⁵² *MO*1891.01b. Shaw remarked: ‘Do not dream of apologising, friend Rubinstein: your remarks may do the children of Albion some good’ (*SM2*: 253).
⁵³ *SR*1890.12.22 and subsequent issues
⁵⁴ *MO*1891.02c
⁵⁵ *MO*1891.10
⁵⁶ *SR*1891.11.28, *SR*1892.01.30
out of the question; and the audiences vanished’. The fact that in October that year there were ‘five comic operas in easy reach and not a symphony to be heard’ confirmed for Shaw the general lack of interest in serious music.

In spite of these pessimistic appraisals, critics acknowledged that the sheer quantity of music on offer from orchestral societies, choirs, etc., was growing. But the supply was not only in excess of demand, but also repetitious, as more adventurous programming could bring heavy losses. J.B.K. opined that many concerts were merely advertisements and only of interest to the performers and their friends. At the height of the 1894 main season there were about seventy concerts a week, but they had ‘often wanted nothing except audiences to make them thoroughly successful’.

A more hopeful sign was discerned when the 1893 Covent Garden promenade concerts devoted their ‘classical’ sections to whole works – demonstrating, according to the *Speaker*, that it was possible for an entirely musical programme ‘to attract a public demoralised beyond hope by music-halls’. This proved to be the stimulus to the later provision of the Queen’s Hall Proms.

**1895–7: turnaround?**

Critics detected signs of a turnaround in 1895: orchestral concerts, especially of Wagner, had grown in popularity. The autumn saw the début of the Queen’s Hall Promenade Concerts, run by the partnership of Robert Newman, manager of the new hall, and Henry Wood, conductor. At first the programmes resembled those of earlier promenade concerts, but the first classical night attracted a large and highly appreciative audience, according to the *Times*. For the *Musical News*, the fact that this audience

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57 SR1892.11.26  
58 SM2: 681  
59 SM2: 701  
60 MO1893.01a  
61 MO1893.07a, Ath1893.03.11  
62 MO1893.07c  
63 Sp1894.06.02  
64 Sp1893.09.16  
65 Ath1895.06.22  
66 MO1895.09
was not drawn by celebrated soloists was evidence that London was musical.\(^{67}\) The *Monthly Musical Record* attributed the success largely to the ‘free-and easy’ atmosphere; smoking, for example, was allowed.\(^{68}\) The Proms series was followed by a series of twenty-six Sunday afternoon concerts; they offered better conditions than other concerts for people unable to afford reserved seats, and attracted a new audience.\(^{69}\) The new concert series had an inevitable effect on the Crystal Palace concerts, which were in financial difficulty as the 1895–6 season approached.\(^{70}\)

Baughan, like other critics, observed that orchestral music, after its earlier uncertainties, was fast growing in popularity.\(^{71}\) And again like others, he was gratified by the success of the Proms and by the fact that orchestral music of the highest kind, especially Wagner and Beethoven, was proving the most attractive and that a new audience was being reached.\(^{72}\) For J.B.K. the Proms demonstrated ‘the important progress which marks the musical intelligence and taste of the British public’.\(^{73}\) But the *Speaker* critic warned against drawing such a conclusion too readily, as the ‘noisier and more frivolous’ part of the audience had moved to music-hall.\(^{74}\)

The large concert audiences during the winter of 1896–7, a time of year when art music had earlier been dormant, yielded further evidence that interest was growing.\(^{75}\) Tchaikovsky’s music, especially the *Pathétique*, was attracting large audiences, adding to the general growth in demand for orchestral music. ‘Nothing in the musical history of England is so remarkable as the present rage for orchestral music’, wrote Joseph Bennett. But, as might be expected from his expressed views about Tchaikovsky, he deprecated the repertoire as ‘a sensuous feast for the multitude’. Nevertheless he

\(^{67}\) *MN* 1899.09.02  
\(^{68}\) *MMR* 1895.11  
\(^{69}\) *MO* 1895.10, *MO* 1896.05a  
\(^{70}\) *MS* 1895.08.24. In the event the Crystal Palace concerts recovered (*MS* 1897.01.02).  
\(^{71}\) *MS* 1895.10.12  
\(^{73}\) *MO* 1896.10  
\(^{74}\) *Sp* 1896.09.05  
\(^{75}\) *Ath* 1897.01.02
expressed the hope that ‘the still spreading and deepening enthusiasm of the public may be rightly guided’.  

1898–1907: better, but still not good enough

Although critics continued to acknowledge the success of the Proms, in other respects orchestral and instrumental music gave cause for concern and the situation soon began to resemble that of the period before 1895. ‘The Canker at the Heart of Music’ was the title of a leading article in the *Musical Standard* in March 1898, in which Baughan expressed disappointment at the failure of the ‘renaissance’ of musical taste. The large number of performances on offer during the season was deceptive: although a few high-class concerts and operas attracted a relatively small section of the public, for the most part the situation was that of ‘a supply without a demand’. Like many other critics, Baughan protested against the sheer number of concerts, many of which were given by third-rate performers who drew some benefit from critics’ unwillingness to slate them. Runciman noted that many were put on to advertise a performer or piano manufacturer. ‘Common Time’ (CT) agreed and estimated that overall at least three-quarters of London music was not wanted. These appraisals shifted some of the blame for low demand from the public’s lack of apparent interest to the activity of attention-seeking performers; London was a honeypot for the latter and the market for their goods soon became saturated.

Runciman judged the Proms to be the best concerts in England, not only for their programmes but also for their informality, as the formality of concerts had put off the public. CT added that old-fashioned critics had made music a closed art for all but experts. He saw Newman as the powerful antidote to the increasing influence of the Royal College, an influence seen in provincial festivals, in the preference given to RCM

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76 *MT*1897.11a  
77 *MS*1898.03.26  
78 *MS*1898.11.05  
79 *SR*1900.09.08  
80 *MO*1902.01  
81 *SR*1900.09.08. J.H.G. Baughan expressed surprise that being allowed to smoke made so much difference (*MS*1904.12.31).  
82 *MO*1900.10
protégés in appointments, and in the press, ‘especially the press of the monied classes’. But Baughan complained about the hackneyed repertoire, inevitable given the commercial environment and only alterable with support from rich amateur patrons – a forlorn hope, ‘for music is not yet a national need, and least of all so with the upper classes’. (He was right in one respect, for the rich amateur who later intervened to save the Proms did not hail from the English upper classes.) Baughan applauded what the Proms had done; however, making do with inadequate rehearsal time and an overworked orchestra, they were not of the highest class. He believed that the fact that a few other high-class concerts (Richter, Philharmonic, Queen’s Hall Symphony, London Festival) were more than enough for the huge London population did not say much for the state of music in the capital.

When Robert Newman’s concert business failed in July 1902, CT opined that there had been something inherently unsatisfactory about concert provision in London in that it did not satisfy the ‘cultured amateur’. Orchestral music was in demand but expensive to put on, and the public was not prepared to pay the necessary prices. The consequent monotonous programming did not appeal to cultured amateurs. But municipally supported music (such as the park bands instituted by the LCC) would not satisfy this special group either, unless the public as a whole became sufficiently well educated. So the group should act together, just as the Covent Garden syndicate had been formed to satisfy opera-goers. A step had already been taken: the Proms were to be continued by a limited company not primarily looking for a return on capital, and new works, including British works, were promised.

In 1903 the Academy critic claimed that in spite of the popularity of the Proms, the overall state of concert-going was not so healthy; after attending several poorly-supported concerts, he found little evidence for a widespread love of music. In an echo of views expressed several years earlier, he identified possible reasons for poor attendance – long journeys, poor weather, absurdly high prices for the better seats – but

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83 The reference is no doubt to the Times, and Fuller Maitland’s known partiality for Parry.
84 MS1900.12.29
85 The limited rehearsal time is noted in Poston: 406.
86 MO1902.09. The Proms were rescued by the banker Edgar Speyer, who provided a guarantee fund (Langley 2007: 61–2).
believed that more important was the fact that concert-going seemed to lack ‘social recognition’ because the upper classes enjoyed their music in private. Moreover there was ‘no recognised body of wealthy and influential music lovers, such as you may always find in any continental centre’.\textsuperscript{88} However, a writer in the \textit{Monthly Musical Record} saw poor attendance as caused by over-supply rather than low demand – by performers ‘elbowing each other in the race for popularity’.\textsuperscript{89} This remark suggests that some critics’ expectations of audience support were unrealistic.

The continuing popularity of the Proms can be gauged from the fact that hundreds had to be turned away from the first concert of the season in 1906.\textsuperscript{90} The reviewer of Rosa Newmarch’s book on Henry Wood described the conductor as having ‘worked a miraculous change upon the musical taste of London’.\textsuperscript{91} It was significant that Wood, rather than a composer, was the subject of the first book in a series on British musicians. In the book Newmarch claimed that the Proms had brought about a renaissance in English music by transferring interest from choral music and oratorio to secular orchestral music, a view that ran counter to the strongly held contemporary belief that the English genius was for choral music. Leanne Langley endorses this claim in her detailed account of the early history of the Proms.\textsuperscript{92} Langley also claims the Proms were successful in ‘levering the musical culture of Victorian Britain into modernity and classical music itself into a place of wide recognition on a par with literature, theatre and art’. They were ‘a subversion of prevailing concert practice that within ten years had totally changed the public perception of orchestral music in Britain’.\textsuperscript{93}

By 1907, the Proms were still being seen by critics as the surest sign of musical advance. According to the \textit{Nation}, other concerts were given for many reasons but

\textsuperscript{87} Ae1903.11.21a
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.: 569
\textsuperscript{89} MMR1903.12
\textsuperscript{90} Ath1906.08.25
\textsuperscript{91} Sp1904.11.26
\textsuperscript{92} Langley 2007a: 34–5. Langley’s account draws on what may be called ‘internal’ material – memoirs, letters, programmes and programme notes, etc., and makes only one reference to the contemporary press: a plaudit from the \textit{Daily Telegraph} (46).
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.: 71
seldom, except in the case of celebrated performers, because the public wanted them.\textsuperscript{94} The Proms, though, were ‘entirely an affair of the people’.\textsuperscript{95} Because of their reputation, Wood had been able to introduce new works and ‘the British composer is not treated at the Queen’s Hall as a musical pariah’ (the implication being that elsewhere he or she was). The Proms had also dissipated the arcane quasi-religious atmosphere surrounding music and had ‘opened a new sphere of delight for great numbers of fairly refined people’.

These ‘fairly refined’ people were belittled by Harold E. Gorst, who briefly replaced Runciman as \textit{Saturday Review} critic, as ‘the people in straw hats, who, accompanied by their womenkind, smoke pipes in the promenade at Queen’s Hall during the autumn months’.\textsuperscript{96} They were ‘representatives of a lower plane of polytechnic culture’.\textsuperscript{97} Their tastes, he claimed, were undeveloped: they applauded most vigorously the worst items in the programme, such as the longest top note, clearly regarded as an athletic achievement. But even the refined classes let Gorst down. When the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, which he considered the finest in existence, played in the Albert Hall in the presence of the King and in aid of a royally supported charity, the audience was disappointingly small: ‘pregnant evidence of the artistic desolation of English culture’.\textsuperscript{98} Gorst also noticed vacant seats at the orchestra’s Queen’s Hall concerts, where the audiences comprised foreigners of all nationalities, leading British musicians, and ‘a solid sprinkling of middle-class concert-goers from the suburbs, who appear to furnish the backbone of all musical enterprise in the benighted Metropolis’. Gorst found this situation shameful: ‘it is useless to pretend – as some people persistently do – that we are a musical nation. It was never impressed upon my mind so vividly as last week that we are at present, in the cultured bulk, a nation of Philistines of the first water’. A.E. Keeton noted that it had been estimated that out of the 4.5 million inhabitants of London, not more than 10,000 were regular concert- or opera-goers.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Na1907.08.10a}. Many recitals were put on to secure press notices for advertising purposes according to A.E. Keeton (\textit{MR1907.05}).
\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Na1907.08.10b}
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{SR1906.08.15a}
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{SR1906.11.10}
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{SR1906.07.07}
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{MR1906.11}
According to Stanley V. Makower, there was a gender imbalance in concert audiences, women outnumbering men by three to one. His observation, if accurate, casts an interesting light on the issue of support for concerts, and will be returned to in the concluding section of this chapter.

To sum up, contemporary commentators welcomed the fact that the Proms had made classical music popular amongst a segment of the London population, although in their praise they did not go so far as Langley, whose account – a contribution to a celebratory collection – is no doubt coloured by knowledge of the subsequent history of the institution. In other respects critics found the appearance of vigorous concert life deceptive; it was seen as reflecting commercial interests rather than a genuine appreciation of music. Outside the ten weeks Proms season, the lack of support given to high-class orchestral concerts was an indication to some critics that the appreciation of music had not advanced amongst the middle classes, whatever advances had been made elsewhere in, for example, the growth of choral societies and the provision of concerts in poor districts and in parks. Moreover, there was ‘no recognised body of wealthy and influential music lovers, such as you may always find in any continental centre’. Ehrlich’s pessimistic judgement about the 1890s was still accurate for many years afterwards: ‘the 1890s boom in London’s concert life lasted only a few years. A proliferation of orchestras and events competed for audiences that failed to materialise in sufficient numbers, and with enough regularity, to support music and musicians’. Although contemporaries acknowledged the success of the Proms, not all judged this success to be sufficient evidence that serious music had finally taken its proper place in the life of the nation: success was too partial, and too many indications of indifference outside the limited Proms season abounded.

Contemporary expressions of dissatisfaction do not chime with representations, by Langley and others, of this period as one of unquestionable advance in the appreciation of serious music. However, it could be argued that dissatisfied contemporary commentators set their expectations too high: that in London, at any rate, supply was

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100 Sp1906.12.08. W.W. Cobbett had made a similar observation ten years earlier (MN1896.04.25).
101 Ac1903.11.21b
bound to outrun demand and what had been achieved was as much as could be achieved under private enterprise. But these commentators saw the willingness to tolerate music’s remaining entirely in the commercial sphere as itself evidence that music had not achieved its proper place in public life.

5.2.2 Orchestral music in the provinces: calls for subsidy

Although in 1888 both in London and elsewhere the number of orchestral societies was growing, there was, with the single exception of Manchester, no professional orchestra outside London. At the 1891 conference of the National Society of Professional Musicians, George Riseley, a prominent conductor in Bristol, claimed that municipal support would be needed to establish the local music schools and orchestras needed to bring instrumental music in England up to the level of choral. However, calls for state or municipal aid did not pass unchallenged. Musical Opinion warned that State aid generally turned out expensive and wasteful. Riseley repeated his call at the next conference. Once again, Musical Opinion warned against public funding: local orchestras needed to be free of ‘the stultifying influences that frequently gather round state-aided projects’. A correspondent pointed out that the calls for subsidy were made not to advance art but to provide employment for professional musicians. The lack of orchestras was regarded by E.H. Turpin as the ‘leading musical question’, since the number of orchestras indicated a country’s musical status, and without them it was useless to expect ‘a great and commanding school of national composers’.

After further calls for municipal aid at the 1898 ISM Conference, Baughan questioned whether it would do any good, as those who directed state- or municipally-aided concerns had their own axes to grind. Musical Opinion reiterated the view that music

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103 MS1889.11.09. Manchester later benefited from the foundation of the not-for-profit Hallé Society in 1899 (Gunn 2000: 141).
104 MO1891.02b
105 MO1891.02a
106 By this time the organisation had become the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM).
107 MO1892.02a
108 MO1892.03
109 MN1893.03.11
110 MS1898.01.15, MO1898.02b
had to be self-supporting: rate support was theft and as such immoral. But the next ISM conference called for the municipal aid given to art and literature to be extended to music, enabling it to be ‘installed in its proper position as a teacher and revealer of the beautiful and an interpreter of the highest emotions of man’. The AMU, a musicians’ trade union, also called for municipal control, under the supervision of professionals, to free music from commercial pressure. By 1905, either as a result of public pressure or as a consequence of inter-resort rivalry, many municipalities were subsidising music by providing concerts and organ recitals free or at low prices, subsidising local societies, and supporting colleges or studentships. This development throws into relief the situation in London, where the over-supply owed much to the city’s commercial and capital status.

5.3 Opera

Subsidy was the key issue in the debate about opera. One motive driving efforts to establish a national opera house was to promote native operatic composition. This is the focus in Maria McHale’s study cited in the previous chapter (p. 122). Agitation for a national opera had a prehistory going back at least to the proposals that eventually led to the foundation of the Royal College: many musicians and critics called for an opera house, with associated training school, to be included in the proposed institution. But composition aside, another declared motive was to extend the appeal, appreciation and ethical power of opera by making it more widely accessible. This motive is the main focus here. The issue of subsidy – called for in order to free opera from the commercial nexus and open it up to people of moderate means – dominated this debate.

There were three kinds of opera provider in London: Covent Garden, visiting foreign companies, and visiting touring companies – such as the Carl Rosa – performing foreign and native works in English. Covent Garden was, until 1892, devoted to Italian Opera – i.e., opera, whatever its country of origin, performed in Italian, ‘one of the conventions

\[111 \text{ MO1898.03a} \]
\[112 \text{ MO1899.02} \]
\[113 \text{ MO1899.09c} \]
\[114 \text{ MH1905.05} \]
of fashionable life’. By patronising during its relatively short annual season mainly by the upper classes. Reviewing the 1888 season, Barclay Squire observed that Italian opera had experienced a remarkable, but inexplicable, revival. By contrast, the Carl Rosa Company had made a loss in the previous year and was not expected to return to London, so ‘the largest city in the world does not number sufficient lovers of high-class dramatic music to support a single opera sung in the language of the country’. Frost complained that the English aristocracy, unlike its European counterparts, was indifferent to national musical art.

The debate about the provision of opera during the period 1888–1907 was punctuated by a series of initiatives, each of which provoked arguments between supporters and opponents. Over time, the debate converged on a similar pattern of claim and counter-claim.

**1888: the Lord Mayor’s initiative**

The first initiative was in 1888, when the Lord Mayor of London convened a meeting to discuss the establishment of an institution for performing and teaching opera. Those attending included Mackenzie, Parry, Stanford, Grove and the celebrated artist Leighton; Sullivan expressed interest but was unable to attend. In the wake of the meeting, the *National Review* carried two articles, one against and one for the scheme. Both writers saw the main concern as the dominance of foreign music. In the event there was no result from the initiative.

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115 SR1888.05.12
116 SR1889.05.25. The growing popularity may have reflected a growing number of the newly rich taking up the fashions of the class they had joined.
117 MO1888.02b
118 Ath1891.02.07
119 Frederic (Lord) Leighton had a strong interest in music and in 1891 became the first President of the Royal Academy to invite representatives of music to its Annual Banquet. See Musgrave 1999; Gillett 1990: 214.
120 NR1888.09; NR1888.10
121 MO1889.02
1889–97: arguments for and against subsidy

In 1889 Shaw argued the case for a theatre in England modelled on Bayreuth, but one available for drama (such as Shakespeare) as well as opera.\(^{122}\) Shortly afterwards, Stainer, in his inaugural Oxford lecture, claimed that to be financially viable English opera needed a national opera house, but not one exclusively for English works, and that only subsidy – such as was given to art galleries – would protect it against bankruptcy.\(^{123}\) For Shaw the case for a state opera was strengthened by the 1890 autumn season, where private enterprise had failed to reach a high standard; he called on critics and musicians to persuade the public that public opera houses were just as reasonable as public art galleries and museums.\(^{124}\) Robin H. Legge, assistant music critic at the *Times*, thought the public’s reaction to a proposed state subsidy would be a fair test of English musicality.\(^{125}\) However, with the opening of D’Oyly Carte’s Royal English Opera House in 1891, it looked to some critics as if private enterprise had provided what was needed. When the venture folded, Shaw attributed its failure mainly to the absence of a sufficiently large clientele for high class works with their inevitably high costs.\(^{126}\)

The case for subsidy weakened when operatic enterprises succeeded. In 1893, according to the *Musical Standard*, opera was becoming ‘quite a favourite form of amusement with our proverbially unmusical nation’.\(^{127}\) The critic ‘Tritone’ was gratified to see that opera was holding its own against the ‘meretricious attractions’ of music-hall.\(^{128}\) Following a well-attended and well-received series of operas in English in 1894, the *Saturday Review* described opera as ‘an entertainment people like best, and for which they are willing to pay most’.\(^{129}\)

Baughan thought State aid for opera in England was an impossibility, because music was regarded as a luxury, albeit an artistic one.\(^{130}\) This view was rejected by A.W.

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\(^{122}\) *SM1*: 789–806
\(^{123}\) *SM1* 1890.01.18a
\(^{124}\) *SM1*: 215
\(^{125}\) *MO* 1891.03b
\(^{126}\) *SM1*: 538
\(^{127}\) *SM1* 1893.04.15
\(^{128}\) *MO* 1893.07b. See also below, §5.4.
\(^{129}\) *SR* 1894.04.07
\(^{130}\) *SM1*: 1894.05.19
Hutton, who put the classic case for subsidy: opera was not a luxury, but a means of raising public taste and influencing the national character for good.\textsuperscript{131} He proposed that the State should pay for the building of an opera house, but the LCC should maintain it, letting it out so as to ensure a lengthy season of the best works. Although Hutton made clear that he was not especially concerned to foster native opera, J.F. Rowbotham poured scorn on the idea of state subsidy, assuming that the intention was to underwrite English opera, which had proved a dismal failure and did not deserve State aid.\textsuperscript{132} The \textit{Musical Times} sided with Hutton. Without a national opera house in London and municipally subsidised opera houses in other cities, it argued, England would never be a truly musical nation; opponents like Rowbotham treated opera as entertainment, whereas it ought to be regarded as educational. However, the writer believed that what was needed in the first instance was not a building but a truly great English opera.\textsuperscript{133}

As with concerts, critics saw the repertoire as vitiated by the conflict between art and commerce. Shedlock noted that the combination of high expenses and a very short season meant that art could not be put before commerce without subsidy; however, the minority interested in opera were satisfied with the status quo and politicians saw the stage only as amusement.\textsuperscript{134} R.A. Streatfeild hoped for a rich backer – a musical Tate.\textsuperscript{135} Joseph Bennett thought expanding the audience was a vain hope, as the English were indifferent to grand opera.\textsuperscript{136} (Clearly Bennett did not value the efforts of the touring companies that kept opera alive in the provinces.)

\textbf{1898: petitioning the LCC}

The financial success of the short Covent Garden season could not be denied, but critics questioned its artistic success and its restriction to the wealthy. A second initiative took the form of a petition presented to the LCC in 1898, complaining that the richest city in the world was unable to make the best opera accessible to the great mass of people, and calling for, if necessary, a financial contribution towards maintaining an opera house.

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{CR}1895.07  
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{NC}1895.07  
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{MT}1895.08  
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Ac}1897.07.24  
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Mu}1897.09.01. Tate, the sugar merchant, had funded what became the Tate Gallery.
The signatories included eminent persons from the worlds of music, art, drama, literature and politics. Fuller Maitland brought composition into the picture, holding that one aim should be to encourage ‘the school of British composers […] to which the revival of musical culture in this country is mainly due’. (He was alone in claiming advances in English composition as the engine of the growth of interest in music.)

The proposal received little support from other critics. Baughan regarded Fuller Maitland’s suggestion of funding opera through a small rate rise as highly unlikely, as there were still parishes that refused to provide free libraries. Rich backers were also unlikely to come forward, being more interested in racehorses or in endowing libraries. But after a Ring cycle at Covent Garden had drawn attention to the building’s inadequacies, Baughan accepted that only a subsidised permanent opera would realise artistic objectives; however, he favoured private subscription over state subsidy, as the latter often involved mismanagement and endless controversy. The Spectator strongly objected to the petition to the LCC and accused the council of a tendency to profligacy, as its rebuilding schemes had shown. The Speaker was also sceptical, observing that the recent success of opera was due to Wagner, and the great mass of people would need an immense amount of musical education before ‘they deserve to have Wagner’s operas played before them at a musically-minded municipality’s expense’. The writer thought Wagner’s works were the only ones of sufficient quality to be worth even considering, and he rejected the argument that England would never get ‘a Wagner of our own’ without subsidy: ‘we think we ought to get our genius first […] not till then, will English people pay rates for its support’. Runciman dismissed the petition in characteristically derisory fashion as having emanated from ‘a number of gentlemen with unsuccessful operas to revive […] we do not want to hear school exercises sung by professors’ pupils in a National Opera-house’.

136 MT1897.07
137 MT1898.07.
138 NC1898.06
139 MS1898.06.11
140 MS1898.06.18. Similar views were expressed in MN1898.07.02, MO1898.08a.
141 MO1898.08b
142 Sp1898.06.25
143 SR1898.07.30
Shortly afterwards, Baughan reported that Stockholm, with a population of only 275,000, had built a new opera house costing £320,000: ‘in the meantime, we make ourselves ridiculous by asking a municipal council to vote a paltry £15,000 a year’.\footnote{MS1898.10.01b}

\textbf{1898: a subscription scheme}

As it happened, a third initiative was taking place at the time: the impresario Alfred Schulz-Curtius was attempting to start a subscription scheme, with a view to building a Wagner-type theatre on Richmond Hill.\footnote{Ath1898.08.20} Nothing, however, came of the idea.

\textbf{1899: Stanford’s scheme}

Early the following year, a fourth initiative was embarked on: Stanford wrote to the \textit{Times} advocating the establishment of a national opera – ‘an essential factor in the refinement and cultivation of the people’ – whether or not supported by the LCC.\footnote{MO1899.04a} He believed that public-spirited individuals could raise the money and that the authorities would then release a suitable site. J.E. Borland agreed with Stanford’s appeal to private generosity, as public subsidy would benefit only the middle and upper classes.

Stanford’s letter, together with a similar expression of support from Mackenzie, drew a response from a correspondent to the \textit{Times} who took it for granted that the aim was the to promote English opera composition. He argued against subsidy: it protected undertakings that could succeed by themselves if efficiently managed. English opera was unable to pay its way because ‘English opera worthy the name does not exist’.\footnote{MO1899.05b} But another commentator, Annie W. Patterson, saw a vicious circle: English composers would not write operas unless there was a theatre willing to stage them.\footnote{MO1899.06} F.B. Money Coutts argued that a flourishing English school of opera could only come about if Government support enabled the commercial motive to be put aside.\footnote{MO1899.06} Runciman agreed that Britain should have an opera of its own; the question was whether the
starting point should be composers or buildings. But the first step was to stimulate a
desire for opera, and here touring companies were doing a useful job.\textsuperscript{150} Here the
Speaker agreed, observing that their success told against Stanford’s contention that
English opera could be expected to make a loss of £25,000 over a five-year period.\textsuperscript{151}

After all this debate, the LCC made its response: it was unable to erect or subsidise an
opera house, but was open to proposals for a possible site and would consider further
contributions were State and private money to be forthcoming first.\textsuperscript{152} The \textit{Musical
Times} commented wryly that ‘the project now awaits the advent of the necessary
millionaire.’\textsuperscript{153} However, the lukewarm LCC report was hailed as a ‘generous offer’ by
the signatories of a manifesto, who included Cowen, German, MacCunn, Parry and
Stanford; they called upon the public to rally to the cause. Edward Speyer (a cousin of
Edgar Speyer, who later rescued the Proms) suggested forming a limited liability
company, but insisted that the director should not be a professional musician.\textsuperscript{154}
Baughan welcomed the latter suggestion, which would make it impossible for musicians
to promote their own protégés. He also wanted an assurance that none of the failed
works of the composers who had signed the manifesto would go into the repertoire.\textsuperscript{155}
Runciman felt that the petitioners – an ‘academic clique’ – had gained little from the
LCC and what the manifesto offered was a ‘municipal-cum-academic hole and corner
kind of opera’. He wanted a genuine national opera, for the performance of all the
masterpieces in their original languages by the best available artists, and thought it
should be a national Government initiative.\textsuperscript{156} Returning later after five months in
France and Belgium, Runciman observed that opera-going was a habit abroad, just as
play-going was in England. This habit was what was needed to make opera viable; the
role of subsidy was exaggerated – paying audiences were the key to success.\textsuperscript{157}
Runciman had found municipally supported opera in Rouen shot through with bribery,
with artistic matters being left to the caprice of an ignorant public. This led him to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Sp1899.04.22}
\footnote{SR1899.04.11}
\footnote{Sp1899.04.01}
\footnote{MS1899.05.20}
\footnote{MT1899.06}
\footnote{Ti1899.05.27. H.A. Scott welcomed the suggestions (\textit{Ou}1899.06.03).}
\footnote{MS1899.08.05}
\footnote{SR1899.06.10}
\footnote{SR1900.12.22}
\end{footnotes}
demand that the management of an English national opera must be free from both local
government and public interference; it should be run by an autocrat and the public ‘must
hear what it is given until it learns to like the best’.158

1902: Lord Dysart’s scheme

Stanford’s plea led nowhere. The next move was made in 1902 by Lord Dysart, who
called for a theatre with a high proportion of moderately priced seats. Reckoning that
£500,000 would be needed, he offered a contribution of £10,000.159 Baughan observed
that no grand opera scheme could survive on reduced prices, unless ‘stars’ were
dropped or engaged at lower fees.160 Both Stanford and Mackenzie reacted negatively to
Dysart’s proposal, thinking that something more modest was both preferable and more
practical. CT thought the chances of raising Dysart’s amount were remote and preferred
Stanford’s lower-cost suggestion. CT believed that the most important reason for a
permanent English opera was its influence on the direction of English music: it would
give gifted musicians a way of avoiding ‘the grave of English music, – the organ loft
and the church’.161 (This was a bold thing to write in a magazine that included very
many church organists in its readership: ‘organ news’ was a regular feature.)

1902–3: W.J. Galloway’s proposal

Both Baughan and CT were impressed by the success of the Moody-Manners
company’s season at Covent Garden in the autumn of 1902. For CT the success showed
that there was an audience for opera in English; Baughan, who had reservations about
translations of foreign opera, saw proof of an audience for cheap opera, but not
especially in English.162 The successful season convinced the editor of the Musical
News that there was no need for municipal subsidy: private enterprise had shown that it
could do the job.163 However, this was not the view of an M.P., W.J. Galloway, who
was responsible for the next initiative, publishing a booklet arguing for subsidised opera

158 SR1901.11.23
159 MS1902.01.11
160 Ibid.
161 MO1902.02
162 MS1902.08.30, MS1902.09.06, MO1902.08
and later raising the question in Parliament. Galloway based his argument on the practice in Italy, France and Germany. *Musical Opinion* was certain that a similar practice would be unacceptable in England, where people uninterested in opera would not be prepared to subsidise those who were.\(^{164}\) Baughan restated his own opposition on the grounds that State subsidy implied interference.\(^{165}\) Runciman, however, thought Galloway’s proposal was the only way forward: ‘not the least of its merits is that it would at any rate keep out the Academic gang’.\(^{166}\) Galloway had proposed that a London opera house be overseen by the Education Department. Shedlock agreed that the educational aspect needed constant emphasis, as public support would not be given to subsidising amusement, but ‘once the idea gains ground that a well-conducted opera house may by noble music refine, and by works of high ethical purpose elevate, the masses, then the “operatic problem”, if not solved, will be well on the high road to solution’.\(^{167}\)

Galloway’s efforts led Parliament in 1903 to commission a report on the provision of subsidised music abroad and the results were later published in a White Paper. Most of the information related to opera and showed Great Britain to be an exception. CT noted that in most cases abroad it was a condition of support that new works be introduced and that native composers should get a hearing; he thought both conditions essential, and enough to warrant subsidy.\(^{168}\) The case against subsidy was put again in a substantial article by H.A. Scott in the *Nineteenth Century* but added nothing new to the debate.\(^{169}\) However, the White Paper persuaded J.H.G. Baughan that subsidy was justified as a means of encouraging native talent and making opera accessible to the poorest.\(^{170}\) But the most important aim was to stimulate demand by raising public taste – the suppliers would then respond, ‘and then, let us hope, the British Wagner will be forthcoming, too’.\(^{171}\)
Advocates of subsidy emphasised the educational advantage of making opera available to people otherwise unable to afford it. This entailed the claim that there existed, or would in time exist, works of ‘high ethical purpose’. But advocates were largely silent when it came to citing examples – Wagner was practically the only candidate put forward and not all critics agreed about the most obvious instance, Parsifal, which was in any case unavailable outside Bayreuth. Some critics argued that a subsidised institution, able to put art above commerce, would provide the native opera composer with opportunities hitherto lacking; but new English operas of ‘high ethical purpose’ – composed by a ‘British Wagner’ – were generally regarded as a pipedream, given the record of failure in English opera. Those who already regarded the ‘Royal College set’ as over-influential did not want it to be given another field of activity. But in any case, so long as advocates were unable to alter the public perception of opera as an expensive form of entertainment for the better off, subsidy was a vain hope. Critics regretted that the most popular works in the repertoire of touring companies were of little artistic worth, but the public that enjoyed them was not likely to take to serious native works, by composers freed by subsidy from the need to have sufficient appeal to break even financially.

5.4 English music: demand and supply

From very early in the nineteenth century two persistent issues can be traced through the commentary on music: first, the question as to whether England was a musical nation, and second, the public neglect of native composers. A fashion for the foreign was frequently invoked to explain the second, although the neglect was also attributed to the poor quality of the music itself, in which case improvement should lead growing public favour. Critics were much concerned about the public attitude to native music and continued to be so throughout the period of this study. However, in their accounts of the EMR, neither Hughes, nor Hughes and Stradling, have much to say about the public, as opposed to the critical, reception of native composition. It is, admittedly, difficult to obtain direct information about audience opinion. As Musgrave reports, the Crystal Palace held a plebiscite in 1880, when the most popular works were by

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172 See above, p. 33.
173 These are the main outcomes of the ‘prehistory’ referred to in chapter 1 (p. 21).
Beethoven, Mendelssohn and other established composers of the past; but this is reported as a strategy to guide programme planning rather than as an indicator of the relative popularity of foreign and native works. Nevertheless, if the RCM was partly set up to be a powerhouse of composition, it is surprising that so little attention was given to the means by which the ‘national music’ would be disseminated. Hughes and Stradling report that the RCM composers detested the provincial festivals and their demand for oratorios, but no alternative strategy is indicated. Their account makes no mention of the Crystal Palace concerts, which had provided the main outlet for new native orchestral music and continued to do so for some years into the period. However, critical acclaim for the works performed there was not necessarily reflected in public approbation. The *Musical Times*, reporting on a Crystal Palace concert that included Stanford’s ‘Irish’ Symphony and Sullivan’s *The Golden Legend*, observed that ‘the audience came to hear *The Golden Legend* and regarded the orchestral piece as a convenient thing *pour passer le temps* while everybody settled down’.

The provincial festivals launched most new English works. As an institution, the festivals provoked much comment from critics: this is examined in §5.4.1. The four subsequent sections examine the commentary on the supply of English music and its public reception during each of the five-year periods between 1888 and 1907. A brief overview follows in §5.4.6. (For the reasons given in chapter 1, chamber music has not been included. In any case the Popular Concerts, which mixed song and instrumental recitals with quartets, etc. – were given over almost entirely to the ‘classical’ repertoire.)

### 5.4.1 Provincial festivals

The history of the provincial festivals has been studied by Pippa Drummond, whose account is written very much from the inside, to support the claim that they were the most significant provincial cultural events of the nineteenth century. Although she

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175 *MT* 1887.11
176 Drummond 2011: 1. One presumes that the term ‘cultural’ is used here in a narrow sense to refer to ‘high (i.e. upper middle class) culture’, as the events were too expensive for others to attend.
summarises the critical response to works and performances, she makes very little reference to contemporary views about the institution itself; this failure to acknowledge contemporary reservations skews the depiction of the festivals. The major festivals, with their introduction of new works, might appear to be solid testimony to England’s musicality; however, some critics saw in them evidence of the exact opposite: one of their major objectives being to raise money for charities, the festivals showed that music was not regarded as sufficiently important in itself. As Shaw remarked of the Norwich Festival in 1893, ‘art, being a beggar in England, is to be robbed of her casual earnings to save rich East Anglians from supporting their local charities’. 177

Oratorio represented the ideal genre for festivals. Whereas works like Bach’s cantatas and Passions and Haydn’s Masses had been church music, Handel had established the practice of performing oratorio in secular venues, where the audience paid for their seats. So oratorio, with its ‘sacred’ text, combined respectability with commerce. The high ticket prices, as Drummond notes, restricted attendance to the upper and higher middle classes, but this enabled the financial objective to be achieved. 178 There was some movement towards lowering prices, but many performances remained too expensive for the lower classes well into the 1900s. 179

The established favourite works attracted the highest numbers. At Birmingham, audiences had been falling steadily since 1873, with only one exception in 1882. 180 In 1888, Elijah (first performed there in 1846) still drew the greatest number. The Athenæum noted sadly that ‘it says little for the intelligence of the Birmingham public that fewer than four hundred seats were allotted at the ballot for a performance of the noblest and most beautiful work by any living composer [Dvořák’s Stabat Mater]’. 181

The Speaker critic saw the provincial festivals as the engine-house of English music: the attendance of the Prince of Wales at the 1895 Leeds Festival prompted the remark that

177 SM2: 939. Drummond suggests that Shaw’s remark was one factor that led the organisers to downplay the philanthropic role and become more adventurous in their programming (142).
178 Drummond 2011: 199
179 Ibid.: 260
180 Ath1888.09.01. Drummond makes no mention of this decline, observing only that receipts remained constant throughout the 1870s and 1880s (199).
181 Ibid.
‘if anything is to be done for English music it must be sought where alone it is to be
found – at our great provincial festivals’. Yet, as he noted, the most successful
oratorio composer [Mackenzie] had decided not to write for any festival again, and he
regarded the unwillingness of festivals to pay for commissioned works as symptomatic
of the low esteem in which music was held in England.

Runciman’s remarks about the 1897 Birmingham Festival – ‘a gigantic fraud’ – echoed
Shaw’s about Norwich. Runciman castigated the festivals as the main obstacle to the
progress of music in England. The chief object being to raise money, music came off
badly: standard works, little payment to composers for new and largely inferior
cantatas, inadequate rehearsal time, and little encouragement for local talent, as
orchestras, conductors and star performers were brought from London. This view was
strongly contested by B.W. Findon, who noted the large sums spent on music and the
rivalry that fostered high standards of performance. Far from suppressing local talent, a
festival like that of Leeds was the centre of a thriving musical life in the surrounding
area, where many choral societies flourished. After attending the 1899 festivals at
Worcester, Norwich and Sheffield, Findon was forced to admit that they did not quite
live up his portrayal; in fact Worcester justified Runciman’s criticisms because of
clerical influence, an inexperienced conductor and a poorly trained, undisciplined
chorus. But although neither Norwich nor Sheffield introduced important new works
they were both in his view highly satisfactory.

Ernest Newman, writing in 1903, believed that the festivals, as then organised, were
unable to advance England musically. An ideal festival should include new works of
such high quality that only a festival committee could afford them, together with first-
rate old works that needed a magnificent choir and orchestra. At the recent Birmingham
Festival only The Apostles was in the first category and only the B minor Mass and

182 Sp1895.08.17
183 Drummond, however, claims that festival commissions were lucrative, with fees of 100–300
      guineas offered (223). She makes no mention of Mackenzie’s decision.
184 SR1897.10.09. Runciman had made similar remarks about the Gloucester Festival
      (MMR1895.10).
185 Ch1899.05
186 Ch1899.09
187 Ch1899.12
188 Sp1903.06.24
Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in the second; most of the festival amounted to ‘an ordinary concert at preposterous prices’. However, improvement necessitated higher spending, which conflicted with the objective of raising money for charities. The only solution was to set up a festival unlinked to a charity, with fewer and shorter concerts and any profit being devoted to the next festival.

The critic of the *Nation*, writing about the Leeds Festival of 1907, praised the organisers for including new work in spite of the fact that they ‘do not draw the Philistine musical public like the old ones, and the Philistines’ money is necessary if these gigantic Festivals are to go on’.\(^{189}\) The festivals were becoming more and more expensive to run, and the ticket prices were so high that large numbers of musical people were kept out. One of the highest costs was that of transporting an orchestra from London; only if there were a sufficiently good permanent local orchestra would this situation be improved. But, as has already been noted, the lack of such orchestras was a frequent cause of complaint.

### 5.4.2 1888–92

Barclay Squire succinctly stated a fundamental problem facing English composers: observing that the old works at the 1888 Hereford Festival were more interesting than the new, he noted a situation ‘inevitable when a few English composers of our own time are matched against the great masters of all Europe during the last century and a half’.\(^{190}\)

New or unfamiliar works at festivals attracted small audiences.\(^{191}\) At the premiere of *Judith* in 1888 the *Musical Times* observed that ‘the Birmingham public seemed to feel no more than a mild curiosity’.\(^{192}\) Two years later *Judith* was the most important

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\(^{189}\) *Na*1907.10.19  
\(^{190}\) *SR*1888.09.29  
\(^{191}\) Paul Rodmell’s assertion that the festivals had an ‘insatiable thirst for novelty’ needs qualification. It did not apply to audiences, but organisers were aware that London-based critics, whose notices were of value, were attracted by novelties (Rodmell 2002: 114–5).  
\(^{192}\) *MT*1888.10b
unfamiliar work at the Bristol Festival, where it attracted the smallest audience.\textsuperscript{193} The 1891 Birmingham Festival, at which Stanford’s \textit{Eden} appeared, showed a similar pattern. The takings for the choral concerts were as follows: \textit{Elijah} £1605; \textit{Messiah} £1432; Dvořák \textit{Requiem} £1352; \textit{St Matthew Passion} £1125; Berlioz \textit{Faust} £1101; Stanford \textit{Eden} £761.\textsuperscript{194} However, although the festivals were important in the English musical economy, they had unusual features. The programme was like one huge concert where people could pick and choose which items to attend. Moreover, the audience was not representative of music-lovers in general, as seats were expensive and most concerts were given on weekday mornings and afternoons.

Commentators continued to complain, as they had done over many decades, that concert-givers neglected native music. State Concerts were a particular cause of concern, because distinguished foreigners witnessed a disregard for native composition at the highest level in the land.\textsuperscript{195} Further information about the treatment of English and foreign composers is yielded by the seasonal programmes of the Royal Choral Society (RCS), which often included works first given at festivals. The repertoire chiefly consisted of familiar, and very popular, works of the past; the gap of only two or three weeks between concerts limited preparation time for new works. However, a particularly successful new work would be repeated. Works by living English composers outnumbered those by living foreign composers during the five seasons from 1888–9 to 1892–3, but more foreign works were repeated. The only repeated English work was \textit{The Golden Legend}, which, along with Gounod’s \textit{Redemption} was performed in every one of the five seasons. Across the country \textit{The Golden Legend} was so popular that, as the \textit{Athenæum} observed, it had become as indispensable in a festival programme as \textit{Messiah} or \textit{Elijah}.\textsuperscript{196} (It drew the only full attendance at the Bristol Festival where \textit{Judith} drew the smallest.)\textsuperscript{197}

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Ath}1890.11.01, \textit{MO}1890.12. \textit{Judith} fared better at Southport two years later (\textit{MN}1892.03.25).
\textsuperscript{194} \textit{MO}1891.11
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{MS}1889.06.08, \textit{MS}1889.07.06b, \textit{MN}1892.07.08
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ath}1888.10.27. The RCS performed it as late as 1918; it remained in the repertoire of local societies for several years after that (\textit{MT}1918.12).
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ath}1890.11.01
The three principal providers of orchestral music in central London were the Philharmonic Society (seven concerts a year), Richter (six) and Henschel (six). English works were rare in all three, although Richter commissioned Parry’s Fourth Symphony, and Henschel premiered Cowen’s Fifth. As an English institution, the Philharmonic came in for more criticism than the others. The *Athenæum* critic expressed disappointment about the neglect of English composition in its 1888 season. But he felt that concert-givers were not wholly to blame, because ‘the public is repelled rather than attracted by the announcement of an important new instrumental work from an English pen’. Here lay the nub of the problem: English works put the public off and their inclusion spelt financial loss to the concert-giver.

However, not all critics found cause for complaint at the meagre supply of native music. In 1890 J.B.K., noting that the Philharmonic had been criticised for including too many new foreign works, argued that the society owed its revived success to the appeal of Grieg, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky and others. He hoped the society would continue to be open-minded. Shedlock agreed, believing the competition beneficial to the progress of English composition. The overall record for the Philharmonic Society for 1888–92 shows that in a total of thirty-six concerts, orchestral works by living English composers were performed on eighteen occasions, and foreign thirty-one. It is impossible to say what proportion of English works would have been acceptable to critics, especially as the foreign works came from several different countries. Of English composers, Mackenzie and Sullivan were the most frequently performed; of foreign, Bruch, Grieg and Rubinstein.

New native works frequently appeared at the Crystal Palace, and the Westminster Orchestral Society – a largely amateur orchestra – also included them. But the appearance of an English work – or any new work – at one of the Popular Concerts of chamber music was rare. The lack of English works in Hallé’s concerts in

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198 *Ath*1888.06.23  
199 *MO*1890.07  
200 *Ac*1890.04.05  
201 Information obtained from Birket Foster 1912  
202 *MO*1888.02a
Manchester in 1888 sparked correspondence in the local press. Speakers at the National Society of Professional Musicians (NSPM) Conference in 1891 complained that native composers were discouraged from writing orchestral music. The *Musical Standard* suggested setting up a society to encourage English composition, on the lines of the Independent Theatre. As noted above, similar enterprises had been embarked on during the previous fifty years, with little success. Nothing came of the suggestion.

### 5.4.3 1893–7

The supply side – the inclusion of native works in concerts – appears to have improved during this period. The provincial festivals remained the chief venues for new native works, orchestral and choral. A writer in the *New Musical Quarterly Review* in 1895 expressed concern that commissions for large scale works at festivals were being confined to a small group of established composers; he called on festival committees to help the cause of English composition by commissioning works from younger composers. (Bantock, the editor of this journal, had an obvious interest here.) However, composers were increasingly reluctant to spend a considerable amount of time and effort with little or no remuneration.

An enthusiastic critical reception at a festival might secure a few further performances of a new native work, but it was no guarantee of a longer-term future. Stanford’s *Requiem*, for example, appeared first at the 1897 Birmingham Festival to great acclaim. Two further performances (plus a student performance), all under the composer’s baton, took place during the next nine months, but from then on only the occasional extract appeared in concert programmes.

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203 MO1888.12
204 MS1892.12.24
205 NQMR1895.11a
206 MO1897.01a. In 1899 Elgar refused to supply the Worcester Festival with a symphony for £100 (MO1900.11).
207 That some of Parry’s works were repeated at other festivals was taken as a sign of the composer’s superiority by Violet (Maxse) Milner, a sister of the *National Review* editor who knew Parry well (NR1894.02).
In December 1896 Bantock organised a concert of music by himself and other young composers at which a manifesto was issued complaining about the lack of opportunities for native composers to get their works performed. This manifesto was widely criticised. Frost observed that the positive reception of Sullivan, Mackenzie, Parry and others showed that the public were prepared to recognise British music when it was good.\textsuperscript{208} Borland pointed out that the manifesto ignored Manns’s efforts at the Crystal Palace. Baughan thought that although it went too far there was some truth in it: English operas had been accepted at Covent Garden only when there was some financial backing, and an orchestral work might get a first performance but the composer got no reward unless it was repeated – something that rarely happened, even though ‘second-rate stuff by a Goldmark, Dvořák or Richard Strauss figures \textit{ad nauseam} on our programmes’.\textsuperscript{209}

New works brought inevitable financial loss to the RCS and other choral societies, which relied on ‘dog-eared favourites’ to refill the coffers.\textsuperscript{210} Of the fifty-five works performed by the RCS over the five seasons from 1893–4 to 1897–8, only six were recently composed – four English and two foreign.\textsuperscript{211} Critics had less reason to complain about the Philharmonic Society. J.B.K., who was probably German, observed that a Philharmonic concert in 1893 included sufficient English music to satisfy ‘the most fervent musical patriot’.\textsuperscript{212} During the period 1892–7, orchestral works by fourteen living English composers were performed; of these, Mackenzie (the conductor) was most frequently represented, with Sullivan a close second. The \textit{Musical Times} noted with satisfaction that the society’s 1897 season (which was extended to ten concerts instead of the usual seven) included eight new native works and only one foreign and interpreted this as a welcome response to the manifesto referred to above.\textsuperscript{213} The same number of new English works appeared in Proms season that year; Frost remarked that the ‘younger school’ could not complain of being neglected.\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{208} \textit{Ath}1897.02.13
\textsuperscript{209} \textit{MS}1896.12.26
\textsuperscript{210} \textit{MS}1895.09.14a
\textsuperscript{211} These figures exclude an occasional piece composed by the conductor. \textit{The Golden Legend} appeared in every season.
\textsuperscript{212} \textit{MO}1893.05
\textsuperscript{213} \textit{MT}1897.02
\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Ath}1897.08.14
Audiences at the festivals continued to be satisfied with the established repertoire.\textsuperscript{215} King Saul, for example, attracted the smallest audience of any of the morning concerts at Birmingham in 1894.\textsuperscript{216} The relative unpopularity of English works was also demonstrated at a Crystal Palace concert in 1895 put on to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the concerts and given over entirely to native works; the \textit{Musical Standard} complained about lack of patriotism, as the concert room was barely half full.\textsuperscript{217} J.B.K. observed that public dislike of native works persisted in spite of the promotional efforts of ultra-patriotic elements in the press. He regarded these efforts as undermining the true interests of the art, as most native works were ‘devoid of every particle of spontaneity, individuality, or style’ and displaced far better music, old and new.\textsuperscript{218}

The lack of recognition of native music by the authorities rankled with musicians. One of the events marking Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897 was a meeting of Imperial premiers in London. The opportunity to showcase English music was denied to English musicians, who complained when a Hungarian band was engaged.\textsuperscript{219}

\textbf{5.4.4 1898–1902}

Complaints about the neglect of native composers, which had abated somewhat during the preceding five years, now began to flare up again and then persisted. A writer in the \textit{Daily Chronicle} observed that although music had become increasingly popular throughout society, the popularity did not extend to British compositions.\textsuperscript{220} Another critic estimated the ratio of foreign to British works in orchestral concerts as thirty to one (and even higher if a current series of Wagner concerts were included).\textsuperscript{221} The demand for orchestral music – stimulated and supplied by the Newman-Wood partnership – had grown in recent years and it was galling to advocates of native composition to see so little of it in the greatly increased provision of orchestral music.

\textsuperscript{215} MO1897.02
\textsuperscript{216} MS1894.10.13
\textsuperscript{217} MS1895.10.26
\textsuperscript{218} MO1895.11a
\textsuperscript{219} MS1897.08.07
\textsuperscript{220} MO1898.03b
\textsuperscript{221} Ou1898.11.12
Wood indicated that he would like to include a native work in each concert, were audiences willing to take as much interest in them as in foreign works. Baughan thought this aim unwise: in his view the public’s coldness was justified, as it could not be claimed that Stanford, Mackenzie and Parry were the equals of Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky or Wagner; moreover, the public regarded nationalism as irrelevant. However, he thought it strange that audiences responded to lesser composers like Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov and the rest of the Russian school, who were picturesque but not much else, but rejected works by the younger school of British composers.²²²

Wood was criticised in the *Musical Times* in December 1898 for his lack of sympathy with English compositions.²²³ A month later there appeared a substantial article entitled ‘Lost! British Music at the Queen’s Hall’, prompted by the performance there of a programme of German, French and Russian music that had just been given before the Queen at Windsor.²²⁴ The writer conceded that most British composers were unable to use the orchestra in the exciting way demanded by audiences, but claimed that the scoring of many foreign, especially Russian, novelties masked poverty of content. The article amounted to no more than a confused diatribe in which blame moved from the shortcomings of composers, through lack of patriotism amongst concert-givers, to an evil conspiracy thwarting the recognition of ‘budding native art’; the last mentioned phrase shows that native composition – at least in the orchestral field – was still seen as a new growth struggling to survive.

In January 1899 a spate of articles appeared in the daily press about the lack of encouragement given to English composers.²²⁵ The *Standard* echoed the suggestion that British composers needed to master modern orchestration; it also called for greater recognition of native music in ‘high quarters’. But the problem, according to the *Musical Times*, lay solely with Newman and Wood, with their ‘craze’ for Russian music. (One critic had suggested renaming the Queen’s Hall the ‘Tsar’s Hall’.²²⁶) Baughan, too, entered the debate: he felt compelled to admit that although the works of

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²²² *MS*1898.09.03  
²²³ *MT*1898.12a. A similar complaint was made in *Ath*1898.11.05.  
²²⁴ *MT*1899.01  
²²⁵ *MN*1899.01.21, *MT*1899.02  
²²⁶ Elkin 1944: 29
such as Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov were not great works, ‘this music is alive, and
that cannot be said of the compositions of many British composers’.227 Baughan thought
that barely five British orchestral works merited repeated performance, including
Stanford’s symphony L’Allegro ed il Pensieroso ‘perhaps the finest example of British
symphony writing’. His view was that the recent renaissance (by which he meant the
post-Parry renaissance) had not had time to produce anything very considerable and the
public’s idea of English music was based on the dry, dull academic music of the older
composers. In effect he was saying that the so-called ‘leaders of the renaissance’ had
queered the pitch for their successors. Soon afterwards, however, Baughan was pleased
to report that several native works would appear in the forthcoming Philharmonic
season.228 Robert Newman’s London Festival of six concerts in May 1899 included six
British works.229 Moreover, the 1899 Proms season also included some new native
works, although the Queen’s Hall symphony concert series that followed it included no
British compositions and was very largely devoted to Russian works. Baughan
recognised that this was in response to public demand.230

‘Common Time’ (CT) put his finger on a fundamental flaw in the whole debate about
‘English characteristics’ which went back at least as far as F. Gilbert Webb’s racial
essentialism (above, p. 145). He asked why English audiences had such a liking for
Russian music when it might be expected that the music of English composers, who
shared the same temperament, would be more to their taste.231 His answer was that
Russian composers were expert at expressing mood, using the different sounds of the
modern orchestra for this purpose, whereas English composers aimed at ‘coherence,
balance, restraint of emotion, and a love of architectural form’ – qualities not found in
Russian music, but qualities that had least appeal for the public.232 Moreover, it was not
architectural form that explained the greatness of the works of Bach, Beethoven or
Brahms but the quality of inspiration, and this was where native composers had failed:
‘we have attempted to say great things without having the great things to say’. The
Russians did not try to say great things: they were content to express ever-changing

227 MS1899.01.14
228 MS1899.01.28
229 Ath1899.05.13, Ath1899.05.20
230 MS1899.10.28
231 MO1899.05a
moods and the audience found their works infinitely more attractive. Nevertheless, CT thought the Russian vein would soon be fully mined and there were signs that younger composers such as Elgar were moving away from the ‘unemotional style of our older composers’. He gave Elgar’s Caractacus as an example and felt that if such works continued to appear, then ‘the much abused public would be glad enough to hear them’. But, as it happened, even a new work as enthusiastically trailed as Gerontius was less of an attraction than more established works: Messiah and Hiawatha drew the largest audiences at Birmingham in 1900.233

The Musical News complained about the under-representation of native composers in the 1900 London Festival, which both foreigners and natives looked on as an opportunity to showcase British music.234 The success of Gerontius in Germany prompted Baughan to ask why English music, which had by now proved its worth, was still neglected by the public. Although the Proms had become less dominated by Russian music, the opportunities all round were minimal. Press coverage was being squeezed by sport. Musicians, preoccupied with defending their professional status against charlatans, were doing little to raise the profile of music; they did not, in general, attend concerts themselves, probably being too immersed in teaching.235 Baughan thought a new British orchestral society was needed, financed by yearly subscriptions from musicians. In 1901, only two English works appeared in the London Festival.236 But in that year, Wood, who had been criticised for neglecting British music, devoted an entire Prom to it, the highlight being two Pomp and Circumstance marches by Elgar (which were enthusiastically received).237 Even so, Baughan observed that the audience was the smallest of any Prom and once again partly blamed composers, who may have been pursuing high ideals but had produced the musical equivalent of blank-verse tragedies; the programme also contained what he judged to be two of the dullest British works ever written: Parry’s Symphonic Variations and Stanford’s overture Oedipus Rex.238

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232 Ibid.: 422
233 MS1900.10.13a
234 MN1900.03.31
235 MS1902.01.18
236 Ath1901.04.13
237 Ath1901.10.26
238 MS1901.10.16
The issue of neglect was raised again in the *Times* in October 1902, where a writer – presumably Fuller Maitland – complained that the series of Queen’s Hall symphony concerts contained no British music apart from *Enigma*. The writer argued that as the Queen’s Hall concerts had virtually supplanted those of the Crystal Palace, it was the management’s duty to continue the policy of the latter. Later in the same month the paper referred to ‘this persistent boycotting of everything British at the Queen’s Hall (except for the handful of British compositions produced at the Promenades)’ and contrasted it with the policy of provincial festivals: ‘it is, apparently, only in London that no British need apply’. The composer Thomas F. Dunhill suggested that composers form a society and become their own concert promoters, putting on works vetted by a committee of musicians. Dunhill regarded the current situation as worse than in the past, when new native works had appeared regularly at the Crystal Palace. Charles L. Graves made a similar complaint. He acknowledged that the Proms had given opportunities, but these concerts did not have the status of the symphony concerts. But in the end, like other critics, he could do no more than in effect appeal to patriotism: ‘in no other country would audiences tolerate such a disregard of their own’.

The chief problem was, as Graves identified, over-supply. Given the popularity of composers such as Beethoven, Wagner and Tchaikovsky, and the growing popularity of Strauss and Elgar, there were few slots available and an increasing number of young composers queuing up for them. Neglect was discussed again in the daily press in 1902, with an initial stimulus from Mackenzie. J.H.G. Baughan, who had taken over from his brother as editor of the *Musical Standard*, thought the charge of neglect unreasonable, because ‘British composition has only recently begun to show any real life’.

### 5.4.5 1903–7

Complaints continued to be made, especially by composers, about the neglect of native composition (an issue that the Festival of British Music had been intended to address). As before, not all critics thought the complaints justified. CT attributed much of the

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239 *Ti*1902.10.10  
240 *Ti*1902.10.27  
241 *MO*1902.12a  
242 *MO*1902.12b  
243 *MS*1902.11.29
agitation on behalf of native music to newspaper editors seeking attention. His restated his view that nationality was irrelevant and that the fault lay with the music itself: a British symphony promised only ‘half an hour or more of wearisome imitation’. Nevertheless, the 1903 Proms were notable for including new works by eight British composers. The Musical News observed a growing interest in British music, but believed that concert givers saw first performances as a means of attracting critics and others who wanted to be present on such occasions; a second performance was seldom given, except in the Broadwood Concerts, which showed ‘the only way to make the cult of modern British music genuine’. The 1904 Proms also introduced new British works, and all the new works at the Leeds Festival that year were British, leading Shedlock to ask why no new foreign works had been included. A further outlet for young composers was set up in that year, when Ernest Palmer founded the Patron’s Fund, which, although primarily intended for RCM students, was not restricted to them. CT suggested the fund would be better used to train promising young conductors rather than composers, of whom there were too many of little talent. In the discussion that followed yet another complaint of neglect, E.F. Jacques observed that probably about two-thirds of concert audiences in London were foreigners, so if anyone was to blame for the neglect of native composers, it was the British public, who stayed away from concerts containing their works. Summing up the year 1904, J.H.G. Baughan claimed that modern British composition was flourishing in concert programmes, even if audiences were still sceptical. The Proms that year had included several new British works, all by younger composers, and provincial festivals continued to give opportunities: at Norwich, seventeen English composers were represented and the Musical Standard remarked that the complaint of neglect could be shelved for a while.

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244 MO1903.02  
245 MT1903.10b  
246 MN1903.12.19. The Broadwood Concerts of chamber music and songs had a policy of including new and unfamiliar works, English and foreign.  
247 Ath1904.08.13, Ath1904.10.15  
248 MT1904.05  
249 MO1904.12  
250 MS1904.11.12b  
251 Ath1905.07.29, MS1905.10.28
But the complaint was not shelved. In December 1905, CT observed that once Elgar had shown that an Englishman could write music that was not an imitation of Brahms, ‘a kind of madness has come over the musical world. Every day the press publishes letters deploring the neglect of British compositions’. In his view, as long as music was worth hearing, the public did not care who wrote it; they were not keen on the British works heard at the Proms.²⁵² To complaints that only six of the twenty-three new works in the 1906 Proms were British, CT replied that the proportion was reasonable, and the cause of British composition was being injured by indiscriminate encouragement.²⁵³ CT approved of Wood’s policy of choosing composers who had already made their mark: concert-goers paid to hear music they liked, not to benefit neglected composers. The strength of the foreign competition facing British composers was shown by a retrospective survey of the 1906 Proms season that identified Sibelius as the most popular living composer.²⁵⁴

Fig. 21  Jean Sibelius

The Patron’s Fund concerts that showcased the works of young composers were increasingly seen as counter-productive, the standard being so low that the reputation of native music was suffering.²⁵⁵ E.A. Baughan suggested the money be used to subsidise

²⁵² MO1905.12
²⁵³ MO1906.08
²⁵⁴ MS1906.11.03b
²⁵⁵ MS1906.07.07; MS1907.12.28
The difficulty of finding publishers for new native works was a frequent cause of complaint. Edwin Evans suggested that a wealthy patron might pay for publication, as had happened in Russia; the composer Landon Ronald supported this plea, but Holbrooke thought the idea the worst possible: it would induce complacency. In 1905 a Society of British Composers, chaired by Frederick Corder, was formed to facilitate publication. Further complaints, including one by Stanford in 1906, prompted a writer in *Musical News* to assert that the main issue was not publication but whether there was any public demand for the product, which he thought had a tendency towards ‘gloom and pessimism’. A leading article in the same periodical represented young native composers as perpetually complaining about neglect – an inevitable situation for newcomers – when there were now more openings than ever before. Dunhill resented this depiction of composers as puling complainants and acknowledged that conditions had improved; his complaint was about ill-informed press criticism.

The situation revealed in the accusations and counter-accusations recorded above was the classic one of supply greatly exceeding demand, as more and more young composers tried to break into a market where there was an adequate supply of popular established works of the past, augmented by some successful works of more recent origin. A single performance was generally the most they could secure, and as commentators pointed out, this situation gave no incentive to publishers and also restricted the feedback that composers needed in order to improve.

In the case of opera, the previous sixty years had yielded nothing of continuing interest to the public. By this time the only works by English composers surviving in the repertoire of the Moody-Manners company, which put on regular seasons in London,

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256 *MS1907.02.02. CT agreed (MO1905.12).*
257 *MS1904.10.08b, MS1904.10.29, MS1904.11.12a*
258 *MT1905.11. The Society’s first Year Book catalogued the works of fifty composers (MT1906.09).*
259 *MN1906.12.15*
260 *MN1907.07.27*
261 *MN1907.08.03*
262 *MS1906.04.07*
were the old favourites of the 1840s, *The Bohemian Girl* and *Maritana*. Otherwise the repertoire consisted of Verdi, Wagner, Puccini, etc., in translation. George Cecil observed that Manners had more sense than to try ‘to cram the luckless efforts of English composers down the throats of his patrons’.  

5.4.6 Overview

In the debate about the progress of native music, contemporary commentators were as much concerned with the public response to native music as with developments in composition, so an account of this aspect of the debate is an essential contribution towards a broader understanding of the development of English music. Critics were divided between those who complained that native music did not get a fair hearing and those who thought it got exactly the hearing it deserved. At the start of the period a critic drew attention to the difficulty of competing with the classics of the past hundred and fifty years. To this difficulty was added that of competing with a resurgent wave of attractive foreign composition. But although the financial risks involved in concert-giving limited the scope for trying out new works, the success of composers such as Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Strauss and Elgar showed that it was not impossible to gain repeated hearings when a work appealed strongly to the public at its first appearance.

Although the provincial festivals were criticised for subordinating music to fund-raising, the most well-established – with multiple concerts, affluent patrons conscious of doing good for charities, and composers willing to work for practically nothing – were able to absorb the financial consequences of the relative unattractiveness of new works. New works helped by drawing publicity from critics, who saw their introduction as the festivals’ most important function. In effect, the festivals provided an element of, if not exactly subsidy, a measure of extra support for native composition. But this, together with the extensive critical coverage, gives a deceptive impression of the appeal of the works concerned.

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263 *Ac*1907.08.17
264 *SR*1888.09.29
The role of the festivals diminished when public interest shifted towards orchestral concerts revitalised by the music of Grieg, Dvořák and, especially, Tchaikovsky. Now English music struggled to compete with the excitement of Tchaikovsky and other Russians. Critics who denigrated the latter music as meretricious could only hope that audiences would tire of it and seek healthier fare. But those who had been critical of the academicism of the so-called ‘Renaissance’ blamed it for creating an expectation, all too often accurate, that English music would be dull. They looked to the next generation to compose music in which feeling was more important than formality. Elgar, having no roots in the ‘Renaissance’, met with a large measure of public success.

At first the Proms were criticised for not including native works, but the position changed when they were put on a securer financial basis and the commercial pressure was to some extent mitigated. More English compositions could get at least one hearing, but few were successful enough to attract a publisher and thus gain further dissemination: the supply outran demand. Foreign composers – Strauss and, latterly, Sibelius – pleased audiences more. English music – with the exception of Elgar – struggled to compete in the commercial nexus governing supply and demand. This contradicts the assertion made by Temperley and others that native music received a boost from Britain’s desire to resist the increasing strength of German economic competition. There was concern about German penetration of British markets (see above, p. 126), but music did not benefit from it. Lawrence Poston suggests that Wood’s Proms programming was intended to ‘strike a blow against English insularity and smugness’, as if the inclusion of foreign music ran against the grain of the audience’s preferences – something that was far from being the case.265

5.5 Music-hall and musical comedy

‘We are not dramatic; we are not musical; we are so essentially inartistic that we rejoice in Burlington House. Now, the music-hall contains a full negative appreciation of painting, music and drama, wherefore are we a music-hall nation’.266

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265 Poston 2005: 426
266 NO1891.10.10. (Burlington House was the headquarters and gallery of the Royal Academy.)
The pun was apt: music-hall was the *bête noire* of some critics, who saw it as militating against the mission to raise public taste, and its popularity as a clear indication that England was not a musical nation. Although originally a working-class genre, it became increasingly popular with the middle and upper classes during the 1890s. This made it simultaneously a territory that threatened to draw patrons away from art music and one that, if it were to improve in quality and taste, might yield new patrons – especially given that the most popular concert series was breaking free of the formal atmosphere hitherto associated with art music.

By the end of the century music-hall – or ‘variety theatre’ – was big business. Large establishments that opened in the centre of London included the Empire (1884, 3000 seats), Hippodrome (1900, 2000 seats) and Coliseum (1904, 3389 seats). There was a similar growth in the suburbs including, for example, the New Cross Empire (1899, 2000 seats) and Hackney Empire (1901, 3000 seats). It is estimated that there were about 500 music-halls in London around 1890 and that the 35 largest had a combined audience of 45,000 nightly. By 1901 there were forty-two music halls licensed by the LCC, in addition to forty-four theatres in the metropolitan area that gave some of their time to variety shows. The popularity of music-hall and the comparatively low profile of art music is reflected in the fact that many books about the social life of the period include references to music-hall whilst making no mention of serious music.

Although music-hall has been the subject of a number of studies, in none have scholars considered the views about it expressed by contemporary music critics. These views were broadly of two kinds: in one camp were critics who saw an institution that

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267 Höher 1986: 86, Faulk 2004: 188. For several years the same person, Augustus Harris, ran both Covent Garden and the Palace Theatre of Varieties, which had previously been the ill-fated Royal English Opera House.

268 These theatres often exhibited symbols of high culture: ancient Rome in the interior (and name) of the Coliseum, portraits of classical composers in the Hackney Empire. Information about dates and capacities is taken from Howard 1970.

269 Stedman Jones 1974: 477

270 Wilson 1951: 22


272 The criticisms of social reformers, including the moral denunciation of the halls as sites of prostitution by the National Vigilance Society, are described in Stokes 1989: 53–93. See also
reinforced low musical taste and undermined morality; in the other were those who understood the need for undemanding entertainment, were optimistic that the standard of taste could be raised and saw signs that this was already happening.

Southgate, writing in 1892, was in the first category: in his view the popularity of light operas and music-halls was ‘doing immense harm to the cause of good music’. Responding to a defence of music-hall by Albert Chevalier, a celebrated performer, Southgate described the typical audience as ‘people with perverted tastes who accepted and applauded anything that required no trouble to understand’. But T.H. Tunstall, in the same paper, saw the need for light and effortless entertainment for hard-working people and suggested that composers whose serious songs found no publisher should instead write light songs to displace those of dubious moral value. The moral quality of music-hall songs was the subject of a controversy carried on in the Westminster Gazette in 1894. A theatre manager admitted that the most popular songs were generally of a low standard, being about either booze or women. The Musical Times reprinted words from a ‘booze’ song and condemned their ‘flagrant imbecility and vulgarity’.

E.A. Baughan questioned whether the popularity of music-hall showed England’s lack of musicality; he was not snobbish about the genre, but welcomed any growth in the enjoyment of music. He recognised that quality varied, with theatres like the Alhambra, Empire and Palace being above others. He disagreed with those who criticised Sullivan for writing a ballet score for the Alhambra: ballet could become high art if composers turned to it ‘instead of writing innumerable cantatas that nobody wants to hear’.

Opinions about music-hall were polarised, as the Musical Times noted in 1894. But the periodical was seeing signs that music-hall was being criticised from the inside by its predominantly middle-class audience and was on the way to becoming more like

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Kift 1996: 155–74. The cadet training movement was seen as a counter attraction to the ‘low music halls’ (Springhall 1977: 77).

273 MN1892.12.09
274 MN1893.04.15
275 MN1893.09.16
276 MT1894.02
277 MS1896.02.29
German café concerts, where a man could take his wife and daughter. But a few years later a correspondent to the *Times* who had visited an out-of-town hall saw only the propagation of the worst forms of immorality. Borland defended music halls against this indiscriminate criticism. However, W.H. Cummings agreed with the letter-writer and called for more support for efforts to supply elevating musical fare to the working classes. Baughan thought Cummings’s condemnation excessive. But another writer was concerned that it was the worst songs – those that glorified drunkenness, for example, or expressed a selfish patriotism – that were sung in the streets and picked up by children.

By the turn of the century, music-hall had crossed class lines and was becoming immensely popular with the middle and upper classes. But for the *Musical News* it had become a less serious threat than the new genre of musical comedy, ‘the degradation of music and drama’. This was, however, not a general view. Writing in 1904, CT saw that the music, although not of the highest kind, was genuinely appreciated, and the best numbers – he singled out Lionel Monckton’s contributions – received the greatest applause. The *Musical News* too came round to the view that musical comedy was improving. Moreover, music-hall itself appeared to be climbing the ladder of respectability: in January 1905 the periodical reported that grand opera selections were well received, and Mackenzie had conducted his own work – the operetta *The Knights of the Road*. Mackenzie hoped that others would follow his example and help to raise the level of music-hall. The inclusion of the work was welcomed by Paul Seer as a possible step on the road to the establishment of an English opera. Seer also reported that an excerpt from *La Traviata* was the best-received item in a recent Coliseum performance.
However, not all critics were as sanguine about a rapprochement of serious and sub-serious genres. Arthur Somervell, inspector of music in schools, condemned ‘the tainted and suggestive trash of the music hall’ and the ‘sentimental twaddle’ of musical comedy.

Fig. 22  Arthur Somervell

5.6 The persistent concern: is England musical?

‘Various are the efforts that are made periodically by English musical enthusiasts to persuade themselves and the public that we are a musical nation’. It might be added that various have been the efforts of present-day scholars to demonstrate that the designation ‘land without music’ was undeserved (see above, p. 12). The meaning of ‘musical’ when applied to a nation is vague, so the criteria for applying it need to be examined in each instance. The nation ‘awash with music’ that present-day scholars descry did not satisfy some, at least, of contemporary commentators, who set the standards of ‘musicality’ higher – unreasonably so, it might be thought today, but if the period is to be understood on its own terms as well as retrospectively, then the existence of this current of dissatisfaction needs to be acknowledged. The writer quoted above dismissed the signs of flourishing musical appreciation as deceptive: the provincial festivals, for example, ‘accentuate by their rarity the absence of musical appetite in the

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289 MS1905.05.13
290 PMA1905.06
291 NR1891.06
country’. The question ‘is England musical?’ was raised again and again as critics reacted to events. In addition, from time to time a commentator stood back to assess the evidence as a whole. This question surfaced throughout the period and beyond, testifying to an underlying anxiety that did not go away. Although it was natural for musicians and music critics to want a population receptive to their ‘product’, there was in addition an ethical dimension. If, as very many believed, the best serious music was morally elevating, then to be indifferent to it and prefer frivolous ballads, music-hall and comic operetta was an indicator of more than just low taste: lack of musicality was a matter for shame.

Jacob Bradford, a church organist and composer, addressed the question ‘is England musical’ at length in 1893. Although his ultimate answer was ‘yes’, like many other writers he focused on deficiencies. He gave the usual account of England’s decline since Purcell but was mainly concerned with the recent revival and where it was leading. He believed England was already eminent in church music, organists and instrumentalists, the number of living composers, the music education of the masses, music colleges and the quantity of good music to be heard. The deficiencies were the lack of opportunity given to native composers, the lack of orchestras, the poor attitude of singers towards preparation, the low place of music in boys’ public schools and the generally poor state of music criticism. Fuller Maitland also expressed qualified optimism, claiming that in the previous twenty or thirty years, England had become ‘if not a foremost power, yet a factor that cannot be neglected in the musical history of the time’. He claimed that although English composers were still little known abroad, they were re-establishing the eminence England had enjoyed during Elizabethan times. However, he raised an issue that also engaged other writers: the activity of foreign musicians. He warned that the influx of foreign musicians that had been going on before ‘this renaissance of national music’ would not abate and was exacerbating a situation where supply already outran demand, as colleges were turning out too many

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292 See, for example, MS1909.01.30, SMR1920.02, Sa1929.12, MMi1929.12, Sa1931.02. C.L. Graves took Parry to task for bringing up the question in 1911 (Graves 1911: 356).
293 MO1893.08a
294 NR1894.12
musicians.\textsuperscript{295} For a writer in \textit{Musical Opinion} the increasing reliance on foreign musicians showed England to be definitely unmusical.\textsuperscript{296} Another pointed out that although in some ways the English were unmusical, the best foreign performers came to London knowing they would receive a welcome and make money. This theme was taken up in the \textit{Standard}, where England was described as the land of musical rewards, but not of musical appreciation. The flow of musicians between abroad and home was almost entirely one-way.\textsuperscript{297} For Runciman too, the dependence on foreigners was proof that little advance had been made in English music.\textsuperscript{298} He noted that a foreign conductor (Richter) had been appointed to the Birmingham Festival, and the same had nearly happened to one of the largest choral societies.

The article in the \textit{Standard} referred to above identified other deficiencies that counted against England’s musicality. The writer claimed that it was fashion that attracted audiences to celebrated performers and largely governed attendance at Covent Garden; support for other operatic productions in London was minimal given the size of the population. Concerts were often in financial difficulties and again the number attending was a tiny fraction of the population. Choral societies were popular, but their members did not necessarily have either musical knowledge or judgement. Part-singing – said to be a custom in Shakespeare’s time – had died out. Although most people had a basic liking for music, in England it found its outlet in ballad concerts. The writer’s complaint can be summed up as ‘poor taste’.

Fuller Maitland had criticised the music colleges for turning out too many musicians. Runciman was severely critical of the training they received: the musicians turned out by the RAM and RCM as ‘finished’ went to Leipzig and found themselves classed as beginners, and a gifted singer like Clara Butt had to go to Italy to perfect her art. For Runciman, music in England was plagued by commercial motivation – ‘place grabbing’: a musician was expected to teach at music schools, be a church organist,

\textsuperscript{295} A leading article in \textit{Musical News} expressed agreement with Fuller Maitland (\textit{MN}1895.01.12).
\textsuperscript{296} \textit{MO}1895.03a
\textsuperscript{297} \textit{MO}1895.11b
\textsuperscript{298} \textit{SR}1896.07.18
conduct a choral society and a provincial festival, and turn out a quantity of part-songs, anthems, etc.\textsuperscript{299}

The dependence on foreigners was still an issue some years later, when the \textit{Speaker} observed that in spite of the increasing number of players coming out of music schools, the number of foreigners in orchestras was still disproportionate.\textsuperscript{300} The writer accepted that foreigners were cheaper to hire and lived more frugally, but still saw the situation as evidence that England was not yet a musical nation in the same sense as Germany or Italy: interest in and aptitude for music being lower, players were being drawn from a smaller proportion of the population.

The unmusicality of the public was, for some critics, the reason why native music was not prospering. For H.A. Scott, writing in 1898, it explained England’s failure to produce a great composer (clearly Parry, Stanford and others did not qualify). He observed that ‘the labour of writing an opera or a symphony is as nothing compared with that of getting it produced’.\textsuperscript{301} Two years later, in yet another article with the title ‘Are the English People Musical?’, George Hopper attributed the renaissance in English musical life to the popularity of Wagner, who had been added to Handel and Mendelssohn to form ‘the musical triumvirate of the intelligent sections of the English public’.\textsuperscript{302} For Hopper the growth of music in England was to be seen mainly in amateur instrumental playing, but the training of listeners had been neglected. He thought the English temperamentally unable to appreciate absolute music; they preferred song, but even here English songs lacked any individuality, being ‘as featureless and cosmopolitan as the race they represent’. As for opera, it was an exotic with a tiny following. Hopper thought it possible that the lack of first-rate composers had inhibited progress, but the situation had improved and ‘the steadily increasing excellence of the present English school’ gave hope for the future, but ‘in the meantime, the less said about the musicianship of the English people the better’. Whereas Hopper had identified Wagner as the motive power of English interest in music, W.W. Cobbett

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\textsuperscript{299} \textit{SR}1896.11.14
\textsuperscript{300} \textit{Sp}1900.03.10
\textsuperscript{301} \textit{Ou}1898.04.16
\textsuperscript{302} \textit{MO}1900.07
\end{flushleft}
credited Tchaikovsky with initiating the growing demand for orchestral music.\footnote{MN1900.10.27} Runciman, however, saw the popularity of Russian music as merely the latest manifestation of a craze for the exotic, which was the bane of music in England and blocked the appearance of a distinctively English school.\footnote{SR1900.09.22b}

Runciman painted a depressing picture of the state of music in England in 1901. London had no permanent opera house, but merely a ‘dreadful’ three-month season at Covent Garden; other cities had only occasional visits by touring companies. The Newman-Wood partnership had given London a permanent orchestra, but the demands of a poorly educated public meant filling programmes with well-worn pieces by Wagner or Tchaikovsky. Younger native composers were unable to get a hearing. A few provincial towns had orchestras, ‘mere annexes to huge cafés’, but the vast majority had no opportunity of hearing the masterpieces. England was producing no fine composers, but ‘men of small calibre are joyfully hailed as great masters’; there were no first-class English singers or players, and any players with some ability moved abroad for their education.\footnote{SR1901.10.12} However, in a retrospective article at the end of the year his view of the frequent Wagner-Tchaikovsky programmes at the Queen’s Hall mellowed somewhat. He acknowledged that the ‘nervous and hysteric’ music reflected the feeling of the age. (He had, after all, called for music that reflected contemporary life.) Moreover, the concerts gave opportunities to hear opera to people who had no other access to it. Runciman concluded that between them the Queen’s Hall concerts and the London appearances of the touring opera companies showed that although the English public was not yet musical it was becoming so.\footnote{SR1901.12.28}

Ernest Newman, writing in 1903, saw the appearance of works by younger British composers in Henry Wood’s programmes as a hopeful sign, but identified the main problem as lack of demand.\footnote{Sp1903.10.03} To stimulate demand, three things were required: music had to be de-centralised, with municipally supported orchestras in the principal cities; festivals had to abandon their ‘preposterous adoration of antiquity’ and drop \textit{Messiah}
and *Elijah*; a ‘good, comprehensive, catholic musical journal’ was needed to encourage an intelligent and active interest in music.\textsuperscript{308} In his view only the *Musical Standard* managed to put the interests of music before those of trade.

In yet another article entitled ‘Are We a Musical Nation?’ C. Fred Kenyon attributed English musical backwardness to lack of seriousness — failure to appreciate music as ‘an educator of the intellect and a stimulator of the emotions’.\textsuperscript{309} He accepted that there was an audience for good music, but it was a very small proportion of the population and made up very largely of Germans. Runciman, however, was becoming increasingly optimistic about English receptivity, claiming that English people were becoming better listeners. He noted that the quantity of band music in parks and other public places had increased over the years, and saw signs that people were listening more, rather than chatting to a musical background: ‘If we are ever to become a musical nation, we must learn first of all to listen to music and it appears we are learning the trick’.\textsuperscript{310} This was most noticeable at the Queen’s Hall Promenade concerts, where behaviour was very different from what it had been at the Covent Garden Proms.\textsuperscript{311}

Ever provocative, Runciman displayed a dislike bordering on contempt for organists. His diatribe drew angry responses, including a claim that organists were ‘the musical backbone of the country’, to which Runciman replied curtly ‘on the contrary, we are getting on in spite of them’.\textsuperscript{312} This remark prompted another correspondent to ask who should take the credit for this ‘getting on’. Only a tiny percentage of the huge population of London went to any concerts at all or could even afford to, whereas for ninety-nine percent of musically inclined boys the route to music was through a local church choir.\textsuperscript{313} Another writer pointed out the limitations of the organ as an expressive instrument and quipped, ‘the organist may be the backbone of the music of this country, but it is the backbone of a whale, and we want a mermaid’.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{308} *Sp*1903.12.12
\textsuperscript{309} *MS*1905.02.25
\textsuperscript{310} *SR*1905.08.26
\textsuperscript{311} *SR*1906.01.27
\textsuperscript{312} *SR*1905.09.23
\textsuperscript{313} *SR*1905.09.30
\textsuperscript{314} *SR*1905.10.07
As noted above, Runciman’s place as music critic was taken over temporarily in 1906 by Harold E. Gorst, who subscribed to the familiar assertion that the English were deficient in feeling: unable to recognise deep passion, the English concert-goer praised mere sentimental effect. Gorst was unmistakably snobbish: whereas critics of wide sympathy, such as Baughan, welcomed the enjoyment of music wherever they found it, Gorst belittled the music of the poorer classes. He observed that musical enterprise was most evident in provincial towns and amongst the artisan and lower middle classes, as was shown by the flourishing choral societies; so music had become pursuit of the ‘the semi-ignorant working man and the Polytechnic-bred intellectual barbarian’, the ‘cultured classes’ remaining apathetic. Gorst dismissed the idea that taste was rapidly advancing: ‘real artistic perceptions are still the exclusive possession of an insignificant minority’.

The question addressed in the foregoing commentary was ill-defined, but one that, in the opinion of several critics, still needed to be asked. Behind it lay an image – whether accurate or not – of Germany (and occasionally Italy) as countries where music of quality was embedded in the culture, supported by the state, and appreciated by a significantly higher proportion of the population than in England. Some of the opinions expressed (by Gorst, for example) display snobbery. Runciman’s views are of particular interest, as he was one of the most vociferous denouncers of commercialism as well as being exceptionally hard to please in the matter of composition. Yet even he eventually recognised that emotionally expressive contemporary orchestral music chimed in a genuine way with audiences, and observed that the appreciation of high-class music was growing.

5.7 Concluding observations

There was a general recognition that interest in music had begun to increase before the period under study and had markedly increased during it. This growth was what critics most often referred to when writing about ‘renaissance’ and cognate terms: it was not

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315 Ibid.
316 SR1906.08.15b
precipitated by key events but was a gradual process. Only one critic – Fuller Maitland – gave native composers the credit for having stimulated it. Nevertheless, subsequent accounts of the ‘renaissance’ have continued to take the form of a narrative with key events. For Hadow, for example, the renaissance began with the performance of Parry’s *Prometheus* in 1880.\(^{317}\) Hughes and Stradling claim that Haweis’s *Music and Morals* and Pater’s *Studies of the Italian Renaissance* were key precursors and that Joseph Bennett’s dubbing of Parry’s ‘English’ symphony was the moment when the renaissance was acknowledged (p. 137, n.115).

But even the gradual growth in activity failed to convince some critics that real progress had been made. Runciman saw it – and the examinations industry at the heart of it – as a mainly commercial operation.\(^ {318}\) The numerous music colleges, seen by some contemporaries as unassailable evidence of the advance of music in England (and also offered as such in secondary literature), were being run in the interests of providers and turning out a greater supply of musicians than the demand warranted.\(^ {319}\) In other respects, too, the contemporary commentary shows a lack of consensus, especially where the issue of subsidy was concerned. Writing about the mid-Victorian period, Hughes and Stradling note that ‘*Laissez-faire* values tended to support indifference over music, and it stayed very much in the market-place’.\(^ {320}\) As Ehrlich remarks, this situation did not change, and music remained subject to the commercial nexus.\(^ {321}\) However, *laissez-faire* was not an entrenched dogma: although there was a predisposition in government towards *laissez-faire* in economic matters, in other areas the choice between *laissez-faire* and state intervention was to a large extent pragmatic.\(^ {322}\) This was a period when central and local government activity was expanding (for example in slum clearance and the provision of open spaces) and some...

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317 Hadow 1928: 21
318 Runciman’s views on the baneful influence of the examinations industry are referred to in Ehrlich 1985: 120. Runciman’s frequent complaints that music was regarded as a trade rather than an art showed a limited understanding of the circumstances that often forced it to be so. See, for example, an extract from the autobiography of John Shinn, who gave up the trade of cabinet-maker to become a church organist and choirmaster and later opened a music shop (Burnett 1982: 186–92).
319 See for example, *PMA*1897.06. For secondary references, see, for example, Eatock 2010, quoted above (p. 223).
320 Hughes and Stradling 2001: 5
321 Ehrlich 1985: 73
322 See, for example, Taylor 1972.
local authorities, such as London and Bournemouth, were supporting music provision. So appeals for subsidy were not doomed from the start. Those who sought state support did so for two reasons. One was symbolic: it would affirm that music was as valued an aspect of national life as visual art, history and literature, all of which received support through the provision of galleries, museums and libraries. It would also affirm that England valued music as much as Germany, Italy, France and other countries where music received state support. The other reason was practical: subsidy offered a means by which art could take priority over commerce. For many contemporary critics it was precisely the acceptance of the prevailing commercialism – the willingness to allow music to be governed entirely by market forces – that offered the clearest proof that England was not a musical country.\footnote{Stefan Collini notes the recurring preoccupation of intellectuals in Britain ‘to elaborate and make effective values that could check and subjugate the corrosive power of economic calculation’ (Collini 2006: 290).}

It was an innovative supplier – the Newman-Wood partnership – that had stimulated and fostered the growth in demand for orchestral music. The enterprise was financially precarious and had to be rescued by wealthy backers, who provided what was in effect a private subsidy. A syndicate of the wealthy kept Covent Garden in business for its wealthy patrons, but no private backer was forthcoming to do for opera what had been done for orchestral music. The case for opera to be treated equally in public provision with art and literature was too weak to convince politicians forever concerned about tax- and ratepayers’ pockets. The provision of local museums dated back to 1845 and of libraries to 1850. The main function in both cases was educational, but libraries were also seen at that time as an alternative to public-houses and drunkenness. In both cases legislation was preceded by an examination of continental practices, in comparison with which England came out badly.\footnote{Ti1849.09.05} But when opera provision was examined in a similar way, no government action ensued. Both state and local government had given support to education, both in music (the City of London for example, had founded the Guildhall School) and in design (the Central School of Arts and Crafts was founded by the LCC). But the educational argument for opera failed to convince. One difference lay in the fact that the music community itself was divided. Moreover, the argument put forward was arcane, in that it asked politicians to accept that what appeared to be a thriving musical
culture happily ensconced in the private and commercial sectors was deceptive because it militated against the provision of aesthetically (and ethically) superior content. The argument from reduced drunkenness, etc., used in the 1840s would hardly apply to potential opera-goers. Taken together with the common perception that opera was an expensive form of entertainment that could only be patronised by the rich, these considerations are sufficient to explain the failure.

Disappointment with efforts to lift the supply side of music out of the grip of commercialism was matched by concern about the demand side. Whilst it would be entirely inaccurate to suggest that opinions were other than highly diverse, there was a strong strain of dissatisfaction expressed by critics of standing, such as Ernest Newman and E.A. Baughan, with the progress made in spreading the appreciation of music. The provincial festivals, for instance, received far more criticism than is acknowledged in Drummond’s history of the institution. But there was general agreement amongst commentators that the Queen’s Hall Proms had been the most successful agent in extending the audience for serious music.

Although the relatively informal atmosphere of these concerts widened their appeal, external factors also contributed to their success. The expansion of employment in office work yielded a growing number of people on middle incomes able to benefit from the lower ticket prices. Increasing numbers of women – especially from the middle classes – were entering employment and the number of unmarried women was also increasing. Moreover, transport into central London became quicker and easier with the opening of the Central London Railway in 1900 (the ‘twopenny tube’): Oxford Circus Station was within walking distance of the Queen’s Hall.

Yet even in the case of these concerts, some reservations were entered. Baughan thought them ‘not of the highest class’ and Gorst was patronising towards the clientele. These reservations are hints of a wider disappointment about the mission of music: music had advanced amongst some classes of the population – including the poorer classes – but not amongst the classes that mattered most to critics. Some contended that

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325 Keller 2008
326 JRSS1895.09, JRSS1909.06
money that could have been better spent was wasted on rudimentary and ultimately ineffective teaching in working class schools, whose products remained satisfied with music-hall.\footnote{MO1893.09c, MO1896.09, MO1899.04a} For ‘the nation’ to become musical, the educated and cultured middle classes, who would demand the highest artistic standards of repertoire and performance, had to be recruited. Specifically, the ‘nation’ meant the men of this class, as is shown by the fact that the so-called ‘national character’ was always presented in masculine terms. However, if Makower’s observation was accurate, three-quarters of the concert-going public were women, whose political power was severely limited.\footnote{Unmarried women and widows had been allowed to vote in local elections since 1869. This was extended to all women in 1894. It was not until 1918 that some women (those over 30 with a property qualification) received the vote in parliamentary elections. Voting rights were extended to all women over 21 in 1928.} His contention was not challenged, either by correspondents to his own paper, or by writers in others; W.W. Cobbett had made a similar observation.\footnote{MN1896.04.25.} Moreover, Baughan noted that a large proportion of the music-loving public in London were foreigners or half-foreigners.\footnote{MS1901.08.24} E.F. Jacques estimated the proportion as about two-thirds.\footnote{MS1904.11.12b} Kenyon, too, observed that concert-goers made up a very small proportion of the population and very many of them were Germans. Further evidence comes from the architect Hermann Muthesius, who was attached to the German embassy between 1896 and 1903 to report on aspects of English life. Muthesius saw the English middle-class dedication to a semi-rural home life as lessening the appeal of metropolitan entertainments.\footnote{Muthesius 1979} Taken together, these observations suggest that the mission of music had failed to enlist English middle-class men in sufficient numbers to constitute effective demand for musical enterprises of the highest artistic quality, let alone to dethrone – through their votes – the prevailing acceptance of commercialism. And even if it was the case, as some commentators claimed, that music was being taken more seriously in the public schools attended by middle-class males, the change had come too late to affect the adult generation of the time.\footnote{Rainbow 1990 comprises articles appearing in the Tonic Sol-fa Reporter and its successor the Musical Herald. Evidence of advance was also presented in MN1901.01.12.}
This class-based (and, more tentatively, gender-based) hypothesis would benefit from being backed up by studies of the composition of audiences, if relevant data are available. Two comparative studies also suggest themselves. One would be into the class structure of concert audiences and general musical participation in Germany, so often cited by commentators as the exemplary ‘musical nation’. A second would be into the differential growth rates of competing attractions in England, especially theatre, given the growth in leisure time.\textsuperscript{334} At a rough glance the latter comparison seems quite stark. Ehrlich estimates that the main London concert halls held only 13,000; moreover, they were closed to music for substantial parts of the year.\textsuperscript{335} By contrast, according to Roy Porter, theatres and music halls in the City and West End could hold around 300,000 people, giving attendances up to 100 million per year.\textsuperscript{336} Ehrlich describes the audience for classical music as ‘pitifully small’.\textsuperscript{337} In relation to that for theatre and music-hall, it certainly was, but the remark means little without a standard of comparison drawn from other countries or cities.

As far as English music is concerned, just as its composition needs to be seen in relation to composition in general, so the demand for it needs to be seen in relation to the demand for art music in general. There was a wide measure of agreement that demand in general had grown, albeit not enough to satisfy some critics. But most were disappointed that English music was, with a few exceptions, still struggling for recognition. The fact that critics like Fuller Maitland could claim a ‘renaissance’ shows that public demand was a matter of little consequence to them: only their own standards of criticism counted. As noted in the previous chapter, they could only hope that the public would tire of what they liked at present and would come round to their, Brahmsian, way of thinking.

Whereas chapters 3 and 4 were about opinion on what are essentially matters of opinion, some of what this chapter deals with is factual (audience size, make-up,

\textsuperscript{334} ‘Standard weekly working hours had fallen from sixty or seventy in the nineteenth century to fifty-three in 1910 […] Saturday was already a half, if not a whole holiday’ (Thompson 1984: 271).
\textsuperscript{335} Ehrlich 1985: 74
\textsuperscript{336} Porter 1994: 292
reception, etc.) but accessed only indirectly through commentary – hence the observation that further research is needed to substantiate the account. Moreover, there is an important area that critics had little access to. Fuller Maitland described himself as a ‘doorkeeper’, but it is not clear how much influence he and his fellow critics had on the actions of the real doorkeepers – those operating in the commercial ethos of the time who decided what would be heard. Lawrence Poston has studied the thinking behind Wood’s programming for the early Proms and Michael Musgrave the selection of works for the Crystal Palace concerts. Popularity with the audience counted for much in the case of the Proms and Poston’s analysis of programme notes shows that English music was more often represented by lighter pieces and songs. But in the field of opera there were decisions that are difficult to fathom. How, for example, did Cowen, in spite of only moderate critical and popular success, gain a hearing for his operas? The cost of mounting Stanford’s *Much Ado about Nothing* must have been out of all proportion to the proceeds from its two London performances, so the questions arise as to who backed it financially; did they believe it would succeed; or, if not, what other motives – for example, patriotism, or the accumulation of cultural capital – were at work?

Critics appraising the advance of public appreciation focused attention on London, regarding it as a test case along the lines of ‘if London – the capital of the country and hub of the Empire – cannot support such-and-such then it is a matter for shame’. However, London attracted career-seeking performers in numbers that outweighed the demand for their services, so poor attendance at many concerts did not by itself indicate a low level of public interest in music. The situation in the provinces was quite different: in most cases provision was starting from a low base.

Inevitably it was the dissatisfied who had most to say; they saw advance inhibited by the commercialism that militated against works that needed repeated hearings for their appreciation, and against the musical education of the audience. Public subsidy, which would have testified to public recognition of the value of music, was not forthcoming, and in any case involved the controversial decision as to which composers would benefit. The other possibilities – a rich benefactor or a group of subscribers – depended on patronage from the wealthier and most influential section of the population. For this

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337 Ehrlich 1995: 158–9
reason the most significant event in London during the period, as far as overall supply was concerned, was not so much the foundation of the Proms as their rescue by a not-for-profit company.
6 Conclusion

6.1 A change of perspective

This thesis has argued that the account of the debate in England about the development of music has been skewed by, first, the concern to refute the taunt of ‘Das Land ohne Musik’ and, second, the narrative – or rather narratives – of the ‘English (or British) Musical Renaissance’. So, rather than taking either of these as a starting point, the approach has been to set them aside and examine the broad scope of the contemporary debate and hence assess their place in it. The expectation that what historians have said about the diversity of opinion in the period would apply to music has been borne out, and exposing this diversity has been a major aim of the thesis. Nevertheless some prominent strands emerge in the debate and make it possible, if not to extract a simple narrative, at least to identify the main issues around which debate coalesced and the main positions taken on these issues. The aim has been to produce a more nuanced and multi-stranded account of the thinking of the period.

As characterizations of the period, ‘das Land ohne Musik’ and ‘the English (or British) Musical Renaissance’ represent opposite extremes. Although the first did not appear until 1904 and was not noticed in England at the time, there was a widespread feeling amongst contemporary English critics that the attitude it represented was common in Germany, which was generally accepted as the leading musical nation. It was, moreover, a succinct if somewhat extreme statement of a view that had been expressed frequently throughout the century by English critics disappointed at the lack of interest in serious music. The fact that a jibe made by one German journalist has been quoted so often suggests that historians right up to the present have felt there was a case to answer, and much of the secondary literature has been concerned with its refutation. This is one source of an inward-looking focus on English institutions in recent secondary literature.

As for the EMR, before Hughes and Stradling produced their narrative it had come to be used by writers as a label for the period, with the implication that the ‘renaissance’ was musically the most important development occurring in England at the time. Howes reinforced this reading. Later scholars, such as Pirie and Kennedy, disputed the dates or
the personnel that Howes, following Fuller Maitland and Hadow, had identified, but the function of the label remained. Hughes and Stradling presented the EMR as a consciously directed movement centred on the RCM. Since then some scholars, accepting this reading, have treated the EMR as the name of a distinct movement within the period, referring to the ‘EMR composers’ in much the same way as art historians refer to the ‘Pre-Raphaelite painters’ (although the pre-Raphaelites gave themselves the name, whereas it is not clear whether this was true of the composers, whose dubbing as ‘leaders of the renaissance’ dated from 1897, many years after the movement was supposed to have been started). Also, it does not help that the EMR label still carries the connotation of a periodisation (Hughes and Stradling stretch it over the period 1840–1940) and the implied value-judgement of the honorific term ‘renaissance’. But if the EMR is narrowed down to being the label for a movement within the period, then its retention as a descriptor of the period as a whole becomes questionable. As noted in chapter 5, writers like Eatock who wish to retain it re-define ‘renaissance’ to refer to the general growth in musical activity and institutions.

If we set aside these confusing usages and look at the period through the eyes of contemporary commentators, taking account of the full scope of their thinking about the development of music, a very different picture emerges. English critics by and large saw music as a cosmopolitan art whose overall development, whatever views they might take of it, was of the greatest moment. Views about native composition diverged considerably and some commentators offered different ‘renaissance’ narratives in opposition to the Fuller Maitland version that came to dominate later accounts of the period. Moreover, commentators were by no means as sanguine about the institutions and activities adduced in the secondary literature as evidence that the ‘ohne Musik’ jibe was undeserved.

6.2 The development of music in general

Although critics were naturally interested in the progress of English composition, most saw music as a unified field, retained a cosmopolitan outlook and were just as interested in foreign music, regarding its origin as of only secondary interest. The main issues they

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1 For example, Poston 2005, Eatock 2010
debated were about music as such. The lively debate about the relationship between music and ethics was about music as such and shows that the hitherto conventional view of a strong link between music and morality was being challenged. As time passed ethical considerations receded in music criticism; they were absent entirely from the views expressed by prominent critics such as E.A. Baughan, Ernest Newman, John F. Runciman and J.S. Shedlock.

In the earlier part of the period it was common for critics to represent composition as in decline and leaderless, afflicted by anarchic disregard for rules of melody, harmony and form. Wagner’s legacy was problematic, imitation producing results that fell far short of Wagner’s own. There was no sign of a genius to replace either Brahms or Wagner, and several critics fantasised about a musical Messiah. Conservative critics saw beauty giving way to uglyness, and intellectuality and idealism giving way to strident realism and meretricious effect. The diversity of critical opinion about the progress or regress of music at this point is brought out especially in the case study of reactions to Bruneau’s opera Le Rêve, a work barely mentioned in existing scholarship, but one which provoked strong reactions that laid bare the different criteria of judgement used. It was at this point that more critics began to appreciate the architectural qualities of Wagner’s music and also began to see that it was possible to exploit Wagner’s legacy without slavish imitation. Brahms came to represent for one group of critics the model for composition in the future that would eschew the sensationalism infecting contemporary music. However, at the time of his death he was most commonly depicted as a composer who had chosen a particular field in which to work and within it pursued his artistic aims single-mindedly regardless of popularity.

The issue that attracted the greatest attention and the most divergent views – the poetic basis of music – was also one that concerned music as such. The prolonged debate about programme music, which centred on the music of Strauss, dominated the critical commentary during the later part of the period of this study and was arguably a matter of greater importance to critics than the progress of English composition. Strauss’s talents were recognised even by those who disapproved of the use to which he put them.

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2 In the period 1885–1900, out of 120 papers presented to the Musical Association, only two, both by W.H. Cummings, were about nineteenth-century English music: both covered lengthy
He appeared to some critics to occupy the position of Wagner’s successor in the development of German music, so his choice of the symphonic poem as his preferred genre was significant as a possible indicator of the future direction of composition. By this time the earlier concern with the perceived decadence of Wagnerian musical language had more or less dissipated, and the discussion was focused on questions of form and on the limits of the musically expressible.

6.3 English music

Wagner had provided a strong stimulus to English composers in the early 1880s, in spite of the animosity he aroused amongst conservative critics. (Later, writers in search of heralds of the EMR downplayed this stimulus.) Then as composers appeared to shed their indebtedness to Wagner, so their works became more acceptable to critics. In the late 1880s optimism about the advance of English composition was growing. To several critics it appeared that German music was in decline. Wagner, whatever view one took of his output, was dead and his most recent composition was inaccessible outside of Bayreuth, leaving Brahms as the only living ‘great’ German composer. The optimism about English music was expressed by critics who saw in English ‘straightforwardness’ a corrective of an almost ethical nature to the trend towards melodic, harmonic and formal complexity that was in their view vitiating contemporary composition.

Yet from about 1892 onwards, native composition was being castigated by several prominent critics for its dryness. To some extent this change reflected the emergence of a new generation of critics with different desiderata, but the evidence suggests that English music had been benefiting from a temporary hiatus in the supply of first-rate foreign music. As soon as the new generation of Italian opera composers – Mascagni, Leoncavallo, and Puccini – appeared, with works that combined melody and dramatic intensity, English operatic efforts were put in the shade. And what the Italians did for opera, a succession of foreign composers – Grieg, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky (especially), and later Strauss – did for orchestral music. In Hughes and Stradling’s account, challenges to the ‘renaissance’ came from other native composers: from Sullivan, a ‘follower’ who descended into comic opera and then made a feeble effort to rejoin the periods up to the then present but made no mention of contemporary native composition.
mainstream, and from Elgar, a Wagner disciple whose attempt to mount an alternative renaissance petered out. However, the most powerful challenge to native composition at the time came not from competing factions at home but from foreign composers, especially Tchaikovsky. Some critics later remarked that the foreign influence of Handel and Mendelssohn on English composers had given way to that of Wagner and Tchaikovsky, an observation that illustrates again the openness of English music to whatever developments were taking place in music in general.

The ‘renaissance’ narrative put forward by Fuller Maitland was contested or even ridiculed by some prominent critics. But once in circulation it elicited alternative versions. Rosa Newmarch, for example, claimed that the renaissance was launched when interest switched from the moribund nineteenth-century tradition of oratorio to secular orchestral music, a development that owed much to Henry Wood and his partnership with Robert Newman. In another narrative, the activity of the RCM composers was represented as not even a propaedeutic to an eventual renaissance but a false trail that confirmed the public’s poor opinion of native composition, making it more difficult to gain a hearing for the younger generation of composers who were intent on pursuing their own individual artistic aims. The several surveys of the works of these composers testify to the efforts made by some critics to gain recognition for them, in the belief that with them lay the real renaissance.

As shown in chapter 5, although the demand for music in general fluctuated, the demand for native music (a topic that Hughes and Stradling hardly touch on) was generally low, except in the case of Elgar. Had there been a renaissance in native composition dating back to about 1880, after nearly twenty-five years it should have made considerable headway. But the spectacular failure of the planned National Festival of British Music in 1903 provides convincing evidence of how little had been the impact on the public. It contrasted with the successful Elgar Festival of the following year, an event that brings out the way in which the provision of music was at the behest of private initiative with no ‘official’ backing. (It also contrasted with the successful Strauss Festival in 1902, another illustration of the cosmopolitan orientation in the period.)
6.4 Nationalism

The evidence presented in chapter 4 shows that interest in the advance of English music was not driven by a concern about the declining international status of England and the growing economic strength of Germany and other countries. Germany had been recognised as a superior force in the world of music for many decades, and English musicians had accepted that study in Germany was practically an essential part of their musical education. It was a coincidence that Germany happened to be both England’s chief commercial and chief musical rival; in the art world of painting, for example, France occupied the corresponding role to Germany. The calls for a national school of composition that were made from time to time from the early years of the century onward antedated the unification of the German Empire and the emergence of Germany as a commercial competitor. They reflected a sense of national inferiority within the music art world, the population as whole remaining largely indifferent to art music. H.R. Haweis, for example, wished to rouse the English from their indifference; he saw their lack of interest in the ethically elevating qualities of German music as not only an indicator of poor taste but also a matter for shame. Had a national art music been seen as an important factor in promoting a sense of national identity it would have received some support from central government beyond the minimal involvement in setting up the RCM as a conservatoire.

During the earlier part of the period, some critics called for English composition to exhibit a distinct Englishness and drew on a stereotype of national character to formulate ethical desiderata for English composition. The question of what part nationality should play – whether, indeed, it should play any part at all – was, as shown in chapter 4, central to the debate about the direction of English music. (This aspect of the debate passes almost unnoticed in Hughes and Stradling’s account of the EMR prior to the emergence of the so-called ‘Pastoral School’.) Although the debate lasted throughout the period of this study, demands for a distinctively English music diminished, and the stridency of the remaining calls showed they were not being heeded – the opposite of what would be expected if concerns about the loss of English ascendancy in international politics and trade were affecting the music art world. Provision of music remained in the commercial sphere. Prestigious English musical
institutions continued to appoint foreigners to important posts when they believed it was in the interests of the institution to do so. Some commentators expressed dismay, suspecting a prejudice operating against possible English candidates. But even if it was prejudice – the prejudicial favour given to foreigners that had been complained about throughout the century – it was exactly the opposite of what one would expect in a protectionist atmosphere. Strauss was acclaimed in England – not by all, of course. Elgar prospered in Germany at a time when Anglophobia was rife in the German press as a result of the Boer War. Moreover, if nationalism were strongly at work, one might expect English critics to boost the status of England’s most prominent composer, yet increasingly in the period 1905–7 critics were expressing reservations about the direction he was taking. And when conservative English critics formulated their hopes for the future of music – a future that would eschew the sensationalism of such as Strauss – they looked to another German, Brahms, as a model to follow.

6.5 Demand and supply

There can be no doubt that the scale of musical activity significantly increased during the period, and through such agencies as the Proms, choral societies, competitive festivals, concerts for the poor, touring opera companies, etc., more people were attracted to serious music. It was this growth of interest that commentators generally referred to when they used the term ‘renaissance’ or its equivalents, and this usage can be traced back over many years. The ostensible scale of concert-giving in London was deceptive: in the commercial nexus London was a honeypot and supply greatly outran demand. In any case, it is debatable whether the greater interest shown in music was proportional to the population increase and comparable with the growth of interest in theatre, musical comedy, etc. Many critics were still not satisfied that the advance had been enough to justify calling England a ‘musical country’. Germany remained the standard of comparison: it was widely represented as a country where serious music mattered to many more people than in England and where it received support from government, either state or municipal. The many efforts to win support for an English national opera led nowhere, and in any case the music community was divided about the desirability of such an institution. The Proms were seen as the surest sign of progress; their rescue by a not-for-profit organisation enabled their programming to be more
adventurous. However, other institutions represented in secondary literature as signs that musical life was flourishing were subjected to serious criticism: the numerous music colleges were criticised for turning out more musicians than were needed and the provincial festivals for their exclusiveness and the priority given to raising money for charity.

The evidence presented in chapter 5 concerning audience make-up and size is largely anecdotal. This is an area that would benefit from further research if the relevant data—for example, the numbers of tickets sold at the various price levels—were available. However, the claim that foreigners made up a high proportion of concert audiences would be difficult to corroborate; likewise the assertion that a large majority of the audience were women.

Comparisons with Germany figured heavily in discussions about the level of musical interest in England. The White Paper published during the debate about a publicly funded opera house (see above, p. 250) includes some information about provision. But information about the uptake would be necessary to confirm the frequently voiced assertion that a significantly higher proportion of the German than the English population attended concerts and opera. This is a complex issue, as information relating to attendance at professional performances would give only a partial picture. Also relevant are first, the level of amateur participation, for example in choral societies, and, second, the popularity of competing attractions, such as music-hall and whatever were its counterparts in Germany.

### 6.6 Implications for future scholarship

Leaving aside for the moment the problematic use of the term ‘renaissance’ in historical studies, it is still open to scholars to argue that the quality of the music composed during the period merits the honorific term. In that case the evidence would be drawn from analysis and appraisal of the music itself. At first sight this appears a difficult case to argue, as the residue of the period is small. The only works written before 1900 that remain in the choral repertoire are Stainer’s *Crucifixion*—never put forward as a ‘renaissance’ composition, and in any case still generally performed as church music—
Parry’s *Blest Pair of Sirens* and the hymn tune ‘Repton’ derived from *Judith*, together with some of the early works of Elgar, such as *King Olaf*. Until relatively recently, to these could have been added Coleridge-Taylor’s *Hiawatha’s Wedding-Feast* and Stanford’s *The Revenge*. None of the orchestral music before *Enigma* and none of the operatic output (apart from the Savoy operas, again never claimed for the renaissance) remain. Of course, a great deal more music has been recorded, but the economics of recording in comparison with those of live performance make it possible to market almost anything. Yet even here some works that figure prominently in the EMR narrative, such as *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Rose of Sharon*, have yet to be recorded. However, the existence of at least one annual festival of English music – the English Music Festival, held at Dorchester Abbey, Oxfordshire – showcasing neglected works of the period is evidence that some present-day critics continue to endorse the aesthetic judgment enshrined in the term ‘renaissance’.

The methodology of this thesis has been to set aside the two recurrent motifs in existing scholarship – ‘Das Land ohne Musik’ and ‘the English Musical Renaissance’ – in order to examine the full scope of the contemporary debate about the progress and regress of music. The findings have amply confirmed that the field of music exhibited what José Harris, cited at the outset (above, p. 9), termed the ‘immensely varied, contradictory, and fissiparous quality’ of the movements of thought of the period.\(^3\) The focus in existing secondary literature on English affairs has obscured the full scope of the debate. The EMR narrative that subsequently emerged as the dominant one in accounts of the period was of minority interest to contemporaries, and was ridiculed by some of the most prominent critics. As regards ‘Das Land ohne Musik’, contemporaries were less inclined than latter-day scholars to acquit England of all vestiges of the accusation. This thesis has argued that setting the two motifs aside has resulted in a more comprehensive and complex picture of the period. Both motifs, it is argued, have lost their usefulness for scholarship.

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\(^3\) Harris 1993: 2
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B1 Periodicals and newspapers

The following periodicals have been surveyed in their entirety for the period 1888–1907:

**Specialist**

Weekly: *Musical News, Musical Standard, Musician*


Quarterly: *New Quarterly Musical Review, Quarterly Musical Review*

The three volumes of the collected music criticism of Bernard Shaw – *Shaw’s Music* have also been surveyed. References are coded as *SM1, SM2, SM3*. (Dan H. Laurence, ed., *Shaw’s Music* (3 Vols.), London, 1981, the Bodley Head)

**Non-specialist**

Weekly: *Academy, Athenæum, Outlook, Saturday Review, Speaker*


Quarterly: *Edinburgh Review, Quarterly Review.*

In the case of certain topics treated in greater depth, the following specialist journals have also been examined:

*Monthly Musical Record*, *Musical Herald, Musical World, Magazine of Music*

Other non-specialist periodicals have been cited occasionally, as indicated in the detailed bibliography below.

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### BQR  British Quarterly Review

**BQR1872.01**  

### Ch  Chord

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### CJ  Chambers’s Journal

**CJ1883.12.08**  

### CR  Contemporary Review

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**IJE  International Journal of Ethics**

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**IR  Illustrated Review**

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**JRSS  Journal of the Royal Statistical Society**

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**WR Westminster Review**


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Appendix 1: notes on periodicals, contributors, etc.

Many articles and reviews were unsigned, and even where the identity of the principal critic of a non-specialist periodical is now known, authorship of a particular article cannot be known for certain, as some critics had assistants or correspondents (for example, at festivals). For this reason, unless the identity of the critic is known, unsigned articles are referenced only to the periodical. This applies also to unsigned articles in specialist periodicals, although leading articles are attributed to the editor when internal evidence points strongly in that direction.

The information below is gathered from a number of sources, including the periodicals themselves. Basic information about non-specialist periodicals is mostly taken from the Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism (DNCJ). This source has very little information about music periodicals and critics; what there is is often referenced to Hughes (2002), which has also been a useful source. Some specialist periodicals are described in the RIPM (Retrospective Index to Music Periodicals, 1766–1962), accessible online. There is also a useful series of articles on music periodicals by Sydney Grew. Christopher Kent has identified many individual critics in two articles in the Victorian Periodicals Review. Obituaries, especially those in the Musical Times, are a very useful source of information. The ‘Deaths’ column of the Times has also been used to establish dates of death.

Many critics were organists, and information about posts occupied and dates may be found in: (1) Frederick W. Thornsby, Dictionary of Organs and Organists (Bournemouth: Logan, 1912); (2) Biographical Dictionary of the Organ (online).

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A1.1 Periodicals

Specialist periodicals: weekly

Musical News

The *Musical News* started in March 1891. It was edited at first by E.H. Turpin and T.L. Southgate, assisted by F. Gilbert Webb as sub-editor. Turpin and Southgate had broken away from the *Musical Standard*, of which Turpin had once been editor. The *News* was set up by a syndicate with the support of the College of Organists, with which both Southgate and Turpin were associated. The break was not amicable. The *News* undercut the *Standard* in price, charging 1d instead of 3d. For a time the *Standard* referred to the new paper as the ‘Penny Trumpet’, but soon it reduced its own price to 1d. The matters of contention between the two papers are of little interest to the present study, having to do with the status of teaching institutions and qualifications. The *Musical News* editors’ bugbear was the proliferation of certificates, diplomas and degrees; it seems to have been a major preoccupation of Southgate, who later was concerned to expose questionable associations of orchestral players.

If the declarations made by the editors in the first issue of Volume 2 (1 January 1892) are to be believed, the paper soon overtook the *Musical Standard* in circulation; it claimed to have achieved the largest circulation of any musical weekly.³

In comparison with the *Musical Standard* under Baughan, the periodical was quite parochial in its outlook and coverage, and there was little by way of incisive commentary on broader aspects of the development of music. Leading articles were contributed by a number of authors, including from time to time one or both of the editors, and were usually signed.

At some point in 1895 the editorship passed to John Ernest Borland, who remained with the paper until 1902. Borland held various posts as organist between 1881 and 1898, after which he became organist of St Botolph Without, Bishopsgate. He was director of
music at the Bermondsey University Settlement from 1891 to 1913. Arthur Watson, who had often contributed to the periodical, appears to have been assistant editor to Borland; he wrote the editorial articles during a period in the summer when Borland was, presumably, on holiday.

In 1907 the editor was J. Percy Baker, as appears from a report on a *Musical News* dinner held in that year. It is not known when Baker became editor, or whether there were other editors between 1902 and 1907. Articles signed by W.S. Case and by Oliver Ives appeared during the period 1902–4 but generally the number of signed articles decreased and it is not clear how many of the leading articles (possibly all of them) were written by the editor.

*Musical Standard*

Founded in 1862, the *Musical Standard* called itself ‘a newspaper for musicians, professional and amateur’. Ebenezer Prout was a reviewer for the paper during the earliest part of the period. His reviews often referred to technical points, especially in harmony, confirming that the paper was intended for professionals and amateurs. A sizeable proportion of its readership at this time were church organists and choirmasters, as is shown by the number of editorials dealing with church matters.

Until the summer of 1891, leading articles and some reviews were signed, or at least initialled. T.L. Southgate, E.H. Turpin and John Broadhouse were frequent contributors. Turpin had been editor until 1886, when Broadhouse succeeded him. From 1888 Southgate was co-editing. By January 1892 it is clear that Turpin had left the *Musical Standard*, as he was named by a correspondent as an editor and proprietor of the *Musical News*. E.A. Baughan took over as editor some time in 1892. A leading article criticising Southgate makes clear that he was no longer writing for the *Musical Standard*. He was by then co-editor of the *Musical News* (see above). The two papers

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9 Borland was the subject of an article in the *Musical Herald* in 1907: ‘Dr John E. Borland’, *Musical Herald*, No. 714 (09/07), 259–62.
10 See leading article in the issue of 02/04/92, 281.
were involved from about March 1892 onwards in a spat about what were in essence turf wars between rival teaching and examining institutions.

From January 1894 the price of the *Musical Standard* was reduced to 1d and the paper enlarged. At this point Baughan briefly stated the approach of the paper. Among the issues raised was that of the treatment of British and foreign music: ‘whatever is worthy of support in the works of our own composers shall receive our support, not because they are by Englishmen, but because they are good as music’.

In addition to leading articles, Baughan wrote under the pseudonym ‘R. Peggio’. These articles were more speculative and sometimes humorous, but through them ran strands of thought that were apparent in the more ‘formal’ leaders. Baughan denied that he put forward any consistent ‘views’ in R. Peggio’s column ‘Rambling Reflections’, but sometimes he used this pseudonymous column to express some of the contradictory opinions and impressions he had about music. In an article in March 1897 he distinguished two personae within himself: Peggio, the Superior Person, and Peggio, the Friend of Man, ‘the lover of sensuous beauty in Art’.

He had to admit that music that fell short of his aesthetic standards as Superior Person could nevertheless touch him as a human being. His explanation for this duality was that art appreciation was a matter of education, but feeling a primordial gift. Whichever was dominant at any moment depended on mood, which was unpredictably variable. Baughan also briefly discussed the idea that classical ‘form’, which had been claimed to give a ‘noble simplicity’ to the works of Mozart and Beethoven, could also be construed as a limitation – a lack of ‘plasticity’ characteristic of the early stages of an art. But the soul of music lay in melody and harmony, so what was admired in Beethoven was not the rigid simplicity of form but the poetic feeling.

E.A. Baughan’s editorship came to an end in November 1902, when he moved to the *Daily News* as music critic (and also, two years later, drama critic). He was succeeded

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by his brother J.H.G. Baughan, who had previously contributed reviews to the periodical.  

*Musician*

The *Musician* appeared only briefly: there were 28 weekly issues between May and November 1897. It was expensive – 6d. per copy – and this probably led to its early demise. It was competing with the weekly *Musical Standard* and *Musical News*, both of which cost only 1d. (A later periodical with the same name that appeared in 1905–6 was the house organ of the Vincent Music Company.)

**Specialist periodicals: monthly**

*Magazine of Music*

Describing itself as ‘For the Student and the Million’, this periodical, which started publication in 1884, was the journal of the Musical Reform Association, which promoted a simplified form of musical notation. However, like the *Musical Herald*, which served the tonic sol-fa movement, it carried articles of general interest. It lasted until 1897, by which time it consisted mostly of sheet music (in conventional notation). In its last issue, a new magazine, *Musical Life*, was promised as a successor, but appears not to have materialised.

*Monthly Musical Record*

This periodical was founded in 1871 by the German publisher Augener; its orientation was scholarly and its first editor was Ebenezer Prout. J.S. Shedlock became editor in the early 1880s and remained until 1912. Frederick Niecks was a frequent contributor.

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13 JHGB was not explicitly named in the paper as editor until April 1904.
Musical Herald

The former title of this periodical, the Tonic Sol-fa Reporter, indicates its provenance. Founded in 1851, it remained the organ of the tonic sol-fa movement, although not restricted to this field in its articles.

Musical Opinion & Music Trade Review

This periodical, which started in 1877, regularly gave space to matters of interest to organists, who probably comprised a significant proportion of the readership. Some longer articles – such as reviews of festivals – were reprinted from other sources.

One regular feature, entitled ‘By the Wayside’, was a collection of short notices of concerts (including events such as church choir festivals and organ recitals) that had recently taken place across the country. It is useful in giving an idea of the sheer number of choral and orchestral societies in existence and the repertoire performed: for example, thirty-six different societies were mentioned in the first six months of 1888.

From remarks scattered about his reviews it appears that the paper’s critic in the early part of the period of study, J.B.K., who was probably German, did not in general think much of English composition. He was very complimentary on occasions, as for example in his response to Ethel Smyth’s Mass, but he frequently drew attention to reminiscences of other works and composers. ‘Tritone’ was the pseudonym of the writer of the column ‘Musical Gossip of the Month’. In September 1893 he announced that he had suffered a stroke that prevented him from continuing to write the column.14

Towards the end of 1897, J.B.K. went abroad and for a short time contributed articles from Germany (further evidence that he was probably German). Concert and opera reviews disappeared after his departure. The pseudonymous author ‘Common Time’ (abbreviated to ‘CT’ below) contributed a regular column entitled ‘Musical Gossip of the Month’, which had started in 1897. This column contained the most incisive and

extended discussion in the whole journal, to such an extent that from this point on almost all material relevant to the present study has been drawn from his column.

Musical Times

The Musical Times began publication in 1844 and is still published today. There were three editors during the period covered by the present study: W.A. Barrett (1887–91), E.F. Jacques (1891–7), F.G. Edwards (1897–1909). Joseph Bennett was a frequent contributor. The nature of the readership of the Musical Times can be gleaned from the typical contents of an issue. This consisted mostly of brief reports relating to musical activities across the country (especially festivals), snippets of historical information, reviews of printed music for church, home or amateur choir, book reviews, notes of appointments to posts such as church organists, and suchlike. At least one longer article appeared in each issue and sometimes a lengthy treatment of a topic would be serialised. Supplements of short anthems and part-songs were included with many issues and other scores, mainly choral (and mostly published by Novello, the publisher of the periodical), were advertised, along with notices of forthcoming concerts and small-ads inserted by singers, teachers, instrument-makers, etc. The readership most likely consisted of what were called at the time ‘amateurs’ (music lovers, whether performers or not) together with music teachers, organists, choirmasters, etc. Until 1902 the full name of the journal was The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular.

Musical World

Although described in RIPM as ‘the preeminent nineteenth-century British music journal’, by 1888 this could no longer be said of it. Begun in 1836, by 1888 it was languishing; Francis Hueffer edited it between 1886 and June 1888, when E.F. Jacques took over until it folded in 1891.
Proceedings of the Musical Association

The Musical Association was founded in 1874. It was intended to be a learned society similar in aims and organisation to others, as was stated in the first of its list of rules.\textsuperscript{15} Sessions ran from November to June, with one paper being presented each month. The discussion that followed each paper was included in the published Proceedings and is of interest in indicating the extent of agreement or disagreement.

The first presenter noted that behind the foundation of the Association lay a concern that ‘music as an art had been too much divided from music as a science, and especially from acoustics, its natural basis’.\textsuperscript{16} The papers given in the first session dealt with technical matters relating to instruments, tone, pitch, scales, notation and theories of harmony. However, in time the range of topics extended, with a growing bias towards the art rather than the science of music. Members were not always well informed about the scientific side: a cranky theory of sound was received uncritically by most of the audience and its advocate was even invited to give a second paper.\textsuperscript{17}

The membership comprised ‘the great and the good’ from the music community. Amongst those holding the offices of President or Vice-President were such figures as Stainer, Parry, and Grove. Presenters included writers and critics such as F. Gilbert Webb, E.A. Baughan, E.F. Jacques, Rosa Newmarch and others. Papers were generally of a high standard, but contributions to the subsequent discussion were often superficial or anecdotal.

The members of the association were for the most part academics, who had an investment in the principles they taught. They could therefore be expected to be on the whole somewhat conservative in their attitudes to contemporary developments. The writers and critics generally showed more open-mindedness, probably because they realised that much of what the academics disapproved of was enjoyed by the audiences who constituted the critics’ readership.

\textsuperscript{15} Proceedings, 1st session, p iv.
\textsuperscript{16} Proc. 1st session, p 1
\textsuperscript{17} G.A. Audsley, ‘What is Sound? The Substantial Theory versus the Wave Theory of Acoustics’, Proceedings of the Musical Association, 16th session (1889–90), 103–48; ‘Again,
Specialist periodicals: quarterly

Chord

Only five issues of the *Chord* appeared, from May 1899 to September 1900. It was edited by John F. Runciman and contributors included E.A. Baughan, Vernon Blackburn and Ernest Newman. Articles were mostly signed; the unsigned ones it may be assumed were written by Runciman. The periodical was issued from the same office as the monthly *Dome* (1897–1900) which referred to its content as if it were a sister publication.¹⁸

Quarterly Musical Review

The *Quarterly Musical Review* was a short-lived publication. It ran for sixteen issues, from February 1885 to November 1888; each issue contained a small number of long articles. Its editor was Henry Hiles, who saw it as a forum for ‘thought and encouragement’ for the large number of music teachers scattered across the country; it would aid the advance of music in education and facilitate discussion about ‘all wise plans for the regeneration and the firm establishment of that English School of Music which, from the earliest historic times, has been one of the glories of their countrymen; and which […] needs only zeal, confidence and wisdom among its disciples to restore it to its former place among the foremost and brightest developments of the Divine Art’.¹⁹

From the fourth issue onwards, several pages devoted entirely to advertisements for Hiles’s own books and compositions were appended, each advert including copious extended extracts from reviews. In the issue for May 1888, for example, such adverts took up 12 pages.

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New Quarterly Musical Review

This short-lived periodical, which appeared between 1893 and 1896, was edited by Granville Bantock, assisted by William Wallace and H. Orsmond Anderton. Contributors included prominent critics and musicians such as Mackenzie, Frederick Corder, Ernest Newman, Fuller Maitland, R.A. Streatfeild, and F. Gilbert Webb.

Non-specialist periodicals: weekly

Academy

The Academy began publication in 1869. For a brief period from 1902 to 1905 the words ‘and Literature’ were added to the title. (This also happened again for the period 1910–14; publication ceased in 1916.) Each issue was mostly devoted to literary matters, but there were also, at least during the period up to 1897, sections on science, fine art, the stage, and music. The last-named consisted of concert and opera reviews, book reviews and notes. The paper’s music critic, J.S. Shedlock, signed his reviews; however, he used the first person plural, as if giving the corporate view of the paper (except when he was reporting on events abroad). Other reviews and notes also appeared but these were not attributed and it is not known to what extent Shedlock was associated with them.

In November 1896 there was a change of style, with each issue carrying at most a single article headed ‘Music’. Shedlock wrote these in the first person and, in common with all others in the periodical, they were signed with initials only. Shedlock moved to the Athenæum in 1898 and articles on music, along with science and art, disappeared until 1902, when Arthur Symons wrote for the paper as both drama and music critic, most of his articles being about drama. But coverage of music ceased in the following year until the appointment of a new editor in October, when unsigned weekly notes began to appear. (It is possible that H.A. Scott, who reviewed some music books in July 1904, was also the author of the unsigned notes.) The notes disappeared in August 1904 and only a few unsigned articles on music appeared in the period up to February 1905. From then on regular, almost weekly, articles appeared, the first two signed by H.C. Colles.
Then the editorship changed hands again and the title reverted to *The Academy*. The articles continued, some unsigned, some signed ‘H C C’ (clearly Colles) and others ‘C’ (possibly George Cecil, whose name appeared in 1907) or ‘E#’ (presumably Elizabeth Sharp). From August 1907, articles on music appeared only sporadically.

*Athenaeum*

*The Athenaeum* began publication in 1830. It was mainly a literary periodical but by 1888 was carrying regular sections on science, fine art, drama and music. The music section was divided into ‘The week’ (reviews of selected concerts) and ‘Musical gossip’ (shorter reviews and other news, including news from abroad) and concluded with a list of the concerts, etc, for the forthcoming week. There were also occasional book reviews and reviews of published music, but no substantial articles on musical topics – any general observations on the progress or regress of music were made briefly in the course of reviews or news items. The layout of the paper remained identical throughout the twenty-year period of this survey. Although in previous years music reviews had been signed – for example, by Ebenezer Prout, the periodical’s music critic in the early 1880s – by 1888 they were anonymous and written in the first person plural. However, the reviews of the 1888 Bayreuth Festival were signed ‘H F F’ (H.F. Frost). In an obituary of Frost, who died in 1901, Prout identified Frost as the sole critic of the *Athenæum* from 1889 to 1898; Frost was also critic of the *Standard* from 1888 until his death. He was one of Wagner’s earliest champions in England. ‘He was a well-read musician, of large general knowledge and of broad sympathies, with a strong leaning to the modern romantic school’. Shedlock took over as critic from 1898 and remained until 1916.

The term ‘chronicle’ was frequently used in reviews and it is clear that the paper saw as part of its function to provide as full a record as possible of musical events in London and of major events, such as festivals, elsewhere. When the number of concerts was exceptionally large, it was not possible to cover them all, and in many cases events were merely ‘noticed’ without evaluative comment. It was the practice of concert givers to

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issue scores of new works to critics. On one occasion where this was not done (for a new cantata by MacCunn), the critic declined to review the work.\textsuperscript{22} Another of the protocols of concert criticism is shown in the following statement: ‘The London Symphony Orchestra gave a concert last Tuesday evening at Queen’s Hall […] Although our critic was present, we are debarred from noticing the performance, owing to the fact that no tickets for it were received at the address of this journal’.\textsuperscript{23} (The \textit{Athenæum} had earlier complained that the LSO were no longer sending free tickets.)

From April 1905 there was a distinct reduction in the space devoted to music.

\textit{Outlook}

This periodical was founded by Percy Hurd in 1898 and lasted until 1928; its political orientation was imperialist. Joseph Conrad and Max Beerbohm were among the contributors. Articles on music were initialled: H.A.S. (almost certainly Hugh Arthur Scott, author of a signed article in the \textit{Chord}),\textsuperscript{24} W.F.S.W. (unidentified), E.J.O. (possibly Ernest J. Oldmeadow).\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Saturday Review}

The \textit{Saturday Review of politics, literature, science and art}, a weekly periodical, was founded in 1855. W. Barclay Squire was music critic from 1888 to 1894, when the paper was bought by Frank Harris, who edited it until 1898. Harris engaged John F. Runciman as music critic, a post that Runciman held until his death in 1916. Runciman’s appointment marked a transition in the \textit{Saturday Review}’s contributions to music criticism.

The coverage of music before 1894 was almost entirely through reviews of performances and of sheet music. There were very few articles of a reflective or synoptic character, apart from obituaries of celebrated composers and performers. The

\textsuperscript{22} ‘Musical gossip’, \textit{The Athenæum}, No. 3359 (12/03/92), 351–2; 351.
\textsuperscript{23} ‘Musical gossip’, \textit{The Athenæum}, No. 4147 (20/04/07), 483.
\textsuperscript{25} DNCJ, 174–5.
music critic was W. Barclay Squire and although all the writing in the periodical was unattributed, the consistency of style and approach (together with occasional references back to comments made some considerable time earlier) suggest a single author at work throughout the period. He felt called upon to achieve as wide a coverage as possible, and frequently complained that the sheer number of events made this impracticable. His job was to evaluate performances and works: artists – composers and performers – expected such evaluation, but circumstances often prevented them from receiving it.

The change of critic in 1894 brought about an abrupt change in the views expressed. The style of Runciman’s criticism was very different from that of his predecessor: his writing was intemperate, even brutal at times, and sarcastic (but far less genial than Shaw’s). Harold E. Gorst briefly substituted for Runciman in 1906–7.

*Speaker*

The *Speaker*, a weekly paper, began publication in January 1890. Its political orientation was liberal. At first it carried very few articles on music (unlike drama and art, both well represented). But the number increased so that by 1895 there were about ten in each half-year, although there were lean periods. Most of the articles were prospective or retrospective comments on opera, many of them focused on singers. This appears to reflect the view, explicitly stated by the paper’s critic in 1894, that men generally did not take any interest in music apart from opera, which they went to mainly for the prima donnas. Unlike those on art and drama, the music articles were unsigned.

A new series was started in October 1899, when the paper added ‘The Liberal Review’ to its title. Until April 1901 articles on music were signed by ‘W.G.’ and (in the case of one book review) ‘F.J.’ (both unidentified). W.G. may have been new to the paper, as there was less of a bias towards opera in his coverage – but this might also have been a consequence of editorial policy. The policy changed from April 1901: there were fewer articles on music – only four, written by named individuals, in the first six months, including one by Ernest Newman, who became the paper’s music critic. Newman contributed a series of ten fortnightly articles on contemporary British composers.
between December 1901 and April 1902. His style in these articles is interesting: he used the first person singular when giving his own opinions but the first person plural when appraising works, clearly implying that he thought criticism as he practised it to be objective, drawing attention to features of the work that were ‘there’ for everyone (or at least everyone who was musically well educated) to observe. After this series, articles on music appeared infrequently and from 1905 included pieces by other, mostly unnamed, writers and two articles by J.F. Runciman.

In March 1907 *The Speaker* became *The Nation*, under the editorship of H.J. Massingham. Newman contributed a review of a book on religious music to the issue of 23 March, but after this articles on music were anonymous. If there was a single writer it was certainly not Newman, as one article was dismissive of *The Ring*.²⁷

**Non-specialist periodicals: monthly**

*Dome*

Described in *DNCJ* as ‘the longest running of the little magazines of the 1890s’, the *Dome* lasted from 1897 to 1900. It was mainly focused on art and literature, but sheet music (which included songs by Coleridge-Taylor and Elgar) was included, as were articles on music by Runciman and Vernon Blackburn.

*Monthly Review*

The *Monthly Review* first appeared in October 1900 and lasted until 1907. Its first editor, until 1904, was Henry Newbold (the poet of Clifton College, always associated with the line ‘Play up! Play up, and play the game!’).

Articles on music were sporadic, from one to three or four a year. Miss A.E. Keeton was the most frequent contributor (as she was to the other monthly and quarterly periodicals surveyed).

National Review

The *National Review* was a monthly periodical that began publication in 1883 and continued until 1950. Alfred Austin, later Poet Laureate, was joint editor until 1887; he then became sole editor until August 1893, when Leo Maxse took over. After 1898, articles on music, which had been reasonably frequent, died out, with the exception of a short article on ‘Street Music’ by Virginia Stephen (later married name: Woolf) that appeared in 1905.

Contemporary Review

This periodical was founded in 1866 as a Broad Church answer to the secular *Fortnightly Review* and *remained a prominent high-cultural journal into the twentieth century*.

Fortnightly Review

Soon after its launch in 1865, this periodical became a monthly, but retained its name. Frank Harris became editor in 1886 and took the paper in a more radical direction. Harris moved to the *Saturday Review* in 1894; under his successor, W.L. Courtney, the periodical reverted to its more intellectual orientation.

Nineteenth Century

Founded in 1877, this liberal periodical was *one of the most important and distinguished monthlies of serious thought in the last quarter of the nineteenth century*. In 1901 it changed its title to the *Nineteenth Century and After*.

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28 *DN CJ*, 139.
29 *DN CJ*, 456.
Westminster Review

The Westminster Review was the idea of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill and was founded in 1824 as a quarterly Radical rival to the Edinburgh Review (Whig) and the Quarterly Review (Tory). It became a monthly in 1887.

Blackwood’s Magazine
Cornhill Magazine
Longman’s Magazine
Macmillan’s Magazine

The magazines differed from the reviews in carrying more fiction (short stories and serialised novels). Their articles tended to be lighter in tone and more anecdotal.

Non-specialist periodicals: quarterly

Edinburgh Review

This first appeared in 1802 and was the first of the major reviews. During the period of the present study each article was linked to a list of books related to its subject; these were referred to, although not necessarily all reviewed in depth, in the article.

Quarterly Review

The Tory Quarterly Review was launched in 1809 to counter the Whig Edinburgh Review. Although its political influence declined as the number of daily papers grew, ‘it continued to enjoy considerable prestige in Tory circles’. 30
A1.2 Contributors

Allen, Grant (1848–99) Writer of popular fiction (including the scandalous *The Woman Who Did*) and prolific writer of articles on science (especially evolution) and other subjects; author of a history of Anglo-Saxon Britain.


E.E.B. Unidentified correspondent.

E.F.B. Unidentified correspondent.


Banister, H.C. (1831–97) Professor, RAM (harmony, piano); textbook author; frequently chairman, Musical Association meetings.

Bantock, Granville (1868–1946) Composer; editor *New Quarterly Musical Review*.

Barnby, Joseph (1838–96) Organist; composer; director of music, Eton College 1875–; conductor, RCS 1871–96; Principal, Guildhall School of Music 1892–6.


Bennett, Joseph (1831–1911) Organist; librettist of oratorios, cantatas; music critic, *Daily Telegraph* 1870–1906; regular contributor to *Musical Times*.

Bernhard, Walter Regular contributor to *Musical Opinion*, especially on vocal and organ matters, suggesting he was an organist and choirmaster.


30 *DNCl*, 524.

Bradford, Jacob (1842–97) Organist; lecturer, Royal Naval School; composer.

Bridge, Frederick (1844–1924) Organist, Westminster Abbey 1882–1919; composer; professor, RCM; conductor, RCS 1896–1918; Professor of Music, London University 1903--.

Broadhouse, John (c.1834–?) Organist; editor, Musical Standard 1886–92; author of books on organ, violin, acoustics.

Buck, Percy Carter (1871–1947) Organist; director of music, Harrow School, 1901--.


Case, W.S. Nothing known.

Caunt, William H. Nothing known.

Cecil, George (‘C’?) Prolific contributor to several periodicals 1900--; otherwise nothing known.

Cobbett, W.W. (1847–1937) City businessman; amateur violinist; benefactor of chamber music; later compiler of encyclopedia of chamber music 1930--.

Colles, H.C. (1879–1943) Organ scholar 1900–3; music critic, Academy 1905; assistant music critic, Times 1905–11, critic 1911--.

‘Common Time’ Unidentified. Regular contributor to Musical Opinion from September 1897.

Corder, Frederick (1852–1932) Composer; professor, RAM (composition) 1889--.

Coutts, F.B. Money (1852–1923) Lawyer; heir to banking fortune; prolific author, esp. poetry; friend and librettist of Albéniz.

Crowest, Frederick J. (1851–1927) Early career as singer; writer of books on music; publisher.


A.B.D. Unidentified correspondent.

Dunhill, Thomas F. (1877–1946) Organist; composer; music master at Eton.


Evans, Edwin (1874–1945) Worked in the City, turning to music criticism 1901--; advocate of Debussy and modern music generally; later President, International Society for Contemporary Music.


W.G. Unidentified.

Goddard, Joseph (1833–1910) Essayist on music, esp. aesthetics.


Graves, Charles L. (1856–1944) Essayist; biographer of Grove; author *Post-Victorian Music* 1911; assistant editor, various magazines.


Hawes, Hugh Reginald (1838–1901) Clergyman, violinist; author, *Music and Morals* 1873; writer and lecturer, various topics.


Holbrooke, Joseph (1878–1958) Composer, pianist; studied under Corder.

Hopper, George Nothing known.


Ives, Oliver Nothing known.

F.J. Unidentified.


Johnstone W.H. Sonley (1866–96) Described in *Musical Standard* as ‘well-known Cardiff littérateur’; wrote history of first Cardiff Festival, 1892; editor of French classic texts; biography of Barnby unpublished owing to death.

Jones, W.A. Nothing known.

J.B.K. Unidentified; *Musical Opinion* critic, probably German.

Kenyon, C. Fred (1879–1926) Poet, novelist; from 1905 used pseudonym ‘Gerald Cumberland’ and was a prolific contributor to music periodicals.

Lane-Fox, Florence Soprano; occasional writer of magazine stories.


Newmarch, Rosa (1857–1940) Expert on Russian music; prolific writer of programme-notes 1908–.


Rendall, E.D. Organist; Director of music, Dulwich College, then Charterhouse.

Rodewald, Alfred (1862–1903) Liverpool merchant, benefactor; founder and conductor, Liverpool Orchestral Society; friend and supporter of Elgar. (Rodewald Concert Society still operates.)


Saint-George, Henry (1866–1917) Violinist, teacher, writer.


Smedley, Constance (1876–1941) Prolific author and journalist: novels, plays, children’s books, pageants.


Tovey, Donald Francis (1875–1940) Pianist, composer: first appearance 1900; music analyst; Professor of Music, Edinburgh 1914–.

‘Tritone’ Unidentified; wrote for *Musical Opinion*.


W.F.S.W. Unidentified.


Watson, Arthur (1863–1954) Studied English and Music, Owens College, Manchester; BA London 1885; contributor to music, historical and antiquarian journals; PhD 1935 (aged 72).31

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Williams, C.F. Abdy  (1855–1923) Organist (London, then Bradfield College), violinist, composer.

Yorke Trotter, T.H.  (1854–1934) Organist; Director, London Organ School (later became London Academy of Music) 1897–.
Appendix 2: music topics addressed in non-specialist monthly and quarterly periodicals

The articles on serious music (i.e. excluding music-hall) that appeared in ten monthly and quarterly non-specialist periodicals during the period 1888–1907 have been classified into two categories: (a) articles whose main subject relates to music; (b) articles that make some passing reference, however slight, to music. Table 1 below shows how many articles of each type appeared in each periodical during the 20-year period 1888-1907.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periodical</th>
<th>Main subject music</th>
<th>Some reference to music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Review</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortnightly Review</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nineteenth Century [and after]</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster Review</td>
<td>35*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh Review</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly Review</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackwood’s Magazine</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornhill Magazine</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longman’s Magazine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macmillan’s Magazine</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Most of these are short book reviews, including six of volumes of *English Minstrelsie*.

** includes two stories with musical content

These figures show a noticeable consistency of output within each type of review (monthly, quarterly), with greater variation among the magazines. Table 2 below shows a breakdown by subject-matter of the articles having music as main subject. (In the case of the *Westminster Review* only articles have been included, not book or performance reviews).
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wagner</td>
<td>20 (including one on Wagner and Liszt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composers who died well before the period</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary composers</td>
<td>Foreign: 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British: 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other historical topics</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical topics (origins of music, sound, tonic sol-fa, etc.)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (including anecdotal, humorous)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspects of contemporary music, music criticism</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary issues relating to music in England</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If Wagner, recently dead at the start of the period, is included as a contemporary topic, then overall about one-third of the articles on music dealt with broadly contemporary matters and the majority of these were about Wagner and other foreign composers. The profile of English composition was very low indeed. This situation contrasted greatly with that of theatre and fine art, where there were many articles on current developments at home and abroad.

Miss A.E. Keeton was the most frequent contributor, but none of her ten articles dealt with English composers or composition. Ernest Newman contributed eight articles, all written during the period 1900–04; one dealt with new music generally and one with English music and music criticism. Fuller Maitland’s seven articles were distributed over the thirteen years from 1893 to 1905; four dealt directly or indirectly with issues relevant to English composition. Of the six articles by J. Cuthbert Hadden – a Scottish
organist and writer of books on ‘Master Musicians’ – one dealt with music teaching in schools and another was about the ‘Wagner mania’, but neither was concerned with English composition. The Revd H.R. Haweis, the author of *Music and Morals* (1873), contributed five articles, none of which related to English composition. The only article solely about a contemporary English composer was Stanford’s substantial review of Parry’s *Judith* in the *Fortnightly Review* for October 1888. Other well-known writers included Vernon Lee (who wrote several articles that touched on the subject of emotional expression in music), Shaw (with a characteristic article on ‘the religion of the piano’), W.H. Hadow (on Brahms and the classical tradition, and on developments in modern – including English – music), Rosa Newmarch (on Tchaikovsky) and H.H. Statham (on Mendelssohn and on Handel and Bach festivals).

To the account above must be added the evidence from the (anonymous) book and drama reviews in the *Westminster Review*. The books reviewed do not relate to contemporary English composition but mainly to historical topics. The drama reviews include brief but complimentary comments on theatre music composed by Edward German, Parry, Stanford and Sullivan.

32 I am assuming that the article on violin-collecting in the July 1895 issue of *Cornhill Magazine* is by Haweis.
Appendix 3: illustrations

The portraits in this thesis are taken from two series of cigarette cards entitled ‘Musical Celebrities’ issued by W.D. & H.O. Wills in 1912 and 1914 respectively. There are fifty cards in each series. In addition eight cards were issued for the second series to replace pictures of Germans during the First World War.

The selection of a composer or performer to appear on such cards denotes a degree of recognition, although it is not known what permissions were sought or whether any person refused. The absence of Henry Wood is puzzling.

The complete list of names is as follows, cards used in the thesis being shown by an asterisk.

First series

1. Bach
2. Handel
3. Haydn
4. Mozart
5. Beethoven
6. Paganini
7. Weber
8. Rossini
9. Schubert
10. Costa (conductor, composer)
11. Mendelssohn
12. Chopin
13. Schumann
14. Liszt
15. Wagner
16. Gounod
17. Sims Reeves (singer)
18. Offenbach
19. Jenny Lind (singer)
20. August Manns (conductor)*
21. Joseph Joachim (violinist)
22. Brahms
23. Charles Santley (singer)
24. Saint-Saëns
25. Bizet
26. Tchaikovsky
27. Dvořák
28. Carl Rosa (impresario)*
29. Sullivan*
30. Grieg
31. Christine Nilsson (singer)
32. Adelina Patti (singer)
33. Hans Richter (conductor)
34. Pablo de Sarasate (violinist)
35. Stephen Adams (English composer of ‘The Holy City’)
36. Albani (singer)
37. Stanford*
38. Elgar*
39. Puccini*
40. Ysayé (violinist)
41. Nellie Melba (singer)
42. Paderewski (pianist)
43. MacDowell (American composer)
44. Debussy
45. Edward German*
46. Richard Strauss*
47. Edwin Lemare (English composer, settled in USA)
48. Tetrazzini (singer)
49. Caruso (singer)
50. Clara Butt (singer)
Second series

1. Palestrina
2. Purcell
3. Auber
4. Bishop (English composer of songs and operas, early c19)
5. Meyerbeer
6. Berlioz
7. Balfé (Irish opera composer)
8. Macfarren (English composer)
9. Sterndale Bennett (English composer)
10. Charles Hallé (conductor) – replaced by Boccherini
11. Anton Rubinstein (Russian composer, pianist)
12. Joseph Barnby (English conductor, composer)
13. Edward Lloyd (singer)
14. Mackenzie*
15. Frederick Bridge (conductor, composer)*
16. Parry*
17. Pachmann (pianist)
18. Cowen*
19. Lady Hallé (violinist) – replaced by Thomas Moore (Irish song composer)
20. Nikisch (conductor) – replaced by Verdi
21. Watkin Mills (singer)
22. Ben Davies (singer)
23. Leoncavallo*
24. Mascagni*
25. Weingartner (conductor) – replaced by Stainer*
26. Hugo Becker (cellist) – replaced by Massenet
27. Plunket Greene (singer)
28. Sibelius*
29. Busoni
30. Bantock*
31. Antoinette Sterling (singer)
32. Leonard Borwick (pianist)
33. Liza Lehmann (composer)
34. Leopold Godowsky (pianist)
35. Thomas Beecham (conductor)
36. Landon Ronald (conductor)
37. Fritz Kreisler (violinist) – replaced by Moritz Moszkowski (composer, pianist)
38. Coleridge-Taylor*
39. Pablo Casals (cellist)
40. Agnes Nicholls (singer)
41. Jean Gerardy (cellist)
42. Kirkby Lunn (singer)
43. Joseph Holbrooke*
44. Ada Crossley (singer)
45. Jan Kubelik (violinist)
46. Elena Gerhardt (singer) – replaced by Cécile Chaminade (pianist)
47. Wilhelm Backhaus (pianist) – replaced by Arthur Somervell*
48. John McCormack (singer)
49. Marie Hall (violinist)
50. Mischa Elman (violinist)