

Bias, Ridicule, and Commercialization:  
Social Implications in Victoria's "Land without Music"

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Moores School of Music

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Music

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By

James Brandon Stovall

December, 2012

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nineteenth-century England is today perceived as a “Land ohne Musik” (“land without music”). This label arose because England is said to have produced no first-rate composers between the time of Henry Purcell and Arthur Sullivan. Previous discussions of England as a “Land ohne Musik” have attempted to overcome this ignominy by pointing out the high points of Victorian musical life and the achievements of a few native composers. This thesis will focus, instead, on the social implications that caused England to develop this reputation. The discussion will first address the bias toward English musicians that existed during the nineteenth century. This resulted in a wholesale discouragement of English men from pursuing music as career. Secondly, the newly emergent music criticism industry will be investigated to show how those critics who promoted native artists failed in this task due to poor journalistic strategy. Finally, an overview of the massively commercialized musical market that developed during nineteenth-century England will demonstrate the overshadowing that foreigners had over native artists in the eyes of the leisured middle class.

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## A note on terminology

Throughout the course of this document, I will refer to various places in the British Isles in order to describe the location of certain events and areas where musical trends were common. Because of the changing governmental divisions and also because modern usage of these terms tends to be imprecise, especially in the United States, I feel that it is necessary to clarify what I mean by these terms. When I refer to England, I am referring to the country that is today part of the United Kingdom. It is bordered by Scotland in the north and Wales to the west. During the Victorian period it was a part of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland that existed from 1801 to 1922. England is the most used term during this discussion as very little of what we discuss will pertain to Ireland, Scotland, or Wales, the other areas of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. When I refer to the nation at large I will use the term Britain, of which Queen Victoria was the sovereign. Other areas within the British Empire will be irrelevant to the discussion and will not be mentioned.

## Introduction

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, revolutions occurred throughout various nations in Europe and in the United States. The overthrow of the monarchy in Paris and the subsequent rise of Napoleon Bonaparte would prove to be a turning point in the history of Europe, and especially, of Great Britain. With the end of The War of the Seventh Coalition in 1815, Great Britain officially saw a cease-fire to the Napoleonic Wars that had rigorously involved the financial and military support of the nation for over a decade. In the aftermath, Britain suffered from a power struggle between the aristocracy and middle class that was peacefully resolved by The Reform Act of 1832, which provided more demographically accurate representation in the House of Commons, increased the number of non-aristocratic voters, and resulted in a sharp decline in the power of the aristocracy.<sup>1</sup> Also contributing to the change in the social dynamic, The Industrial Revolution was in full swing and the social standing and wealth of the middle class was elevated to previously unprecedented heights.

By the time the Reform Act was passed, the middle class of London already commanded a music industry as large as any other in Europe. The explosion of musical activity during the late Georgian and early Victorian years resulted in a complex social environment in which opinionated musicians and journalists all vied for social status within the musical community of the city. As Lisa Withers notes, “The increasing power and participation of middle class professional and amateur musicians began to determine the

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<sup>1</sup> Eric J. Evans, *Parliamentary Reform, c1770-1917* (New York: Longman, 2000), 28-29. Also significant is the fact that unlike other revolutions that occurred during this period, Britain’s non-violent resolution to social conflict demonstrates the overall stability of the national identity.

course of musical life.”<sup>2</sup> And according to William Weber, “Members of the upper classes who did not play active roles in affairs of state often became deeply engaged in musical, theatrical, or literary politics, tossing off combative essays that mingled a great many levels of partisan meaning.”<sup>3</sup>

Among the trends of this newly developed social environment was the middle class’s increasing desire and obsession with social elevation, the proliferation of music journals and the controversial debates between prominent critics, and the commercialization of musical concerts that became increasingly available to the middle class. As I will show in the chapters that follow, these trends weakened the influence of English artists on the middle class, thus impeding their ability to define national musical taste. As a result, circumstances became such that, in 1914,<sup>4</sup> the phrase “Land ohne Musik”<sup>5</sup> (“Land without Music”) would be coined to classify this problem. Ralph Waldo Emerson described the dilemma in 1876:

England has no music. It has never produced a first-rate composer, and accepts only such music as has already been decided to be good in Italy and Germany. They seem to have great delight in these things, but not original appreciation; and value them as showy commodities, which they buy at great price for pride.<sup>6</sup>

This issue has heavily influenced the study of music in Victorian London, which has developed greatly in the last six decades. Pioneered in 1959 by Nicholas Temperley in his dissertation, “Instrumental Music In London 1800-1850,” the study of nineteenth-century

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<sup>2</sup> Lisa Withers A. “Solo Piano Performances in London from 1837 to 1850: A Cultural and Musical Evolution” (DMA diss., West Virginia University, 1999), 3.

<sup>3</sup> William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Banfield, “The Artist and Society,” in *Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800-1914*, ed. Nicholas Temperley (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 11.

<sup>5</sup> See Nicholas Temperley, “Xenophilia in British Musical History,” in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies: Volume 1*, ed. Bennett Zon (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 3. According to Temperley, “Land ohne Musik” was a phrase that came about as the idea of a musical renaissance emerged in England toward the end of the nineteenth century. The term “Land ohne Musik” was a way of describing the “darkness” that existed before the “light” of the “English Musical Renaissance.” It is not known who first used the phrase “Land ohne Musik.”

<sup>6</sup> Ralph W. Emerson, *English Traits* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1876), 388.



English music has since been explored by dozens of scholars. Most discussions of the Victorian period generally begin with the “Land ohne Musik” problem. The idea that very little music of quality was produced in London at this time and that there were no first rate composers that originated in the city has been a stigma that Temperley and these other musicologists have attempted to counter. Indeed, most of this scholarship has dealt with overcoming this ignominy by pointing out the high points of Victorian musical life and the achievements of a few native composers. But, only a few articles have mentioned or even alluded to the actual reasons behind the tarnished reputation of musical Victorian London. It is time for an evaluation of the direct effect Victorian musical life had on the “Land ohne Musik” problem.

The purpose of my study will be to illustrate the various forces that influenced the musical tastes of the middle class during the late Georgian and early Victorian periods (1800-1885) and to demonstrate the effect that they exerted upon musical life in London, which eventually caused England to gain the reputation of being a “Land ohne Musik.” These forces included the desire of the London middle class for social elevation, the failure of journalists to successfully promote native talent, and the massive commercialization of musical performances that favored popular music over art music. The discussion will consist of three chapters. The first chapter will deal with the middle class’s drive for social status and the bias against English artists that then existed. The second will introduce the controversial literary figure James William Davison and will discuss his shortcomings as a proponent of native talent. Finally, the third chapter will discuss how the rapid commercialization of England’s music industry resulted in the public’s demand for more popularized forms of musical entertainment and how failure to adapt and respond to this demand on the part of

English artists caused flamboyant foreign virtuosos to become synonymous with quality musical productions.

## Chapter 1: Social Elevation

A powerful force in nineteenth-century English middle class culture was a desire to achieve greater social status. Because of this drive, a bias was developed against English composers, who were seen as having low social status, in favor of foreign masters, who had long been popular entertainment among the aristocracy. This bias was the cause of several difficulties for English musicians in the job market, including a low demand for their services, a wholesale cultural discouragement of Englishmen from becoming musicians, and a lack of educational options for serious musicians. The result of these difficulties was that few musicians were produced in England during this period, and the English musicians who were working suffered a competitive disadvantage to more prestigious foreign musicians or titled persons. We will now examine how this bias developed, the effects that it had on English musical life, and how this contributed to the “Land ohne Musik” scenario.

In 1730, John James, a celebrated musician, acquired the post of organist at St. Olave, Southwark.<sup>7</sup> According to Cyril Ehrlich, his style was purported to be “learned and sublime,” however, among the man’s hobbies were “dog-fighting and bull-baiting” and he spent his time in the company of “butchers and bailiffs.”<sup>8</sup> Ehrlich states that:

... he [James] indulged an inclination to spirituous liquors of the coarsest kind, such as are the ordinary means of ebriety in the lowest of the people; and this kind of intemperance he would indulge even while attending his duty at church.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> H. Diack Johnstone, "James, John," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/14111> (accessed October 16, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 30.

<sup>9</sup> Ehrlich, 30.

This type of behavior, while certainly not applicable to all professional musicians of the era, was considered disreputable, and it was apparently common enough that it had a negative impact on middle class perceptions of the character of musicians. *The Choice of a Profession: A Concise Account and Comparative Review of the English Professions*, written by H. B. Thomson in 1857, over an hundred years after James's lifetime, was a manual designed to aid in the choice of a career. It described a musician as an "itinerant fiddler, and of the lowest grade of society."<sup>10</sup>

Joseph Bennett, music critic to *The Athenaeum* and several minor London journals and close acquaintance of London *Times* critic James William Davison, describes an occurrence that many would consider inappropriate decorum for a church service. John Goss, the organist at St. Paul's Cathedral in London from 1838-1872, had an assistant, a Mr. Cooper, who would handle the more difficult portions of the services while Goss would lounge inside the organ case, which was like a small room. On multiple occasions, Goss would invite Davison and Bennett inside and the three of them would have a small private party.

Once inside the case, and secure from observation, a bottle of sherry was gravely produced by the gentle and hospitable organist. There were glasses, of course, and also biscuits. So, while the anthem, the multitudinous voices and the thundering organ tones rang through the Cathedral, we three refreshed the inner man.<sup>11</sup>

Donovan Dawe has documented similar tales and accounts of "rogue organists" who were known to "desert instrument and wife."<sup>12</sup> These and other stories partially contributed to the

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<sup>10</sup> H.B. Thomson, *The Choice of a Profession: A Concise Account and Comparative Review of the English Professions* (London, 1857), cited in Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 43.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Bennett, *Forty Years of Music, 1865-1905* (London: Methuen and Co., 1908), 32-33.

<sup>12</sup> Donovan Dawe, *Organists of the City of London, 1666-1850* (Cornwall: Purley, 1983), 18-20.

reputation of musicians as rebels and itinerants. Even though all musicians were not alcoholics and ruffians, there was a general perception that English musicians were lazy, immoral, and indulgent. Francesco Berger, an English pianist-composer, claimed that as late as the 1860s:

Musicians were still looked down upon, and a man who admitted that he lived by Music was considered little better than an imbecile or a pauper. No “gentleman born” devoted himself to it.<sup>13</sup>

From this and other statements we can see that by the nineteenth century, musicians were reputed to be miscreants. It is possible that since many of these stories involve church musicians, who were ideally above such moral failures, a congregation’s shocked reaction to such behavior within the church may have contributed to the immortalization of these scandals and, therefore, the exaggeration of the perception of musicians as immoral. This may also explain why organists were often the focus of such tales. In whatever way musicians gained this reputation, it is clear that to the genteel Victorian middle class, the stereotypical musician was considered socially unacceptable.

As achieving wealth through work rather than birth became the norm, the middle class developed a passion for respectability to match their longing for financial security. In his book *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*, Walter E. Houghton points out that the Victorians’ “economic struggle was focused less on the comforts and luxuries which had hitherto lain beyond their reach than on the respect which money could now command.”<sup>14</sup> He further states that “the struggle for money in the middle class was complemented, and to a considerable extent motivated, by the struggle for social advancement,” and that “by the

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<sup>13</sup> Francesco Berger, *Reminiscences, Impressions and Anecdotes* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1913), 167.

<sup>14</sup> Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 184.

1840's...the younger generation was determined to push—and buy—its way into the upper classes.”<sup>15</sup> As Thomson’s book demonstrates, among the impacts of this trend was a disdain for native musical talent.

It is ironic that the British developed the notion or opinion that English musicians were in some way inferior to foreign talent. As the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution and the world’s foremost colonial power, Britain was a technological and political superpower. In addition, the nation possessed a thriving literary tradition from Chaucer and Shakespeare to Shelley and Keats. However, with music, rather than acknowledging English musicians, the middle class paid large sums of money to hear virtuosos such as Sigismund Thalberg and Franz Liszt, and to hear the operas of Verdi, Bellini, and other illustrious Italian masters. Stephen Banfield points out that, “Male keyboard virtuosos such as Thalberg and Liszt were idolized inasmuch as they brought an alien thrill to that society; to the ladies they possessed something of the erotic aura of the twentieth century pop singer, whilst to the men appreciation of their pyrotechnics was about as passive and vicarious as is the modern middle class husband’s admiration for the professional footballer.”<sup>16</sup>

The reasons for this are rooted in the clambering of the middle class to reach the apex of the proverbial social ladder, and to understand them one must look back in time to the beginning of the developing middle class musical culture, which started around the same time as the Industrial Revolution, about 1750. In Pierre Bourdieu’s 1984 work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, the concept of cultural capital is discussed. Cultural capital is non-financial social assets from which members of a society can distinguish themselves from those in lower societies, or classes. Bourdieu describes cultural capital as

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<sup>15</sup> Houghton, 185.

<sup>16</sup> Banfield, 12.

“symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, [...as] the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction.”<sup>17</sup> By applying Bourdieu’s theory to the early years of the Industrial Revolution, we observe that the middle class began to close the gap between themselves and the aristocracy. The aristocrats, in order to distinguish themselves from the middle class, consciously or not, developed what they perceived as a more refined or exotic taste in musical performance as their cultural capital. Temperley points out that:

One way in which the truly blue-blooded could separate themselves from the ambitious parvenu [the middle class] was by cultivating *foreign* art, literature and music, which were still beyond the climber’s grasp. Italian opera was well suited to this purpose, and so it was cultivated, for the most part, as a snobbish entertainment, not as a serious intellectual pursuit. It was desirable not for its intrinsic qualities, but simply because it was exclusive.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the use of the Italian language in vocal pieces, this aesthetic favored works by foreign masters and the habit of attending concerts in dedicated performance halls, all for the purpose of exclusivity.

The first aspect of this trend is most poignantly demonstrated by the fact that Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony was performed in Italian for its London debut<sup>19</sup> (a fact that never ceases to amaze Beethoven historians today); in fact it was common to translate works in other languages such as German and French into Italian to cater to English upper-class aesthetics. Italian’s popularity was in part derived from its use in opera, the most popular and expensive—and therefore most prestigious—musical genre available in England. The second aspect is obvious when we consider the names of the most popular musical artists in England in the eighteenth century: Georg Friedrich Händel, Johann Christian Bach, and Franz Josef

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<sup>17</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 66.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas Temperley, “Xenophilia in British Musical History,” in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies: Volume 1*, ed. Bennett Zon (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 11.

<sup>19</sup> David Benjamin Levy, *Beethoven: The Ninth Symphony: Revised Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 152.

Haydn, to name a few. The third is noticeable in that The Kings Theatre, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Hanover Square Rooms were not only the most common venues for performance during the Georgian Period, they were also exclusively for the use of the upper classes. Middle class concertgoers were relegated to the public events that took place in various pleasure gardens. It would not be until 1855 that the middle class had similar access to concert halls with the inauguration of the Crystal Palace.<sup>20</sup> However, even after this, the audience was segregated by class distinction. Here is a rule that was in place at the Philharmonic Society, well into the twentieth century:

No Gentleman above twenty-one years of age residing or carrying on business in Liverpool or within ten miles thereof, and not being an Officer of the Army or Navy, or Minister of Religion, is admissible to the Boxes or Stalls at the Philharmonic Society's concert unless he be a Proprietor, or member of the family residing at the house of a Proprietor, or has his name upon the list of Gentlemen having the *Entrée* exhibited in the Corridors.<sup>21</sup>

By the Victorian period, the middle class had learned that in order to more successfully emulate the aristocracy they must develop similar aesthetic values, in other words, they had to adopt the cultural capital of their betters. They began attending Italian operas, and they became enthused over the exploits of foreign masters. The period is characterized by a spirit of xenophilia.<sup>22</sup> Lisa Withers notes that xenophilia “paved the way for late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century virtuoso pianists such as Hummel, Dussek, Cramer, Clementi, and Field to take advantage of the enthusiasm and financial support of London audiences for accomplished foreign musicians.”<sup>23</sup> Many British musicians, in an attempt to compete in this environment, began using foreign titles before their names (e.g.,

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<sup>20</sup> “Crystal Palace,” in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e2610> (accessed February 8, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Reginald Nettel, *The Orchestra in England, A Social History* (London: J. Cape, 1946), 262.

<sup>22</sup> See Nicholas Temperley, “Xenophilia in British Musical History,” in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies: Volume I*, ed. Bennett Zon (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 3-19.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa A. Withers, “Solo Piano Performances in London from 1837 to 1850: A Cultural and Musical Evolution” (DMA dissertation, West Virginia University, 1999), 3.



Madame Arabella Goddard and Signor George Alexander Macfarren). Lady Victoria Henry, the fictional character in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, expresses a supporting sentiment:

I have simply worshiped pianists—two at a time, sometimes, Harry tells me. I don't know what it is about them. Perhaps it is that they are foreigners. They all are, ain't they? Even those that are born in England become foreigners after a time, don't they?<sup>24</sup>

The middle class saw music as something that was vital to a young person's domestic education and the ability to appreciate musical performance as essential to their ability to pass as cultured, but parents were grieved if their children sought musical prestige. Few citizens were willing to encourage, or even allow, their children to pursue the life of a professional musician. (It is to be noted that while there were many respectable occupations that a parent would have preferred for their child—medicine and law being the most obvious—the most coveted profession of all was in the literary field. The highest goal for most respectable young men of the era was to achieve the status of being a “man of letters.”<sup>25</sup> We will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.) Frederick Delius is a prime example of this trend. His father Julius, a wool merchant who settled in England, was an enthusiastic supporter of music. He organized concerts for Charles Hallé in Bradford, and opened his home to the violinist Josef Joachim and the cellist Alfredo Piatti, but when his son Frederick expressed a desire to enter the music profession, he disowned him, whereupon, Frederick left England and studied music in Jacksonville, Florida.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Charterhouse Press, 1904), 66.

<sup>25</sup> Temperley, *Xenophilia*, 13. “Burney's great ambition was to be accepted as a man of letters, and only when he did so was the door opened to gentlemanly society...the professions of law, medicine and the church assign a certain position in the social scale...occupying an exalted position in the literary world. The key word here is literary.”

<sup>26</sup> “Delius, Fritz,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e2840> (accessed March 26, 2012).

Professional native musicians often had to contend with a list of difficulties, including the tendency to be overlooked for prospective appointments in favor of illustrious foreign musicians or even native musicians with more prestigious degrees such as law or medicine or who had inherited titles. A prominent example is William Sterndale Bennett (1816-1875), England's most notable composer of the mid nineteenth century. As one of England's foremost pianist-composers he became a candidate for the Reid Professorship at Edinburgh University's music department in 1844. He was eminently qualified, having been a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music and having studied under notable professors Cipriani Potter and William Crotch. Felix Mendelssohn even wrote a letter of support to Bennett, in which he mentions a recommendation that he would be sending to the professors at Edinburgh University for Bennett's sake. Also considered for the position was Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876) the greatest organist of the Anglican tradition since Purcell. During the deliberations over which man was to become the next Reid Professor, the faculty's attention was garnered by Henry Hugo Pierson (1815-1873), a former medical student who had abandoned medicine in favor of music (against his father's wishes). It was decided that Pierson, having a background in medicine and therefore a higher social standing, brought more distinction to the position, and because he was a more respectable candidate Bennett and Wesley were asked to withdraw their candidacies, which they did.<sup>27</sup> (Ironically, Pierson resigned after a few months on the basis that he had grown to despise the sound of the bagpipes and emigrated to Prussia where he enjoyed a long career.<sup>28</sup>) A similar misfortune befell Bennett when he was up for the directorship of the Philharmonic Society in 1842.

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<sup>27</sup> James Robert Sterndale Bennett, *The Life of William Sterndale Bennett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 161.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Davison, *Music During the Victorian Era: From Mendelssohn to Wagner, Being the Memoirs of J. W. Davison, Forty Years Music Critic of 'The Times'* (London, W. M. Reaves, 1912), 142.

Despite Bennett's credentials, the Neapolitan Michelle Andrea Agniello Costa, known in England as Michael Costa, became the director of the Philharmonic Society. This was partially due to the urgings of music critic and confidant to Costa, Charles Lewis Gruneison, who exploited the previously mentioned bias against English musicians that existed at the time to promote his friend.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Sir Frederick Arthur Gore Ouseley (1825-1889), the son of a nobleman and amateur musician who contributed to the founding of the Royal Academy of Music, was forbidden by his father to become a musician. In 1843, Ouseley defied the wishes of his father and chose music as a career. Nicholas Temperley notes that Ouseley "was later the obvious choice for professor because he was the social equal of the dons and could make music respectable."<sup>30</sup>

Another challenge that ensured that there would be few English musicians was a lack of musical educational options and quality. The Royal Academy of Music was founded in 1822<sup>31</sup> and it would be a decade or more before the first students had reached their potential to operate as professionals. In addition, because of its initial poor quality of training<sup>32</sup>, by 1866 we see no indication that the Royal Academy of Music had fulfilled its role as a national conservatory, as graduates only constituted a small percentage of all English musicians employed by the most important musical organizations of the day. These

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<sup>29</sup> Henry Davison, 48-9.

<sup>30</sup> Temperley, *Xenophilia*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> See "Paris Conservatoire de Musique," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e7659> (accessed October 16, 2012), and "Leipzig: II. After 1763: 5. Education," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16353> (accessed October 16, 2012). By contrast, the *Paris Conservatoire de Musique* was founded in 1775 by combining two existing music schools. A Herr Hiller in founded the first musical educational institution in Leipzig in 1771. These institutions were established on the cusp of The Enlightenment when access to wealth and opportunity for the middle class was beginning to expand. The fact that London did not have a similar institution for the musical education of middle-class citizens is indicative of a lack of demand for this service during the late Georgian and early Victorian era.

<sup>32</sup> Ehrlich, 81. The cost of employing first-rate musicians as instructors was apparently beyond the financial resources of the RAM in its early years.

organizations included the Royal Italian Opera, Her Majesty's Theatre, The Philharmonic Society, the Musical Society, and the New Philharmonic Society.<sup>33</sup> Squelched by their culture's rejection, British musicians stagnated while foreign masters found London a veritable utopia of musical appreciation.

As mentioned, the lucrative economy of London attracted a plethora of working class musicians from abroad. In 1835, Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), pianist-composer and German immigrant, described the scenario: "I must compare the swarm of foreign musicians who obscure the horizon, to the locusts which darkened the Egyptian sky."<sup>34</sup> They came to take advantage of the enthusiasm of the wealthy middle class and the high demand for music and musical services, (i.e., lessons for wealthy young women). Foreign musicians varied between those who would frequently but temporarily appear in England for performances, to those who became fixtures of musical life and wholeheartedly assimilated into English culture. Of the first variety we may categorize an artist like the German Felix Mendelssohn who made ten trips to London during his career and whose music became definitive in English musical style. Mendelssohn, however, remained a loyal German citizen. Berlioz also made multiple trips to London. The second variety is characteristic of an artist like Moscheles who settled in London and became co-director of the Philharmonic Society. Others that fit into this category would be eighteenth century artists such as the Italian Muzio Clementi, the Czech Jan Dussek, the German Johann Baptist Cramer, or nineteenth-century artists like the German Charles Hallé or the Neapolitan Michael Costa.

We can see the preference for foreign musicians reflected in the employment records of the time and by examining the names of the most prevalent soloists of the age. In 1866,

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<sup>33</sup> Ehrlich, 80.

<sup>34</sup> Charlotte Moscheles, ed., *Recent Music and Musicians as Described in the Diaries and Correspondence of Ignatz Moscheles*, trans. A. D. Coleridge (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1889), 210.

English musicians constituted a minority of less than half of those employed by Her Majesty's Theatre, a stunning fact for an English theatre that boasted an orchestra of more than eighty members and specifically catered to the English aristocracy.<sup>35</sup> The elite performers of nineteenth-century English musical life also tended to be foreign. It is possible to catalogue a long list of foreigners whose popularity in England was unparalleled by Englishmen, among whom were Sigismund Thalberg, Jenny Lind, Ignaz Moscheles, Gioachino Rossini, Frederick Chopin, Julius Benedict, Franz Schubert, and later Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner. Mendelssohn, especially, was welcomed and enthusiastically supported by the public as well as music critics.<sup>36</sup> Berlioz also found London a haven and felt that his music was accepted in England more readily than in his native France.<sup>37</sup> The public's reaction to these foreigners can also be inferred by their continued demand for their music and their perpetual and prolonged bias against English artists. This helped pave the way for foreign domination of English Victorian musical life, so that by the end of the nineteenth century, England had failed to develop its own musical identity, hence the phrase "Land ohne Musik."

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<sup>35</sup> Ehrlich, 80.

<sup>36</sup> Therese Ellsworth and Susan Wollenberg, "Introduction," in *The Piano in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, ed. Therese Ellsworth and Susan Wollenberg (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ellsworth, 7-8.



## Chapter 2: James William Davison: Overzealous Proponent of Native Talent

One of Great Britain's defining musical characteristics during the early nineteenth century was a quickly emerging music literary tradition. Before the nineteenth century, England had produced only three music periodicals. But as the middle class grew wealthier, journals that catered to leisure became more common. As a result, between 1800 and 1850, a surge of music journalism resulted in more than forty new music publications being founded, a growth similar to that seen in France.<sup>38</sup> (In contrast, Germany boasted well over thirty music journals before 1800, and during the first half of the nineteenth century another eighty were created; growth to be sure, but hardly the sudden birth of a brand new national industry.) With the birth of this new industry in England, information and opinionated discussion about music became available to the individual middle class citizen. Musical debates between critics were highly publicized in prominent music journals to which the middle class public enthusiastically subscribed. The most common among these journals were *The Musical World*, *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* (later to become simply *The Musical Times*), *The Times*—which was the primary newspaper in London and therefore had the largest readership— and minor journals (not always music specialized) such as *The Athenaeum*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and *The Harmonicon*. Those who had either no formal music training or limited access to the most recently published or performed music would have learned much of what they believed about music by reading music journals, and they would likely have adopted the opinions of their favorite journalists and critics.

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<sup>38</sup> See Imogen Fellinger et al., "Periodicals," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/21338pg21> (accessed October 17, 2012).

During this burgeoning period of musical journalistic growth, my observations reveal two major factions of opinion that developed. The faction that I will call the “English Artistic School” was headed by a group of music critics who were considered conservative for the day. The adherents of this school were generally musically literate, valued the music of the artistically sensible composer over those composers who relied on what they considered to be superficial bravura (then associated with foreign artists like Liszt and Thalberg), and tended to promote English talent as well as what they felt were ideals representative of English aesthetic standards. Paradoxically, adherents to this school associated canonical Classical and early Romantic works—such as those by Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven—with traditional English values. But, they criticized what they deemed to be foreign values that they associated with the music of the New German School and other artists that they viewed as progressive (including Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner, and, perhaps somewhat surprisingly to our modern sensibilities, Schumann). Their belief was that the English middle class’s values had been corrupted or polluted to the degree that they could no longer recognize good music when they heard it. Therefore, they argued, the public took delights in pointless bravura, simple operatic melodies with static accompaniments and stratospheric coloratura, and shocking feats of prestidigitation performed by exotic foreigners, rather than appreciating the works written by native artists that the “English Artistic School” considered tasteful, sincere, and striving for the highest artistic standards. The critics associated with the “English Artistic School” made it their mission to restore English musical standards by promoting native talent in England, by exposing the English public to works that they considered meritorious, and by touting the accomplishments of English artists in their respective periodicals. As we will see, the leaders of this school of thought sometimes argued among themselves to the point of



ridicule, and their overzealousness did not always result in the hoped-for response. This is seen most poignantly with James William Davison, the leading critic of the day, who will be the primary focus of this chapter.

The opposing party, which was sometimes referred to as the “Popular Ballad School,”<sup>39</sup> tended to not be musically educated and promoted music that was *en vogue* or currently in style with the social elite—i.e., aristocrats and upper middle-class socialites—whose values tended toward the promotion of foreign virtuosi and attending performances in the Italian language. Proponents of this school felt that England had proven itself to be musically deficient based on the evidence that there had been no first rate composer in England since Henry Purcell. This belief was also upheld by many upper-class concertgoers. Most music critics who subscribed to this school were either men of letters such as Sir George Bernard Shaw, who once stated that he “knew absolutely nothing whatsoever about music,”<sup>40</sup> or else they were foreigners who, through happenstance, found themselves uniquely situated to become music critics. (Indeed, it is plausible that a critic with the same knowledge of music as the public could be considered to be the most accurate arbiter of popular taste.)

Public opinion on music was long divided between these two schools, and although the proponents of English native talent quarreled ferociously, their arguments would prove to alienate the average music enthusiast who attended concerts for social prestige rather than for the appreciation of musical ideals. The foreigners promoted by the “Popular Ballad School” ultimately prevailed, which contributed to England later being characterized as having no true musical identity. Successive generations of foreigners would coin the term: “Land ohne

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<sup>39</sup> James William Davison, “The Temperaments,” *Court Gazette* 211 (February 26, 1842): 996.

<sup>40</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *London Music in 1888-89 As Heard by Corno di Bassetto* (London: Constable, 1937), 6.

Musik.” This would not change significantly until a reevaluation of musical aesthetics at the end of the “long” nineteenth century during what many musicologists refer to as the English Musical Renaissance, the period in which composers such as Arthur Sullivan, Hubert Parry, and Sir Edward Elgar made their mark. By examining the career of a prominent advocate of the “English Artistic School” we may observe how the shortcomings of his critical pen damaged the credibility of the native talent movement in England and how this contributed to the failure on the part of English composers to fulfill their potential as the leaders of English musical life, thereby allowing foreign artists to take advantage of this vacuum.

James William Davison (1813-1885), London’s most prominent music critic from 1842 until 1885 began his journalistic career in 1835. He would become an influential voice representing one of the major factions of music critics that would divide public opinion on music aesthetics. Joseph Bennett, another critic, described him as “a critic who exercised upon his fellows a most powerful influence.”<sup>41</sup> Davison was fiercely against what he believed to be the deterioration of English aesthetic values in music and the resultant domination of the foreign virtuoso and popular music over the legitimate native artist. Being a pianist and composer who performed alongside other notable musicians such as William Sterndale Bennett, George Alexander Macfarren, and even Felix Mendelssohn, Davison would have been strongly aware of the difficulties experienced by native musicians in London during the late Georgian and early Victorian period. Additionally, his musical experience legitimately qualified him as a music critic. Davison was a pioneer in the native talent movement and was an original member of the Society of British Musicians, founded in 1834.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Davison, 16.

As a musician, Davison felt first hand the acute prejudice against native talent in England, and as a journalist he became the English musician's advocate in the press. Often warring against other music critics who typically had no musical training, and who promoted foreign composers at the expense of English artists due to bias, Davison frequently criticized London's prestigious Philharmonic Society, "whose breath froze upon young British talent, while its eyes beamed on the undeserving foreigner."<sup>43</sup> He was one of a new generation of musicians in England who, as Nicholas Temperley puts it, "disdained to write popular piano music, turning to other activities such as teaching, journalism, and administration as means of livelihood, while keeping their music pure and aloof from influences thought to be harmful."<sup>44</sup>

Because of his positions with *The Times* and *The Musical World*, the two primary chronicles of musical life in London, and the large number of critics who revered him, Davison was a powerful force in nineteenth-century English music criticism. A literary figure of some prominence, Davison would find himself uniquely situated to garner support for the native talent movement. He had a powerful personality and a large following, yet despite Davison's great partisan power and his ability to out-argue his political opponents, his fight for the equality of the English artist and respect for English native talent ultimately faltered because of several character flaws. As I will demonstrate, he had the propensity to exhibit overtly hostile behavior that discredited him to his readers, the tendency to favor his friends and close acquaintances in reviews over individuals he did not know personally, the inclination to suddenly reverse his negative opinions of an artist's music when he got to know them personally, and finally the habit of using confusing fictional literary characters to

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<sup>43</sup> Henry Davison, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Temperley, "Piano Music: 1800-1870," in *The Athlone History of Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800-1914*, ed. Nicholas Temperley (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 414.

express his sentiments. We will discuss how this behavior eventually discredited him before his readership and developed a negative reputation for his journal, *The Musical World*. Even today, he is still infamous for his barbed tongue; he is even referred to by one modern biographer, Charles Reid, as “The Music Monster.”<sup>45</sup> Because the majority of music enthusiasts began to dismiss Davison’s opinions as invalid, support for his native talent movement was abandoned in favor of more popular foreign virtuosos. As mentioned above, this contributed to a weakening of British musical culture and England was labeled a “Land ohne Musik.”

#### Davison’s Background and Views

Before we discuss his journalistic mission and how it intersected—often volatily—with others in his profession, his views, background, and several occurrences in his life are relevant to an understanding of his career.

Davison’s mother, Maria Duncan, was a successful actress in London. She performed such roles as Beatrice and Rosalind from Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*, and Lady Teazle from Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *The School for Scandal*. She was well received at prestigious venues such as Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and The Haymarket. She was also apparently an accomplished vocalist, enthralling audiences with her singing skills. She shared her love of music and literature with her son, James, who became

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Reid, *The Music Monster: A Biography of James William Davison, Music Critic of “The Times” of London, 1846-78, With Excerpts from His Critical Writings* (London: Quartet Books, 1984), 3.

avid about the works of Felix Mendelssohn (from a young age Mendelssohn was already known in London) and the writer Percy Shelley.<sup>46</sup>

From this early love of English literature (as previously mentioned, an art already considered respectable by the status-hungry middle class), combined with his exposure to an apparently professional-level musician (his mother), Davison developed the notion that, contrary to the views of contemporary popular culture, English music was just as respectable as English literature (to be a man of letters was the most sought after status). In fact he made no distinction between the two at all. The fact that Davison never developed the pre-conceived notion that English musicians were inferior to, or less respectable than, foreign ones was a crucial factor in his development into the journalist that he would later become.

It was during his early life that Davison became close friends with English composers William Sterndale Bennett and George Alexander Macfarren, both graduates of the Royal Academy of Music, whom he would accompany on multiple journeys overseas, the first of which was to Leipzig in 1836. On this trip he first met his idol Felix Mendelssohn, who was hospitable and flattering toward him. While there, Davison took ill and Mendelssohn came to call. Upon entering the bedroom where Davison lay, Mendelssohn stroked the sick man's head and in his heavy German accent consoled, "Poor fallow, poor fallow."<sup>47</sup> Any dedication that he may have felt toward Mendelssohn the man and to his compositional style was probably solidified at this time. From then on, Davison was a loyal disciple and would not tolerate any negative opinions of him.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Henry Davison, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Henry Davison, 25.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Davison, 25. "Such a slight touch of from the genius to his particular admirer, from the player of the 'Kreutzer,' the conductor of the Ninth Symphony, the composer of 'Paulus,' from music's then hero, in short, put a seal on the admirer's devotion." Davison would apparently "feelingly" recount his encounter with Mendelssohn for another fifty or sixty years.

From this admiration of Mendelssohn (who Davison considered both a musician and a gentleman) Davison developed his conservative philosophy of music, which would later place him at the forefront of the “English Artistic School” of music critics. Davison felt that the German Mendelssohn represented everything to which a modern English composer should aspire. Also representing this ideal were other German artists such as Josef Joachim, Louis Spohr, and Ignaz Moscheles, the last of whom would later replace Felix Mendelssohn as the head of the Leipzig Conservatory. Davison felt that these artists were the successors to the traditions of the German classical style (epitomized by Haydn, Mozart, and Hummel, who all brought their music to England). He further felt that the German classical style should be the model for all musical composition in England and that young English men and women should study these works to gain the benefit of their time-tested superior quality.<sup>49</sup> He believed that if young composers would spend their time writing compositions that were firmly rooted in traditional techniques, that English music would be imbued with deep quality, and it would become a way of educating audiences about good music. Davison’s son and biographer, Henry Davison, put it this way:

On the important question of the progress and development of Art he held that movement must be along lines in continuation of those laid down by a succession of musicians definitely acknowledged by the world as great, and therefore known as classical masters. The earlier of these had gradually found and left their stamp on a certain form, which their successors had accepted and never departed from, however much they might develop it. It was a form evolved by necessity for emotional expression in music and was based on laws natural and eternal. Thorough knowledge of it was to be acquired by hard study, theoretical and practical; without which no freedom in the expression of purely musical ideas was to be hoped for, and to depart from which was to relapse into chaos.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Henry Davison, vi, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Davison, 70.

Davison reckoned that this is what Mendelssohn was doing in his own work and revered him for it. It may seem contradictory that Davison's ideal composers were mainly of German descent, but it seems that it was because of the benefit that he felt their music would have on English composition that he promoted their works. Any of these contemporary composers, with the possible exception of Mendelssohn, would have come in second place—in Davison's book—to any English composer of equal skill. (Davison never tolerated artists like Liszt and his ilk because of their flamboyant captivation of an uneducated public who attended concerts merely for prestige. Note that he had no problem with programmaticism.) Henry Davison states:

Davison's attitude as a music critic had from the first been definitely that of an ardent supporter of native talent. His feeling on this subject did not prevent his doing justice to foreign artists of merit nor his joining heartily in their welcome to England. But, genius being acknowledged first, nationality came next and, other things being equal, he would give the preference to a British artist over his foreign competitor.<sup>51</sup>

Davison first became involved in music journalism as the editor of *Musical Magazine*, a periodical that he founded in 1835. He wrote under the pseudonym Arthur Pendragon. His use of the name of the mythical English king demonstrates not only his love and familiarity of literature, but more importantly, his keen interest in the promotion of English musical talent, and since Arthur's Camelot promised protection from the invading foreign barbarians terrorizing the ancient English people,<sup>52</sup> so did Davison wish to protect the English musicians from the overwhelming domination of the exotic foreign virtuosi who currently held sway in musical life.

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<sup>51</sup> Henry Davison, 47.

<sup>52</sup> See Sir Thomas Mallory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1906). Reprinted in 1816 for the first time since 1634, this was likely the version of the Arthurian myth that Davison was familiar with. It is likely that he was also acquainted with Tennyson's poems concerning the Arthurian legends, the first of which were published in 1832, just before Davison founded his journal. Historic implications of the myth deal with the unification of the various tribes throughout the British Isles for mutual protection from hostile continental forces, problematic during the fifth and sixth centuries, in a post-Roman political scenario.

## Hostility

This brings us to the first of Davison's unfortunate character flaws that would ultimately hurt his campaign for native talent. It is well illustrated by an incident that occurred on June 13, 1842. Davison and his friend, the composer George Alexander Macfarren, attended a concert in Hanover Square Rooms where Mendelssohn's Symphony in A Minor was played under the direction of the composer himself. After Mendelssohn had left the conductor's desk, the brilliant German pianist Sigismund Thalberg, who represented everything that Davison stood against, ascended the stage and played an improvised fantasia on the opera *La Sonnambula* by the Italian composer Bellini. The applause was apparently rapturous in comparison to the applause received by Mendelssohn, and the audience began demanding an encore. His son reports, "Thereupon Macfarren and Davison hissed so vigorously as to become observed by all observers and draw down upon themselves the scorn of the *Times*, *Athenaeum*, and *Morning Post*."<sup>53</sup> This was the first reported public manifestation of a hostile disposition that Davison would frequently employ later as a defender of English native talent. (It should be noted, however, that if Davison was hoping to bring respectability to his fellow countrymen, a disrupting display that could only attract negative attention was probably not the best method. In fact, only a few weeks later hissing ensued during a performance by Mendelssohn in retaliation to Davison and Macfarren's behavior. Also, Davison's opponents would frequently bring up the hissing incident for the purpose of discrediting him.<sup>54</sup>)

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Davison, 41-42.

<sup>54</sup> Henry Davison, 50-51.



Davison's hostility also manifested itself as defensive posturing when discussing his hero Mendelssohn. A few months before the hissing incident Davison had waxed eloquently in *The Court Gazette*, on the *Seven Characteristic Pieces* (Opus 7) by Mendelssohn. Here, he refers to them as "The Temperaments of Mendelssohn," where he writes:

The first of them [The Temperaments] sings, to our minds, the tristful complaint of an abandoned maiden; the second, the war-song of a northern king; the third (a noble fugue), the flight of a discomfited army, and the headlong pursuit of the enemy; the fourth, an eternally flowing rivulet, with now and then a pebble to break the transparent limpidity of its surface; the fifth (another grand fugue), a consultation of the inquisition ere burning a body to save a soul; the sixth, the mournful reproach to the world of an unappreciated poet; the seventh and last, a festival of the minute particles of light, which outside resembles a sunbeam but within is a world of tiny sensations.<sup>55</sup>

Suffice it to say that Davison considered these pieces to be monumental musical achievements. Davison goes on to recommend these so-called "Temperaments of Mendelssohn" to all who love good music, but to those who do not adhere to Mendelssohnian standards he does not recommend them:

but to [those who] look upon the frivolities of Jullien, the sickly nothingness of Bellini, the inflated hyperbole of Thalberg, or the maudlin mock-mournfulness of the "Popular Ballad" school, as worthy the name even of bad music, we [Davison and his alter egos] recommend them not, for they are beyond the grasp of their intelligence.<sup>56</sup>

To paraphrase, Davison is stating that if one considers the sounds produced by Jullien, Bellini, or Thalberg to be considered music at all—even bad music—they should not bother to play any pieces of Mendelssohn, because they are too stupid to get any enjoyment out of them. Clearly, the scathing language was intended to attract attention and to sound like righteous indignation, but to any who do not already agree with him—and perhaps to some

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<sup>55</sup> James William Davison, "The Temperaments," *Court Gazette* 211 (February 26, 1842): 996.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

who do—his tone comes across as being angry and obstinate, and would no doubt disaffect some who were undecided in their opinions.

By late 1841 Davison began contributing to *The Musical World* and in 1843, he took the job as editor in chief of the journal, a post that he held until his death in 1885.<sup>57</sup> Davison exercised his critical pen without restraint in *The Musical World*; his most lengthy and protectionist articles can be read here. In 1853 Davison writes:

Turn your eyes, reader to any one composition that bears the name of Liszt if you are unlucky enough to have such a thing on your pianoforte and answer frankly, when you have examined it, if it contains one bar of genuine music. Composition indeed! — decomposition is the proper word for such hateful *fungi* which choke up and poison the fertile plains of harmony, threatening the world with drowth — the world that pants for ‘the music which is divine’ and can only slake its burning thirst at the ‘silver fountains’ of genuine, flowing melody — *melody*, yes, melody, *absolute* melody. (Quotations and hyphenation original)<sup>58</sup>

The maniacal tone of his prose again suggests anger and complete exasperation with public taste, especially where he says, “*melody*, yes melody, *absolute* melody.”

Davison’s hostility was directed not only toward artists, but also to the critics who favored them. On the other end of the musico-political spectrum was the critic Charles Lewis Gruneison (1806-1879). He represented much of what Davison considered distasteful in music criticism and although the two men made amends later in life (this is also a recurrent theme throughout Davison’s career), their bickering early in Davison’s career—in the 1840s—illustrates the opposite poles of musical partisanship that then existed in London and gave Davison a chance to exhibit some of his most aggressive criticism. Gruneison had his

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<sup>57</sup> Leanne Langley, “The English Musical Journal in The Early Nineteenth Century” (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1983), 579. Langley states that Davison was involved in the journal by December of 1843 but an article on Chopin written in October reveals that it was likely that Davison was contributing earlier.

<sup>58</sup> James William Davison, *The Musical World* 33, no. 26 (June 30, 1855): 413.

first prominent dispute with Davison in 1843 when Davison was firing off criticism toward the Edinburgh professors for selecting H. H. Pierson as Reid Professor of Music over Davison's friend and colleague W. S. Bennett (as was discussed in chapter one). Grüneison, a German expatriate, was the editor of the journals *The Morning Post*, *Maestro*, and *The Great Gun*; he was an opponent of the native talent movement; and he was one of the first supporters of Berlioz and Wagner in England (at a time when Davison heavily criticized them both). According to Joseph Bennett, "With Grüneison, whatever Costa (William Sterndale Bennett's arch rival) did was right."<sup>59</sup> Grüneison, therefore, frequently found himself under fire from Davison and *The Musical World*. Grüneison appears not to have had significant musical education, a fact that Davison exploited to its fullest.<sup>60</sup> In what can only be a concerted effort to publicly discredit a rival critic who was opposed to native talent, Davison began referring to Grüneison in print as "Green-Eye-Sen", and sometimes as "Jenkins," the butt of a satire published in the humorous journal *Punch*, which was started in 1841.<sup>61</sup> Davison even went as far as to entitle a series of columns in *The Musical World*, "Beauties of Jenkins", where he would carefully dissect and point out Grüneison's musical inaccuracies.<sup>62</sup> One such example:

[Grüneison:] The Ottoman air was a curious specimen of *effects from the use of the Eastern Gamut!!!*

[Davison:] "*Effects from the use of the Eastern Gamut!!!*" Positively Jenkins will be the death of us. In the name of the *Morning Post*, Jenkins, what dost thou know of the Eastern Gamut? Are the readers of that miserable journal such noodles as to imagine that you are writing sincerely? In the Turkish air which De Meyer played, we could discern nothing more than a simple march

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<sup>59</sup> Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> See Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 13-16.

<sup>61</sup> "Punch," in *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2006), 1,566.

<sup>62</sup> James William Davison, "Beauties of Jenkins," *The Musical World* 19, no. 29-31 (July/August 1844): 235, 243-44, 251-52.

movement, which might have been English, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Persian, or Japanese, in spite of the gamuts.<sup>63</sup>

On another occasion, Bennett reports Davison as saying:

[Grüneison:] ‘Life is an April Day,’ in A sharp is insufficiently carried out!

[Davison:] The key of A sharp is another of the very sharp keys of this exceedingly sharp critic that are utterly unknown to composers. The key of Mr. Macfarren’s song is D. The key of A sharp is never used,—is totally unnecessary, and exists only in the muddled brain of the word splutterer, whose analysis we are analyzing.<sup>64</sup>

As one can see, this is not serious music journalism, but comedic critical satire.

Another occurrence that demonstrates the particular venom that Davison could direct toward an opponent was his defamatory, albeit probably true, account of Grüneison’s resignation from a certain journal over a monetary feud. After reprinting, for the public’s amusement, embarrassing letters to and from Grüneison concerning the request for a raise, all cunningly disguised by referring to “Jenkins” rather than Grüneison by name, Davison then prints his own commentary on the incident with subtle clues as to whom he is really talking about. It is necessary to see the full column to fully absorb its impact. Pay attention to the use of capitalizations.

We can state, upon unquestionable authority, that those respectable newspapers, *The Morning Post* and *Britannia* have at lenGth, disencumbeRed themselves altogether of the notorioUs JeNkins . . . . WE take some credIt to ourSelves fOr this. We have persisted iN our course in spite of vituperation. We undertook to extirpate Jenkins—and we have done it. Many of our friends, sick of the very name of Jenkins, remonstrated with us in the form of epistles expostulatory, assurinG us of the small inteRest taken by the general reader in the sUBject aNd hinting that we wERE injuring our sale and Influence—but we were regardleSs of this, thOUGH in some degree ackNowledging its truth. We had the high aim in view, of rooting out a rank funGus, which stank in the nostRils of trUth, and impudently iNtruded its pestifErous shank Into all that

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<sup>63</sup> James William Davison, “Beauties of Jenkins,” *The Musical World* 19, no. 30 (July 25, 1844): 243. The formatting has been changed to clearly indicate the speaker.

<sup>64</sup> Bennett, 15-16. Again, I have changed the format to clarify the speaker.

waS fair and gOodly in art. We had sworN to destroy the enemy of musical England, and in the face of friendly admonition and hostile spear-thrustings we have Gone on unsweRvingly in oUr path, and at leNgth, through obstinacy as unflinching as it was wEll directed, have succeeded In putting a total extinguiSher on the burning shame which has sO loNg disgraced the hemisphere of musical literature.<sup>65</sup>

Davison has, of course, capitalized seemingly random letters in his diatribe to reveal the last name of the individual that he was criticizing: Grüneison. In the original paper, these characters were also in bold type. Until this time, only Davison's closest acquaintances were aware of the true identity of "Jenkins." It is interesting however that Davison acknowledges that his readers are "sick of the very name of Jenkins." I believe that this may indicate that some readers had expressed their irritation at continually reading Davison's criticisms of Jenkins when they did not even know whom this individual was or what he had to do with music criticism. Davison obliges them by revealing the subject of his witty nastiness.

Grüneison, although not as abrasive as Davison, rose to the challenge. He writes in *Maestro*:

We remarked with astonishment the very inefficient, nay, discreditable, manner in which several of the artists were accompanied on the piano, and demanding the name of the conductor we learnt it was Mr. J. W. Davison, who, in conjunction with another, hissed Thalberg a few seasons back at the Philharmonic. We shall make no comment on past transactions; but, if Mr. J. W. Davison intends conducting other concerts than Mr. Doehler's we most strenuously advise him to go to the Royal Academy of Music and take lessons in pianoforte playing. He would make an admirable scholar.<sup>66</sup>

As can be seen, their barbed attacks eventually escalated to the degree that they were no longer discussing the merits or shortcomings of music, but rather attacking one another's character. Although entertaining, these attacks illustrate how emotions were running high

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<sup>65</sup> James William Davison, *The Musical World* 29, no. 37 (September 12, 1844): 299.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Davison, 50-51.

between the two factions or “schools” of music aesthetics. While both parties did their share of antagonizing, Davison appears to have been the instigator and was certainly the more aggressive of the two men. Davison’s image as a crank becomes visible as it did when he hissed Thalberg.

The year 1846 saw Davison’s acquisition of the position of chief music critic of *The Times* of London, the city’s primary circulating newspaper. This, combined with his journalistic freedom in *The Musical World*, as well as his contributions to other local journals, effectively made Davison the most read critic in town. As such, he should have wielded immense influence over aesthetics in popular musical life; however, we observe that although he continued to wield influence over his fellow critics, over time, his journal *The Musical World* became less popular with the more serious musical public. According to Leanne Langley, “his reign of over forty years on *The Musical World* was marked by a degree of personal eccentricity that would ultimately damage the public reputation of the journal.”<sup>67</sup> This damage is evidenced by twentieth-century references to the journal as “comic journalism.”<sup>68</sup> Additionally, the number of seemingly petty squabbles over non-musical issues, which increasingly appeared in the letters to the editor over the course of Davison’s career at the periodical, indicates a lack of seriousness. For example, in 1869 one reader who identifies himself as, “An Old Musician, and Hater of Twaddle,” complains that Davison uses too many synonyms of the word “performed,” when describing concerts. (The terms to which he objects include “rendered,” “recited,” and “interpreted.”<sup>69</sup>) One can see from this and numerous similar contributions by readers that a large percentage of subscribers were well-meaning amateurs rather than serious commentators. Davison’s answer comes by way

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<sup>67</sup> Langley, 580.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> “A Growl: To the Editor of The Musical World,” *The Musical World* 47, no. 2 (January 9, 1869): 23.

of his alter-ego (“Muttonian”) Abraham S. Silent, whose initials spell “ass.” “To call things by their proper names ‘An Old Musician and Hater of Twaddle’ is an irritable old donkey.—A.S.S.”<sup>70</sup> This stereotyping as a less serious journalist would have been damaging to his reputation as a critic and by extension his influence on the native talent movement.

## Favoritism

Another problem that existed for Davison was that he tended to favor his friends when writing and promoting artists. In Davison’s obituary, Joseph Bennett wrote, “This was the musical world in which he lived, and into which a peculiar jealousy for his heroes forbade new-comers to intrude without the clearest credentials.”<sup>71</sup> As previously mentioned, Davison was good friends with composers William Sterndale Bennett and George Alexander Macfarren. These fellows could do no wrong in the sight of Davison and the list extends to English vocalists Sims Reeves and Charlotte Dolby; Arabella Goddard, London’s most famous concert pianist and Davison’s wife; and of course Felix Mendelssohn.<sup>72</sup> We can also include the names of the Germans Spohr<sup>73</sup> and Joachim.<sup>74</sup> According to an anecdote by Joseph Bennett, Hans von Bülow was told not to bother to introduce himself to Davison upon coming to London as he was led to believe that Davison gave good reviews only to his own wife, Arabella Goddard.<sup>75</sup> A short time passed and Davison wrote a positive review of von Bülow. Apparently surprised, Bennett mentioned it to Davison; “I gather from something I

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<sup>70</sup> “A Growl,” 23.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Bennett, “In Memoriam. James William Davison, Born, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1813. Died, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1885,” *The Musical World* 63, no. 13 (March 28, 1885): 200-201.

<sup>72</sup> Kitson, 305.

<sup>73</sup> Henry Davison, vi.

<sup>74</sup> Henry Davison, 47.

<sup>75</sup> Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 24-25.

read in *The Musical World* that you now admire him as a pianist.”<sup>76</sup> Davison answered that von Bülow had called and that he found him to be “an interesting man.” In addition, Bennett reveals that, in fact, von Bülow had held a dinner in Davison’s honor at the urging of the “coterie” (a small group of critics that Davison surrounded himself with). This reveals that, by then, it had become common knowledge that in order to secure good reviews from Davison, it was necessary to socialize with him. Since it was generally known among other critics that Davison favored his own *clique* over others, it is safe to assume that the public would have also eventually known about it. This may have caused many of his readers to take him and his views less seriously and would have diminished the influence that he had in regards to the native talent movement. According to Richard Kitson, “by emphasizing the careers of his close associates, friends and family, Davison denied equally talented British performers fair and equal representation, and thus left himself open to criticism on this account.”<sup>77</sup>

Later in Davison’s career, charges were brought against him by *The Times* insinuating that positive criticism was handed out in return for money. Although the details are unclear, it seems that a series of articles in the society journal, *Truth*, published in 1878, were aimed at Davison. The journalist theorized that Davison had once been in-cahoots with a blackmailing musical agent who would approach artists. If the artist paid up, Davison would write positive reviews; if they refused Davison would destroy their reputation with “faint praise.” Henry Davison states:

Such was the gist of the article, in which reference was made to the fact that the *Times* critic had some forty years before lived with Sterndale Bennett, and had, on that account, run down the Philharmonic Society, that he had been relieved in the financial difficulties of 1848 by certain mysterious persons,

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<sup>76</sup> Bennett, *Forty Years of Music*, 25.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Kitson, 305.



that he had married an artist whom he wrote up at the expense of her rivals,  
and so on.<sup>78</sup>

Things got out of hand, and a criminal application was filed against Davison by *The Times*. The application was denied, but the scandal damaged Davison's reputation as a critic. Within two years, Davison's duties with *The Times* effectively came to an end, leaving *The Musical World* as Davison's only outlet. The effect that these allegations had upon Davison's credibility would have been great, in that they insinuated that Davison's favoritism was—at least in part—driven by financial gain.

### Flip-Flop

As we have already seen, Davison damaged his credibility by having a hostile disposition that made him seem journalistically less credible, and he exhibited the habit of showing favoritism to his close friends and acquaintances. Another damaging character flaw that Davison possessed was that he would often suddenly change his opinions and flip-flop from writing negative reviews of artists to positive reviews. In terms of well-known composers, this list includes Chopin, Berlioz, Wagner, and Meyerbeer. Because Davison's main agenda was the promotion of native talent in England, it seemed natural that he would denounce the attempts of foreign masters at gaining a foothold in English musical life. This he did with great regularity, however it was frustrating and confusing to his readers when the artist that he proclaimed to be vulgar, grotesque, and banal, was hailed shortly thereafter as being among the great masters of all time. This apparent about-face and its recurring frequency damaged Davison's reputation as a serious and legitimate musical authority. This

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<sup>78</sup> Henry Davison, 331.

left the reader unable to coalesce a firm opinion on musical taste, as his source of information oscillated from one estimation to another. This ultimately hurt the native talent movement, as Davison was its most vocal proponent. Here, I will present three instances of this happening.

On October 28, 1841 Davison writes of Chopin:

Monsieur Frederic Chopin has, by some reason or other which we cannot divine, obtained an enormous reputation but too often refused to composers of ten times his genius...he is, what by many would be esteemed worse, a dealer in the most absurd and hyperbolic extravagances. It is a striking satire on the capacity for thought possessed by the musical profession that so very crude and limited a writer should be esteemed, as he is very generally, a profound and classical musician. M. Chopin does not want for ideas, but they never extend beyond eight or sixteen bars at the utmost, and then he is invariably *in nubibus*.

He goes on to say:

There is a clumsiness about his harmonies in the midst of their affected strangeness, a sickliness about his melodies, despite their evidently forced unlikeness to familiar phrases, an utter ignorance of design everywhere apparent in his lengthened works, a striving and straining after an originality which, when obtained, only appears knotty, crude and ill-digested, which wholly forbid the possibility of Chopin being a skilled or even a moderately proficient artist...we venture to call the ears and the judgment of any unprejudiced person to witness that the entire works of Chopin present a motley surface of ranting hyperbole and excruciating cacophony.<sup>79</sup>

More statements followed proclaiming Chopin's deficiencies.<sup>80</sup> If any of Davison's readers depended on him for their musical judgment they would have been confused when confronting Davison's preface to the first complete edition of Chopin's works, published in 1843 by Wessel and Stapleton, Music Sellers to Her Majesty. After an undulating 10,000-word praise of Chopin and his music, Davison culminates with the rhetorical question, "What

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<sup>79</sup> James William Davison, "Review: Souvenir de la Pologne. Seventh set of Mazurkas. Frederic Chopin. Wessel and Stapleton," *The Musical World* 16, no. 292 (October 28, 1841): 276-77.

<sup>80</sup> See James William Davison, "M. Frederick Chopin," *The Musical World* 16, no. 294 (November 11, 1841): 309, and James William Davison, "M. Frederick Chopin," *The Musical World* 16, no. 295 (November 18, 1841): 324.

argument thus created, what abortion from such a weed-producing womb, can have sufficient preponderance with the unprejudiced and calm observer to shake the firm basis of *our* confident assertion that Frederic Chopin is one of the greatest living composers, and, Beethoven and Mendelssohn excepted, THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED PIANOFORTE COMPOSER THAT EVER EXISTED?”<sup>81</sup> Reid has suggested that this assertion, made in all capitals, was a sarcastic accession to the desires of the publishers who had taken issue with Davison on his views of Chopin in recent volumes of *The Musical World*, and that the extravagance with which Davison writes “serves a secret purpose – to kill Chopin’s reputation stone-dead.”<sup>82</sup> (Hyphenation original.) Why they selected him to write the preface of the first complete edition of Chopin is not clear—Wessel and Stapleton purchased numerous advertising spaces throughout the *The Musical World*—however, whether or not this was an ironic ploy on the part of Davison is not the important fact. What is important is that Davison’s readers would have been unaware of his intentions and would have taken him literally. This dramatic contradiction of Davison’s previous statements create ambivalence that would have been very difficult for the average reader to decode. This does not successfully fulfill the role of a music critic.

We see a similar picture when reading Davison’s writings on Meyerbeer. In 1842, Davison proclaims him to have a “flimsy pretension as a harmonist and contrapuntist,” and who, “committing a shower of vulgarisms, as melodist null, as harmonist *nuller* still.”<sup>83</sup> Later he would call Meyerbeer, “the most overrated composer of the present day and, perhaps, of any time.”<sup>84</sup> In 1845, Davison met the composer personally, and

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<sup>81</sup> Reid, 172.

<sup>82</sup> Reid, 154.

<sup>83</sup> James William Davison, *Musical Examiner* 6 (December 10, 1842): 29-30. Quoted in Reid, 58.

<sup>84</sup> Reid, 58.

although a few more years of anti-Meyerbeer writing were still to come, gradually we see a change of song in Davison's comments. On August 25, 1855 Davison writes, "there is no other...which betrays so surely the marks of a thinker and purely musical genius."<sup>85</sup> For the rest of Meyerbeer's life, he would receive only positive reviews from Davison. Some have even gone as far as to accuse Davison of having accepted a bribe from Meyerbeer for the change of heart.<sup>86</sup> Charles Reid cites the fact that after Meyerbeer's death, Davison—although not in full force—returned to the scoffing attitude toward the composer's music.

Davison's opinions on Wagner are probably the most bewildering of much of Davison's writing because Wagner's music represented the ultimate deviation from Davison's aesthetics. Wagner had, by this time (1855), proclaimed his music to be "the music of the future," a point which Davison unceasingly attempts to refute in his early writings on Wagner.

We hold that Herr Wagner is not a musician at all but a simple theorist who has conceived the unhappy idea of aiming a blow at the very existence of music through melody, that element which has won for music the epithet of "divine".... What do we find there? So far as music is concerned, nothing better than chaos — absolute chaos consistency of keys and their relations overthrown, condemned, demolished the charm of rhythmic measure...destroyed; symmetry of form ignored or else abandoned; the true basis of harmony cast away for a reckless, wild, extravagant and demagogic cacophony, the symbol of profligate libertinage...*Lohengrin*...is poison, rank poison...*Die Fliegende Holländer*, the most hideous and detestable of the whole — this preacher of the "Future" was born to feed spiders with flies, not to make happy the heart of man with music, with beautiful melody and harmony.<sup>87</sup> (Ellipses and hyphenation original)

Few could have guessed how Davison would be won over by this foreign master and representative of the New German School. In 1877, Wagner came to England for the London

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<sup>85</sup> James William Davison, *The Musical World* 33, no. 34 (August 25, 1855): 553.

<sup>86</sup> Reid, 63.

<sup>87</sup> James William Davison, *The Musical World* 33, no. 26 (June 30, 1855): 412.

Wagner Festival. Davison wrote numerous articles proclaiming the greatness of Wagner and reprinted from one journal to another articles that he had written. Among the comments that he makes are:

Leave Wagner to himself; take Wagner for what he is; and enough remains entitling him to be regarded as a man of wonderful intellectual power — a man who, having a great deal to tell us, tells it in such a way as to enforce serious consideration. A more convincing illustration of this, apart from passages in the *Ring des Nibelungen*, could not be cited than the marvelous duet which, on Saturday, was the chief feature of the selection from *Tristan und Isolde*, wherein the lovers echo one another, phrase after phrase, as if what one said was precisely what the other would have said if their positions had been reversed.<sup>88</sup>

The positive comments that Davison begins to make about Wagner again happened after the two men had met personally.

I believe that as time passed, Davison became less cantankerous and began to accept things that he previously rejected, especially when he developed a liking for the individual involved. Perhaps becoming acquainted with the individual was just the incentive that Davison needed to make the step toward accepting their work. The possibility that he was taking bribes also existed, the knowledge of which would be quite damning for a music critic. Either way, Davison's habit of changing his views—sometimes overnight and sometimes over longer periods—was detrimental to his goal of promoting native talent. To his readers, it might have appeared that the foreigners that Arthur Pendragon had sworn to protect against were able to buy his loyalties. With the most vocal proponent of native talent going “soft,” there was little or no defense against the foreign musicians who found London a veritable economic musical utopia.

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<sup>88</sup> Reid, 210.

## The “Muttonians”

If, when attempting to convince a group of people of something, one begins using rhetoric that they cannot understand, one will be unsuccessful. Davison’s use of a crew of confusing characters known as the “Muttonians” to express some of his ideas alienated a portion of his readership because they simply could not get the gist of what he was talking about. In fact, he downright lost them.

The “Muttonians”—similar to Schumann’s *Davidsbündler*—were imaginary characters who would hold fictional conversations and participate in activities that were apparently meant to express Davison’s views or opinions (although how those opinions were distributed among them has not yet been deciphered). For example, on July 15, 1865, we read in Davison’s weekly column, “Muttoniana”:

Drs. Shoe, Wind, Queer, and Pidding have off’d Cape Horn. Mr. Ap’-Mutton is exploring the Western course of Lake Victoria Nianza in Africa. Mr. Ap’M. believes he will trace the waters of the Nile to yet another source. Captain Burton has written to Mr. Ap’M. to allow him (Burton) to accompany him (Ap’M.), but he (Ap’M.) has declined the honor. His (Ap’M.’s) discoveries have always been made without aid or lookers-on. He (Ap’M.) is *suite*-less, travels on a mule, drinks coconut milk, eats berries, locusts, and phoenicopters—when he can catch these last, which he occasionally does with salt. Mr. Ap’M. gathers the berries. The locusts leap into his mouth unawares to both. He simply bolts them.<sup>89</sup>

Apparently the character “Ap Mutton” is a manifestation of one of Davison’s alter egos. This is only a portion of a article that takes up two double-columned pages in its issue of *The Musical World*. The language used seems completely nonsensical to us, as it would have to any readers of the journal that were not familiar with Davison and his “Muttonian” plotline

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<sup>89</sup> James William Davison, “Muttoniana,” *The Musical World* 43, no. 28 (July 15, 1865): 438.

(and there were likely few who were). With such a large portion of the journal turning to gibberish, it is easy to understand why the average reader would have laid the paper aside rather than trudging through the confusing jumble of words. Perhaps if the column had only taken up a small portion of the journal, readers would have been apt to simply skip over the confusing few paragraphs, but with such a large amount of space dedicated to the “Muttonians” it would have been hard for the reader to forgive. According to Henry Davison in his account of this phenomenon, “Some people would write serious letters whose editorial framing at Muttonian hands would surprise, mystify or make indignant their writers.”<sup>90</sup> This shows that readers of the *Musical World* were in fact being impeded in their attempts at musical discourse with the journal. The frustration that they clearly felt would have resulted in less serious contribution to the journal and a general disintegration of the journal’s credibility. These fictional characters clearly meant something to Davison, (exactly what has yet to be ascertained) but he failed to make wise decisions about what material to print, and what to keep within the confines of his very active imagination.

Davison’s colleague Joseph Bennett tells of how he urged Davison to exclude the “Muttonians” from any future publications of *The Musical World* on the basis that they were “obscure” and “too recondite for the ordinary mind.”<sup>91</sup> This statement, though clearly lip service to Davison, demonstrates that the general public neither understood nor enjoyed Davison’s excursions into “Muttoniana”. When the “Muttonians” disappeared from the paper, the public expressed its gratitude that *The Musical World* was “once more in its right mind.”<sup>92</sup> Information on the “Muttonians” is hard to come by for the plain and simple reason that very few people during the nineteenth century and possibly nobody in the present have

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<sup>90</sup> Henry Davison, 267.

<sup>91</sup> Bennett, 224.

<sup>92</sup> Bennett, 225.

any clue as to the information contained within the column. Davison's own attitude on the "Muttonians" illuminates the fact that he never intended for the code to be deciphered. When confronted by Bennett, Davison remarked, "If I can please myself and make fools laugh at what they can't understand, why not?"<sup>93</sup>

In conclusion, Davison's contribution to the native talent movement that existed in England during the nineteenth century should have been revolutionary. He had the right combination of literary prowess and political position to arouse jealousy for his native countrymen. It is plausible that he could have reversed the bias that existed toward English composers through convincing criticism, the promotion of the works of native talent, and the indoctrination of the middle-class public to his own traditional aesthetics. His failure hinges on the fact that as a music critic, his job was to supply his readers with a standard by which to judge musical quality, but by failing to do so in a consistent manner, those who had ever bothered to read his writings in the past were unable to develop opinions based on the information they were receiving from his pen, and as a result they turned to other sources for the service that Davison failed to provide. His message did not get through. Because he was the most active, public, and vocal proponent of native talent, English artists became associated with Davison's eccentric writing, to which few readers could relate or enjoy, and this reflected negatively on the native English talent movement in general. This likely biased audiences from attending concerts by English artists. The lack of public demand for English musicians contributed to the domination of foreigners in English musical life.

On the other hand, many of his ideals would later come to fruition in the form of the canonization of the more high-minded composers of the English Renaissance period that would emerge after his death. Davison's contribution to *The Musical World* represents an

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<sup>93</sup> Bennett, 225.



uninterrupted chronicle of musical life in London, which is unparalleled by any other journal of the period. Despite his flaws as a journalist, the dedication that Davison had to his periodical has supplied a carefully preserved window into the nineteenth century and an invaluable resource.



### Chapter 3: Popular and Art Music in Commercialized “Miscellany”

During the nineteenth century, as previously mentioned, the English middle class enjoyed a new state of affluence. This affluence provided more free time for the average middle-class individual. As a result, their demand for leisure activity was insatiable. As with any demand, a savvy coterie of suppliers (including musicians and impresarios) began to market more specifically to the middle-class consumers, offering more and more exciting spectacles. As will be discussed, London’s music industry became highly commercialized. Entrepreneurs, rather than private working class musicians, would organize large impressive concerts featuring dozens of artists performing a vast array of styles and genres. As excitement in performance became the norm, public taste changed dramatically. Consumers began to demand sensationalism in musical performance, often at the expense of artistry. The flamboyant style (both musical and dress) that many foreigners often exhibited lent itself well to sensationalism in concerts, while the more modest style of the “English Artistic School” was seen—by concertgoers—as tame by comparison. The public’s admiration for foreign artists was thus magnified and their inclination to attend the concerts of English musicians was diminished; foreign spectacles became synonymous with popular music, and the more traditional, toned-down English style became associated with art music.<sup>94</sup> In this chapter we will look at how supply and demand gave rise to concert formats that began to favor popular music in England and how the resultant commercialized popular music made it

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<sup>94</sup> I define art music as music that is designed for the aesthete and it is meant to challenge, educate, and satisfy the intellectual listener. Popular music on the other hand is commercialized music that is designed specifically to appeal to the largest number of people by writing in a socially accessible style.

appear (to later generations of scholars) that England had produced no art music in this period. We will also examine how foreign artists were uniquely situated to be the suppliers of this commercialized popular music, giving them domination over England's musical life. Both of these ideas later contributed to the impression that England was a "Land ohne Musik."

Commercialization in nineteenth-century English musical life is most readily observed in the benefit concert; therefore it is important to know what a benefit concert was and how it changed over time. Modeled on a common theatrical practice, a benefit concert was typically an end of season concert held by an elite performer for the purpose of generating profit (for the artist's *own* advantage).<sup>95</sup> Integral to the benefit concert was the concept of variety or "miscellany." William Weber defines "miscellany" as "a program that included a variety of pieces rather than a single oratorio or ode."<sup>96</sup> The concept of "miscellany" had been around since the eighteenth century. Weber demonstrates that by "1780 every major concert series offered opera selections, concertos, cantatas, and symphonies, and almost every concertgoer learned the music of Haydn, Domenico Cimarosa, Giovanni Paisiello, and the long-deceased Giovanni Pergolesi."<sup>97</sup> "Miscellany" had always been a tool for promotion as it guaranteed that there would be something on the program for everyone.<sup>98</sup> Benefits followed this concept in concert programming. Therefore, the benefit concert was simply an economically advantageous miscellaneous concert of greater exclusivity (which will be explained in the next paragraph).

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<sup>95</sup> Simon McVeigh, "The Benefit Concert in Nineteenth-Century London: From 'tax on the nobility' to 'monstrous nuisance,'" in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies: Volume 1*, ed. Bennett Zon (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999), 244.

<sup>96</sup> Weber, 14.

<sup>97</sup> Weber, 40.

<sup>98</sup> Weber, 16.

A musical celebrity would often sign a contract for the duration of a subscription series, and for those in greatest demand, a benefit was frequently stipulated in this contract. For this concert, the artist's manager, who was also the concert organizer,<sup>99</sup> would pay all concert expenses, and any other performers who were to be on the stage would waive their fees. As a result, a top performer could expect to receive a profit of up to £200-500, or the equivalent of an entire year's wage.<sup>100</sup> Tickets to these events were ordinarily more expensive, which limited the audience to the wealthier classes and increased the prestige associated with them. Representatives of the performer and/or manager would approach patrons in a door-to-door fashion and request that they purchase tickets. Many of these patrons were personally acquainted with the performer—and probably the manager—and it would have been socially awkward to refuse. Benefits in the late eighteenth century were therefore seen as a reward for good musical service for the year.<sup>101</sup> The benefit concert was reserved for only the top performers in the community and therefore, only between fifteen and twenty would take place annually.<sup>102</sup> This rarity guaranteed a socially elite audience and provided the justification of the high price of admission, without which generating the desired extra profit would have been difficult.

By the 1820s however, benefits (as well as other miscellaneous concerts) were occurring more frequently and some critics pointed out the fact that increased numbers had allowed room for lesser musicians to infiltrate the previously elite status that the benefit

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<sup>99</sup> Although not a manager strictly in the modern sense, these entrepreneurs would recruit artists for musical productions and would take care of the business and financial matters of concertizing. The most notable example of this is the German impresario Johann Peter Salomon promoting Haydn during the 1790s.

<sup>100</sup> McVeigh, 244.

<sup>101</sup> The benefit concert was viewed not only as a reward for musical performing, but also for educational services rendered within the community.

<sup>102</sup> For more information concerning benefit concerts see Simon McVeigh, 244-46.

commanded.<sup>103</sup> It would appear that quality had been sacrificed for the sake of quantity. For example, Felix Mendelssohn remarked, “Here they pursue music like a business, calculating, paying, bargaining, and truly a great deal is lacking.”<sup>104</sup> Simon McVeigh notes that, “The ever increasing number of concerts was a clear indication that minor hopefuls were beginning to infiltrate the traditional system, so that the benefit was less and less regarded as a reward or mark of recognition, and more as a purely commercial undertaking.”<sup>105</sup> Speaking in more general terms about all miscellaneous concerts, William Weber states that by the mid-1840s, many connoisseurs had “turned against the virtuoso program of *fantaisies* and selections from recent operas, finding the music poorly crafted and overly commercialized.”<sup>106</sup> From Weber’s statement we see that the poor standards that were evident in benefit concerts of this era had also reflected negatively on the miscellaneous concert format, which constituted the primary concert format in England. (It is important to note that those who felt this way were the more musically educated individuals, not the enthusiastic leisured public.)

These commentators are all talking about popular music (considered superficial by the *connoisseurs*) such as fantasias on opera tunes and other novelties that were easily composed to fill concert programs. To the historian looking at concert programs, this music appears to be the most prevalent throughout England during this time period. What this means is that art music was poorly accepted, while commercialized popular music was at its height. We can infer that the dearth of quality, which was created by the low standards of musical activity at this time, would pave the way for later generations to assume (quite

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<sup>103</sup> McVeigh, 244-45.

<sup>104</sup> Felix Mendelssohn, *A Life in Letters*, ed. R. Elvers (New York: Fromm International Pub. Corp., 1986), 106.

<sup>105</sup> McVeigh, 247-48.

<sup>106</sup> Weber, 141.

incorrectly) that no art music was produced during this period in England's history, but rather was a period of superficial commercialism in music.

Nonetheless, commercialized benefit and miscellaneous concerts continued to gain favor among the middle class. The public's craving for entertainment was at an all-time high, leisure for wealthy bourgeois was at its apex,<sup>107</sup> and individuals of means were willing to pay large amounts for concerts in which the most *en vogue* stars would be flaunted. According to Peter Bailey, "British music hall or variety [concerts]...grew rapidly to dominate the commercialized popular culture of the late nineteenth century."<sup>108</sup> Simultaneously, the expenses with benefit concerts were increasing due to larger numbers of musicians, including guest artists and divas, who demanded large sums to take part in the performance.<sup>109</sup> This made it harder for the benefit artist to make a profit at the end of the day. Therefore, competition ensued to garner the attention of the public with lures of spectacular attractions.

By the 1830s and 1840s, miscellaneous concerts and benefits became associated with grand and spectacular popular music, which was becoming increasingly synonymous (in the public mind) with "foreign." For example, Madame Louise Dulcken, the pianist to the Queen, gave her annual grand concert on Monday, May 31, 1841 at two o'clock in the afternoon in the Great Concert Room of Her Majesty's Theatre. Divided into two parts, it was hardly *her* concert. It featured twenty-three works of varying genres by seventeen composers, including Meyerbeer, Paccini, Rossini, Mercandante, Thalberg, Donizetti, David, Auber, Schubert, Godefroid, Schira, Liszt, et al., and it exhibited the talents of twenty-one

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<sup>107</sup> See Peter Bailey, "The Victorian Middle Class and the Problem of Leisure," in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13-29.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Bailey, "Music Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture," in *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 128.

<sup>109</sup> McVeigh, 248.

soloists, including Franz Liszt.<sup>110</sup> Only one of the works was by an English composer, and although several performers have possible English names, they are referred to by the titles Herr, Madame, and Signor. The concert is representative of a typical miscellaneous concert; the works include virtuoso works for piano, chamber ensembles, and airs on the latest—and most popular—opera arias. The timing of the event tells us that this was a socially prestigious event, because by scheduling it on Monday afternoon, it would effectively exclude the entire working population of London, allowing only the leisured to attend.

In concerts like this, foreign artists would perform show-stopping bravura works and variations on well-known opera tunes, while English artists preferred to perform classical works (both vocal and instrumental) by Handel, Beethoven, and Mozart (we will examine two examples of this later). The foreigners would embellish their performances with tremendous feats of coloratura and prestidigitation to the thrill of the onlookers (indeed many pieces were written for exactly this purpose). Demonstratively, a concert was held in Stamford on September 16, 1840 at one o'clock in the afternoon in which the vast majority of performers and composers were foreign.<sup>111</sup> On this program are fantasias on airs from operas and virtuoso solo piano character pieces performed by Liszt. Among the bravura works on the program was the *Grand Galop Chromatique* by Liszt, a work characterized by staggering octave passagework, chromatic harmonies, and rhythms evocative of horse's hooves. By Victorian standards (and even today's) this piece would not be considered artful, but rather stunning in the physical acrobatics required for execution. The form of the piece is rather simple, giving the pianist ample opportunity to repeat the virtuoso passagework, rather than being bothered—too often—to play new material. At the end of the program, a footnote

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<sup>110</sup> Weber, *Transformation*, facsimile of program between pages 144 and 145.

<sup>111</sup> Weber, *Transformation*, facsimile of program between pages 144 and 145.



explains “The Piano Forte is one of Erard’s new patent, and is brought expressly from London for the occasion.” The Erard was known as a particularly hardy instrument.<sup>112</sup> If the resident piano in the music hall had been a model from earlier in the century, it would likely not have withstood the abuse of such an aggressive style of piano playing. It is possible that the Erard was brought to the performance for precisely this reason. (Erard pianos were Liszt’s choice of instrument.<sup>113</sup>) If this is true, it would indicate that virtuosity was a normal and expected element of benefit and miscellaneous concerts from the era, even to the point that managers would make arrangements to have a special instrument for the occasion.

Additionally, we now know that some artists like Liszt dressed flamboyantly on the stage. Liszt in particular enjoyed wearing the various medallions and other eccentric jewelry—that had been presented to him by monarchs and other notable personages as awards for spectacular performances—on the stage where it would jingle and jangle. He particularly was known for “gesturing” and “gesticulating” on the stage to amplify the effect of all this jewelry “clinking and clanking” on his person.<sup>114</sup> This effect would have been quite dramatic to those unaccustomed to such scenes in the nineteenth century. It also presented these foreign artists (it was not only Liszt who exhibited such theatrics) as exciting rebels (like modern pop-stars), especially to the younger generation of English (and quite possibly further alienating English parents from encouraging their children to become musicians).

Although foreigners overwhelmingly conceded to the public’s demand for popular music, there were few English musicians whose style lent itself to such virtuosity and

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<sup>112</sup> Ann Griffiths and Richard Macnutt, “Erard,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42471> (accessed November 11, 2012).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Alan Walker, et al., “Liszt, Franz,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48265pg8> (accessed November 11, 2012).

flamboyance. In contrast to the above concert examples, James William Davison reports on the fine performance (to Davison, any concert with a majority of English musicians was to be commended) given in Southampton on Thursday, November 5, 1840.<sup>115</sup> This event consisted of performances principally by English artists. Among them, a Miss Birch, a Mr. Hobbs, Henry Blagrove (who is referred to as Messr., despite his English nationality), and a Mr. Lindley. They performed vocal and chamber works by Handel. A similar concert took place on November 4, 1840 as part of the Devon and Exeter Quartet Concerts.<sup>116</sup> Again we see a program of mostly English artists, including a Miss Cole, a Miss Down, a Miss Carpenter, and a Miss Haycraft. (Note the proliferation of the female performers giving credence to the idea—established earlier—that music was not an acceptable vocation for men.) Vocal and chamber works by Beethoven, Weber, Spohr, and Schubert were performed. These concerts provide far less in the way of variety of style and genre than the concerts by the foreigners, not to mention less opportunity for showmanship. It is also important to note that the works that they were performing were all by composers that were sanctioned by the “English Artistic School” of musicians and critics. This was typical of the conservatism by which English artists were perceived by the general public. Coming at a time when performing the newest music was *en vogue*, these concerts paint a portrait of English performers as unfashionable.

Additionally, when one compares the works of the most popular virtuosi of Europe to those of the most prominent English composers and performers of the era we see a monumental difference in style. There is nothing remotely approaching the bravura of Liszt or Thalberg in the works of William Sterndale Bennett, James William Davison, George

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<sup>115</sup> James William Davison, *The Musical World* 14, no. 242 (November 12, 1840): 312.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Alexander Macfarren, or Arabella Goddard. Additionally, these composers (the “English Artistic School”) were known for their dogged promotion (discussed in chapter 1) of Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, and Mendelssohn (composers who they considered the antithesis of Liszt and Thalberg); indeed these are the composers that appear on their concerts the most.<sup>117</sup> Rather when we examine the works and performance careers of these musicians, (with the possible exception of Goddard) we see a modest crew of artists intent on avoiding popular music at every turn, and in general, avoiding what they considered pointless virtuosity. (It is to be noted that Goddard was viewed as the least conservative of these artists—being younger and a former pupil of Thalberg<sup>118</sup>—and she attained the most exciting performance career, going on to become England’s most revered native pianist. This supports the notion of English artists being ignored on the basis of their lack of virtuosity as Goddard’s virtuosity and flamboyance—as with many foreigners—seem to be the reasons for her success.)

Charles Hallé and Ernst Pauer, both immigrants, were reckoned by fellow pianist Oscar Beringer (1844-1922) to be the most influential pianists in England during the 1860s.<sup>119</sup> Sigismund Thalberg had a huge following, and the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind had all of England suffering from “Lind fever.”<sup>120</sup> All of these artists followed in the tradition of Liszt who wore flamboyant clothing (and in the case of Lind, extravagant hairstyles) or

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<sup>117</sup> See James Robert Sterndale Bennett, *The Life of William Sterndale Bennett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 83-182, for a detailed summary of Bennett’s career. See Therese Ellsworth, “Victorian Pianists as Concert Artists,” in *The Piano in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, ed. Therese Ellsworth and Susan Wollenberg (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 149-69, for details concerning the performance tendencies of Goddard.

<sup>118</sup> Ellsworth, “Victorian Artists,” 153.

<sup>119</sup> Oscar Beringer, *Fifty Years’ Experience of Pianoforte Teaching and Playing* (London: Bosworth & Co., 1907), 1-2. Quoted in Therese Ellsworth, *Victorian Pianists as Concert Artists*, in *The Piano in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, ed. Therese Ellsworth and Susan Wollenberg (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 151.

<sup>120</sup> Henry Davison, 85.

played (or sang) in an ultra-virtuosic manner. Bravura foreigners attracted audiences with guarantees of musical fireworks and there was an element of erotic sensuality to be found, especially in concerts held by the likes of Liszt, about whom anecdotes are still related of screaming women seeking souvenirs in the form of hair clippings, cigar butts, or the gloves that Liszt purposely left lying on the piano.<sup>121</sup> The reverence paid to these foreign virtuosi had another social implication as well. When Liszt made his famous pronouncement in Milan in 1839 that, “Le concert c’est moi!”<sup>122</sup> (I am the concert!), he invoked the authority of Louis XIV, the Sun-King, who famously stated, “Le etat c’est moi!”<sup>123</sup> (I am the state!) Therefore, a major change in the perceived status of musicians occurred. Liszt was no longer a servant who was to be benefitted or rewarded by his aristocratic patrons (as was the purpose of the benefit concert genre), but rather he was their new musical king who was *owed* gifts befitting his status. As we have seen, English artists offered very little in the way of thrill in comparison. The English artists’ failure to excite audiences through virtuosity and flamboyance stifled their presence in musical life throughout the middle of the nineteenth century. As previously mentioned, this would not begin to change until the 1870s.

The average middle-class concertgoer preferred the splendor and sensationalism of foreign bravura artists, whose music was designed to appeal to the largest group of people. They did not share the traditional ideology held by most English professional musicians, i.e., that music should reflect the continuous development that began with canonized composers of the past. Therefore, once the public was exposed to large competitive spectacles, their desire to attend smaller concerts that were characterized by an emphasis on artistry, rather

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<sup>121</sup> See Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 289, 371-2.

<sup>122</sup> Alan Walker, et al., “Liszt, Franz,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48265pg8> (accessed November 11, 2012).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid

than bravura, was lessened. In 1864, a writer in the *Saturday Review* commented, “That they have a right to be always amused, or to be always going to be amused, is an axiom apparently with many young people.”<sup>124</sup> Coming at a time when leisure and money were a stable part of Victorian cultural life, foreign artists (consciously or not) capitalized on this desire for amusement and entertainment in a way that Englishmen failed to do. For the Victorians (especially the younger ones), flamboyancy had become the main identifier of popular entertainment, and the primary exhibitors of this flamboyancy were foreign artists.

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<sup>124</sup> “Our Rising Generation,” *Saturday Review* 17, no. 439 (March 26, 1864): 375-76.



## Conclusion

In his treatise, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), Matthew Arnold describes culture as “the best that has been thought and said.”<sup>125</sup> He further calls culture, “a study of perfection.” By culture, he is talking about high-minded ideals such as “art, science, poetry, philosophy, history”<sup>126</sup> (i.e., things in which highly developed minds participate). To Arnold, culture includes the upper-class refinements that are by their very nature, exclusionary. By contrast, Arnold describes the “raw person” (or general public) as unable to discern cultural value. “But culture indefatigably tries, not to make what each raw person may like the rule by which he fashions himself, but to draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get a person to like that.”<sup>127</sup> In other words, “culture” is the high-minded study of aesthetics, that “raw” people cannot understand without guidance. Therefore, if we accept Arnold’s claims as valid, one can conclude in the words of Dennis Denisoff, that an attempt “to infuse high-culture tastes with mass appeal can appear to be an enterprise destined to failure.”<sup>128</sup> In other words it is impossible to adapt one of these high-minded disciplines to mass appeal without a necessary drop in quality.

As the middle class rose in prestige and wealth toward the end of the eighteenth century—and into the nineteenth century—and became more of an influential factor in the musical life of England, we do indeed see (for some time) a decrease in the level of participation of the more high-minded composers of art music. This was possible in England

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<sup>125</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay In Political and Social Criticism* (Minneapolis: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1903), 304.

<sup>126</sup> Arnold, 10.

<sup>127</sup> Arnold, 14.

<sup>128</sup> Dennis Denisoff, “Popular Culture,” In *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, ed. Francis O’Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 135-36.

because of its liberal, free-market economy.<sup>129</sup> This system gave England's middle class the freedom to choose between various composers, musical styles, and concert genres, through the complicated process of supply and demand. Into this process were factored cultural biases, contemporary input from music journals and critics, and exposure to the performance conventions of the day. A type of natural selection occurred in England's musical populace at this time that allowed foreign musicians to be preferred over native ones and that would cause popular music and popular music composers to enjoy social and financial success over those whose focus was to achieve artistry. There is clearly, then, a correlation between this generation of wealthy English middle-class individuals and the previously mentioned drop in quality—that may have been interpreted by future people as an absence of musical culture—that would later earn England the reputation of being a “land without music.”

There are very few resources with which to gauge the average middle-class citizen's exact feelings or opinions on the matters that we have here discussed. However, we can say with certainty that the wealthy middle-class citizens of England were integral in determining the direction of musical aesthetics in the nation at large. The venues and concerts at which they chose to spend their money would enjoy success; those artists that received little or no attention would be forced to either conform to popular trends or retreat into the world of musical academia. As the French man of letters Charles Dufresny asserted as early as 1698, “The public is a sovereign, to which all must account who strive toward high reputation, or indeed for financial gain.”<sup>130</sup>

It has been suggested that early musicology's pre-occupation with “great men” falsely points to a description of England as a “Land ohne Musik” on the grounds that among

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<sup>129</sup> Weber, 40.

<sup>130</sup> Charles Dufresny, *Amusements Sérieux et Comiques* (Paris, 1699; Bossard, 1921), 126. Quoted in Weber, 19.



England's musical progeny only "small men" may be found.<sup>131</sup> This is a valid point and I believe that it deserves consideration, but I maintain that social idiosyncrasies of the period, rather than contemporary misinterpretation, is the key to unlocking the complete story behind the "Land ohne Musik" problem. The obsession with respectability that pervaded the middle-class social environment, the positive and/or negative influence that the writings of prominent critics and other literary figures may have wielded over the public, and the brainwashing of concertgoers by the emerging "big business" music industry are important pieces of the "Land ohne Musik" puzzle (not unlike the popular music phenomenon of our own time).

In this thesis I have tried to show the social implications involved in England's development as a so-called non-musical nation. The English middle class's desire to achieve social status and their bias against English musicians made it difficult for an individual to pursue the dream of becoming a musical artist. Additionally, English musicians often had to contend with a list of difficulties such as having to accept the public's preference for the foreigners against whom they were competing. It was likely frustrating for aspiring English musicians to have to stand aside while a lesser musician was selected for a coveted position in a church or school, merely on the basis that he or she was somehow connected to medicine, law, or that they had a title before their name. In most cases, these difficulties and biases resulted in parents who were unwilling to allow their children to even consider becoming professional musicians. With an English public that was so averted to the idea of English musicians, it is no wonder that successive generations of scholars would assume that

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<sup>131</sup> Ruth A. Soli, "Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 101.

England had no true musical identity, but instead, had simply inherited a musical identity from the numerous immigrant musicians within her borders.

Additionally, the advantage in music that England should have had with such a prosperous industrial society—one that included instrument making, music printing, and music journalism—was in fact hindered by the serious journalism of a man whose writings the public would begin to view as trivial and flippant. James William Davison, stood in a unique position that should have allowed him to influence the middle class toward his ideals of a musical nation for the people of England, but with so much hostility, so many contradictions, and the prevalence of nonsensical puppets (the “Muttonians”) to express his opinions, many readers would have taken him less seriously. Ultimately, Davison himself would never see his dream of a musical nation; instead, a number of musicians and scholars would arise a generation after his death to proclaim the musical world in which he lived as a “land without music.”

Finally, as in today’s world, the massive commercialization of nineteenth-century England’s musical life created a scenario where popular music was favored over art music. Because foreign artists readily adapted to the demands of an enthusiastic public who preferred bravura and spectacular attractions over classical music concerts that they saw as dull, English musicians who had more difficulty adapting to this new idiom always stood in the shadow of the flamboyant and extravagant presence of their foreign competitors. Looking back at a musical culture that was characterized by foreign virtuosi performing popular music, later musicologists would receive the impression that there were no serious English musicians composing art music (when in fact there were, but they were not recognized).

This examination potentially breathes new life into the now stale subject of the reason behind England's lack of musical culture. As I mentioned earlier, the studies on this subject thus far have resulted in discussions meant to counter the argument that England had no musical heritage. My discussion, however, demonstrates that there are important social factors behind England's musical reputation. It serves to dispel the myth that there was no music in England; we clearly see a thriving economic system well suited to musical industrial pursuits of every kind from musical performance, music education, and music journalism. In addition, I hope to have linked the discussions of these social factors of English musical life directly to the discussion of "Land ohne Musik" so that we may continue to investigate this phenomenon from an entirely new and important angle.



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