

5 | Two styles in 1830s London: “The form and order of a perspicuous unity”

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To what erotics of knowledge can the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos be connected?¹

To gaze on musical life in London in the 1830s is to find oneself divided: between thoughts of the new and thoughts of the old; between what might seem to resemble our present musical milieu and another country, now unimaginably distant. As it happens, a sense of rupture was also voiced at the time. The city after dusk was the most richly illuminated in the world, and public musical performance, which typically took place during these bright, newly theatricalized urban evenings, flourished as never before; but many were struck by new fissures becoming apparent in musical life and taste. Lynda Nead, whose book on nineteenth-century London – tellingly called *Victorian Babylon* – talks little about music but has much to tell the music historian, puts the general case much better than I can:

There can never be a pure, clean modernity, for the discourses that constitute that historical temporality bear the ghosts of the past, of modernity’s own other. The past may be rejected or repressed by the language of improvement, but it returns to disturb and unsettle the confidence of the modern. The present remains permanently engaged in a phantasmatic dialogue with the past.²

In terms of city geography, and in spite of some significant advances in the 1820s, London in the 1830s was still largely pre-modern. Joseph Bazalgette’s sewerage system; the Metropolitan Board of Works; and other aspects of what, if patriotic, we might look on as a pragmatic British answer to the circulatory swathes cut through Paris by Baron Haussmann – all this was twenty and more years in the future. London was still in the grip of crippling traffic jams up and down its main artery from the City to Westminster, and as always it suffered from chronic pollution. When Verdi visited in 1847, he described residence in London as “like living on a steamship.”³ This presumably referred to the air quality; he omitted to mention (perhaps Milan was as bad) that it was also like living in what Dickens and others euphemistically referred to as “dust.” But amidst this chaos and miasma, and perhaps in some small way because of it, a new

musical terrain was emerging. As a correspondent in the (aptly, imperialistically, entitled) *Musical World* wrote in 1838: "The nineteenth century seems peculiarly to belong to musical art . . . The history of the arts affords no example of a development of genius at once so powerful and rapid; never was any half century so fruitful."⁴

There is no better way to introduce this "powerful and rapid" development than by turning to a further 1838 article in *The Musical World*, a journal in the vanguard of such thinking in the late 1830s, and a major point of reference in what follows.⁵ It is a report, or rather a celebration, of a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony by London's Philharmonic Society. Why, the journal asked, had this work, now treated with such reverence, been so poorly received when first given in London little more than a decade earlier? The answer seemed plain:

Independently of the careless and ignorant performance of this sublime work at the earlier epoch we have named – an accident, however, which ought to have been of no essential weight in the formation of an estimate of its intrinsic excellence – we may, we think with justice, ascribe its unfavourable reception to *the want of community of sentiment*, and *the great inferiority in their knowledge*, which then existed between the mass of our native professors and the gifted composer . . . They did not understand the meaning of the symphony as a whole; and were therefore content either to overlook its details, or to dismiss them with a superficial glance.⁶

This was, then, a sea change indeed. Reverence for Beethoven had been occasioned not by a turn in the usual tides of fashion, but by something more fundamental: the writer called it a new *community of sentiment*.

One way to trace the lineaments of this brave new world is to examine how a series of binaries began to settle around music and musical performance during the 1830s, some of them gaining a status they retained with remarkable persistence through the coming decades, even the coming century and more. Like all such collections, they are mutable and intricately intertwined, moving in and out of each other's orbits at the whim of the rhetoric that commands them. Curiously enough, and a point to which I will return, Beethoven vs. Rossini was not in noticeably common parlance; but many others of greater currency can be ranged around the same divide. We've heard them before, but to list them baldly may expose how confusion could arise when they intersected: simplicity (good) vs. ornament (bad), for example, would seem clear enough, and was the subject of much polemic; but it could dine uncomfortably with counterpoint (good) vs. melody (bad), which was often served at a nearby table. Composer (good) vs. performer (bad) is another, gathering much force, and fits well with masculine vs.

feminine, depth vs. surface, and German vs. Italian; or with fidelity to the score vs. improvisation, instruction vs. entertainment, amateur vs. professional, middle class vs. aristocratic, and so on and on. Something of a London specialty was the fact that all these opposites could become tremendously fraught if they stumbled over that hardy perennial of the sceptred isle: English (good) vs. "foreign" (bad). This last, plainly contradicted in the professional musical sphere by all but the most eccentric public taste, was the subject of endless, anxious analysis. One desperate measure was disarming in its simplicity: contemporary English composers might, writers ruefully admitted, be inferior to the sublime, manly Germans and even to the superficial, feminine Italians, but *at least they were better than the French*. Unfortunately, even this argument (superficially plausible given the paucity of French music performed in 1830s London) tottered under the impact of changed public preference after 1850. Thank goodness, then, that by that time an ever-expanding empire and its attendant musical ethnographers had furnished critics with other, more distant musical cultures towards which upstanding Englishmen could feel themselves superior.

I mentioned that "Beethoven vs. Rossini" was not a particularly common formulation in 1830s London, and the reasons for this are intriguing, not least in light of the binary's evident currency in Paris and elsewhere.⁷ Acceptance of and, eventually, reverence for Beethoven was, at a guess (and it's only a guess: more comparative, trans-national work needs to be done, in this as in so many aspects of nineteenth-century European music history), a much more gradual process in London than it had been in Paris. By the time, in the 1830s, that the sublime German came into a decisive ascendancy, Rossini had passed his greatest vogue, and partly for this reason was becoming accepted as a "classic," albeit one with distinctly suspect progeny. Not that Rossini entirely escaped criticism. His supposed failure to differentiate musically between operatic characters, or even between the emotions they expressed, was still routinely derided, as was his wasteful indulgence in vocal ornament. What's more, the long-standing anecdotes about his ease of composition and love of cash, nobility, and good living could become nastier in tone. George Hogarth's *Musical History* elaborated on the extremely generous royal and noble patronage Rossini had received on his visit to the capital in the 1820s, and compared it, in a tone of outrage, to the muted welcome London had given a little later to "the modest and high-souled Weber."⁸ Worse came in John Ella's *Musical Sketches*, in which certain remarks about Rossini are reminiscent of anti-Semitic caricature: "now Rossini [Ella wrote] reposes in a quiet life of luxurious idleness, cracking his jokes, hoarding up his money, and liberally encouraging the

efforts of the numerous tribe of imitators who follow, at an immeasurable distance in his train."⁹

The greatest vituperation, however, at least in a proportion of the musical press (the opera-going public was, as ever, annoyingly promiscuous), was reserved for Rossini's "imitators," amongst whom Bellini was the most popular and thus the most dangerous. Bellini was routinely accused of having the same faults as Rossini: indiscriminate use of ornament in particular, but also "noisy" orchestration and abuse of the brass. It was – perhaps in the face of public appreciation it had to be – admitted that the odd phrase could provide, in the words of one critic, "momentary gratification"; but more extended musical ideas were, this critic thought, successful only because they were "calculated to attract that portion of the audience who are neither able, nor desire, to pierce below the surface of a composer's design."¹⁰ Here, immediately, other binaries come into play, not least the idea that something close to what we today call "music analysis" might be important, and that moral worth could be attached to musical understanding of the most discerning variety.

What was new in the 1830s, as perhaps befitted that pragmatic, reformist decade in British political culture, was the decisive emergence and growing self-confidence of a new audience for non-operatic music, one whose presence and trajectory clearly encouraged much of the anti-Italian polemic.¹¹ Of course, this story – the rise of a new audience in London, together with a new repertoire and new kinds of concert – has often been told, but the attitudes and behavior attendant on it may still benefit from rehearsal.¹² As many have said, spectator silence was an important ingredient at these new concerts, and became intimately associated with humility before the composer: deference to elevated reputations and a desire for self-improvement. Discussing a concert "in the East End of London" that contained choral works by Cherubini and Haydn, one *Musical World* critic opined that "if [the audience] could not appreciate those compositions, (which was scarcely to be expected) they nevertheless were content to take their merit upon trust, and to subject their own understandings to the discipline of an acknowledged and chastised taste."¹³ Another spilled over into missionary zeal when enthusing over what such "amateur choralists" could achieve:

They were not merely providing a cheap enjoyment for multitudes, of the most unquestionable character, but they were diffusing a refinement of taste, and a power of appreciation, which belongs to the best agencies of civilization. They were in fact, though not in form, a Mission for elevating the taste, and by that for elevating the moral improvement, of the middle classes of society.¹⁴

This attitude, in particular of quasi-religious reverence before the musical object, of the new *rituals* of concert-going, was enthusiastically extended to the fastest-growing type of concert in the 1830s, which was that featuring German instrumental music. In stark contrast to the noisy opera house, which thrived on novelty, here sameness was actively promoted and celebrated. When the Philharmonic Society in 1838 had the temerity to feature a work by George Onslow (who of course had the misfortune of being partly French), it was roundly castigated:

No band in this country can do such justice to Mozart, Beethoven, and Spohr, as that of the Philharmonic. Herein rests their glory, and until they have produced *all* the works of these composers, and by repeated performances rendered them as familiar as household gods, we very readily give up all curiosity with regard to Kalliwoda, Lachner, or Täglichsbeck.¹⁵

As another article put it, "the immense accumulation of classical music, the frequency of its performance, and its wide dissemination, have been rendering, and will continue to render us, more and more fastidious."¹⁶ Indeed, a leading article about the Philharmonic Society in 1838 extended this ritual aspect, this idea of reverential repetition, from the repertoire to the performers, and even to the audience:

The subscriber enters the room, and takes the seat he may have selected for a dozen years past . . . the members of the orchestra have no difficulty in immediately proceeding to occupy their well known stations. The performance commences, perhaps with a symphony of Beethoven; a difficult passage occurs; it used to excite discussion as to the mode of its expression, in what way it should be fingered or bowed; these points have long been settled . . . Move the members of the band from their accustomed places, you lose the spell, and destroy the unique character of the performance.¹⁷

Of course the phenomenon of subscription events, at which audience members took the same seat on multiple occasions, was not new: indeed, such subscribers had for long been the core audience at the opera. What is more, it seems likely that the system there served to *encourage* social exchange and inattention to the spectacle, so much so that the emergence of silent operatic listening has been persuasively linked to the decline of the subscription audience.¹⁸ It is likely, though, that subscription culture had a markedly new effect in these changed circumstances. As the last quotations make clear, an essential ingredient of the new concert-audience attitude was the fact that the music was instrumental and primarily by dead composers. And foremost among – virtually iconic of – the dead was certainly Ludwig

van Beethoven. Although plainly some still had difficulties with the last works, they risked tremendous vituperation if they dared admit it: in the face of such genius, faith was above all demanded. Even lighter works such as the Septet might be heard in "death-like stillness" by large audiences, a stillness that "amply testified the highly intellectual gratification they had received."¹⁹

Amid all such pronouncements, we might seem to have reached within hail of the theme of this book: its guiding binary, if you will. Musical London in the 1830s can indeed be seen in terms of the "two styles," or rather in terms of a whole collection of binaries, of which "Beethoven vs. Rossini" was indeed important, if not – as mentioned – among the most potent or inflammatory.

It would, though, be simplistic and needlessly reductive to divide 1830s musical London into anything like rigidly opposing factions: on the one hand, a gaggle of aristocratic, hedonistic Hooray Henrys at The King's Theatre, breaking three pairs of kid gloves a night by frenetically applauding the latest warbling Italian soprano; on the other, down the road in the Exeter Rooms and other emerging concert hall venues, a band of dour, silently attentive, middle-class listeners, striving to improve themselves by means of Beethoven-worship. In spite of the fact that critics often had a vested interest in exaggerating such differences, London's musical life constantly confounded them. As William Weber and others have told us, there were plenty of boundary-crossers: many among the Exeter Hall audiences also went to the opera, and many of the nobility propped up the Philharmonic Society and other concert ventures of impeccable seriousness. Just as important, a preponderance of concerts were still "mixed" affairs, in which the season's operatic stars would alternate with the most elevated of instrumental music, Beethoven symphonies not excluded.

It is, though, surely significant that boundary-crossing *performers* – a genus whose status was inexorably falling during this period – could get into trouble with the critics. Sometimes, for example, singers versed in the Italian mode tried their fortunes in other repertoires, bringing with them a freedom of expression that was harshly treated. A soprano whose singing style was "decidedly ornamental" received this stern homily:

In the Italian style of the day, it seems to be quite a matter of necessity, that a singer should not leave one phrase of an aria in its original state . . . In the German style, it is refreshing to know, that the singer cannot, if he would, alter passages at will. And in the sacred style roulades are out of place, as well as unnecessary; and least of all do

the heaven-born strains of Handel need "the foreign aid of ornament." To garnish such music with modern cadences we have ever looked upon as an offence worthy of emphatic reprehension.²⁰

There are numerous other accounts of singers trained in the Italian repertory drowning the "classics" in ornament.²¹ What is more, this kind of critique could all too easily modulate into general diatribes against performance, in particular its potential to beguile audiences and make them overestimate the musical worth of what they are hearing.

It is also true, though, that some exceptional performers seemed able to move with extreme freedom between audiences and styles that might otherwise be thought firmly opposed. The classic case in 1830s London was the most celebrated singer of the decade. Maria Malibran was famous for her vocal range and flexibility; but her equally prodigious linguistic skills meant that she also managed to arouse adulation in a startling variety of styles – the Italian operatic, the Germanic "classical," the Spanish, and even the native British. In 1835, for example, she starred in *Fidelio* and then in *La sonnambula* in swift succession, sometimes rounding off the evening with concert appearances showing off an even broader repertoire. The Countess de Merlin's *Mémoires* of Malibran – notoriously unreliable, relentlessly hagiographic, and liberally plagiarized – even saw fit to close its two volumes with a tribute to her versatility in the "two styles":

There can scarce be a finer contrast than exists in the music of Bellini and Beethoven. The mind of Malibran could feel the influence and appreciate the excellence of both, and her impressions of the graceful Italian and the profound German she was enabled, by the exercise of her genius, to convey to her hearers. The thunders of applause and enthusiastic encores with which they rewarded its exercise, evinced the completeness with which they felt its influence.²²

Contemplating the role that migrant laborers such as Malibran had in forming musical taste may, then, be a useful corrective to "two-styles" history-making, with its inevitable focus on composers and their works.

To sum up: "two styles" rhetoric was certainly a feature of 1830s London, indeed was symptomatic of a new musical world then emerging. But the question remains: what purposes can contemplation of these ancient divisions serve in today's musicological climate? The complicated issues I've sketched here also occupied Paris, Vienna, and doubtless other large European cities. For reasons not yet adequately researched, the chronology and tone of the discussion would be different in different centers, although it

is, I think, generally agreed that in some (though by no means all) respects London was in the vanguard of these developments, simply because it had the largest and most mobile audience base. Given this general context, it might then seem strange that when Carl Dahlhaus launched the modern “two styles” debate in his book *Nineteenth-Century Music*, there was (at least when it reached the English language) something of a hue and cry.²³ Famously – and there is much about this elsewhere in the present volume – Dahlhaus resurrected the “Beethoven and Rossini” slogan from Kiesewetter;²⁴ but what is interesting for my purposes is that he proceeded to gloss it in terms that, while they had little to do with its originator, found multiple echoes in 1830s London. Dahlhaus’s distinction was between the score-based “work” (owned by Beethoven) and the performance-based “event” (launched by Rossini). While some applauded the cultural generosity of Dahlhaus’s move, others saw the refurbished binary as merely a more covert brand of Germanocentricism. The hue and cry was particularly impassioned from the Italian opera expert Philip Gossett: one who had personally invested no little time and editorial energy in erecting a score-based corpus of Rossini’s “works.” As Gossett wrote: “[Dahlhaus] mistakes Rossini’s flexible approach to operatic performance as proof of the non-existence of ‘authentic’ texts, failing to appreciate the limits within which Rossini normally allowed variations.”²⁵ Given the dismissive attitudes to Rossini that could still circulate in musicological circles when this review appeared (in the late 1980s), such laments are entirely understandable, even if it is clear that as a “defense” of Rossini they had the effect of celebrating his absorption into the Beethoven camp – if you will, of declaring that camp to be the only one in town. What is most interesting, however, is that the line of argument espoused an attitude gaining decisive momentum back in 1830s London, when the status of the “score-based” work was beginning to form, and was the subject of lively polemic.

As we might expect, the topic emerged from and merged with some of my earlier binaries. In 1837, for example, the journalist and composer Egerton Webbe offered readers of *The Musical World* a long disquisition about music, during which he touched on the evident inferiority of performance to composition. His reasoning is interesting. He admitted first that “Performance, being the practical issue of composition, may seem to divide claims with the latter”; but he then went on to refute this conclusion on the grounds that:

A written composition is capable of affording great delight to him who peruses it only with his eyes, and thus accomplishes in fact no small proportion of its intention, independently of performance.²⁶

As observed a moment ago, this business of the *musical score* and its importance was frequently mentioned in the press of the time, often explicitly draped around the old German vs. Italian divide. For example, a critic at one of the (relatively rare) Mozart opera performances at the King’s Theatre (it was *Don Giovanni*) noticed:

several “scores” of the opera in the house – a sure sign of there being a composition worth listening to in the detail. Who would ever expect to see a musician or young student poring over the “partitura” of one of the Pacini or Donizetti school? Even if such a thing were ever published.²⁷

It’s important to emphasize that this critic was entirely accurate in his last assertion. Orchestral scores of contemporary Italian operas were certainly *not* published during this period, nor – and this is significant – were they used during performances, which typically relied on an annotated first violin part for the leader of the orchestra. To put this in a different way, orchestral scores of Italian operas were not then available as objects of aesthetic contemplation.²⁸ When it came to the “classics,” though, those of elevated taste were now prone to insist that an orchestral score was essential to musical understanding: one critic refused to pass judgment on Mendelssohn’s oratorio *St. Paul* before he had undertaken “a perfect and repeated study of the score. Such a judgment must necessarily be partial! It may be injurious, and it cannot be of any advantage, though it sound ever so well.”²⁹

There were several key agents in this pioneering, score-based economy. One was that newly emerging figure, the orchestral conductor. His task was recognized partly as the prosaic one of holding the orchestra together in increasingly complex works; and partly of course he had the more ancient task of keeping time. Of growing importance, though, was a new skill: his knowledge of the composer’s score and thus intention, and his ability to communicate this knowledge to both performers and audience. He was, in this sense, a surrogate for the all-conquering composer, cementing the new, steeper hierarchy between creator and performer. As one enthusiastic critic put it:

The mere practical man acknowledged in the artist – the composer – a superior power, to which he paid willing and grateful homage. He felt himself relieved from a load of responsibility, and looked up with confidence and esteem to one, who by the wave of his baton, the expression of his countenance, or the glance of an eye, indicated his wishes, or communicated his approval.³⁰

And if this smacks strongly of Victorian patriarchy then the resonance is startlingly confirmed, and given a Foucauldian twist, by a later passage in

the same article. When the maestro is at his most commanding, “no pert or mutinous expressions escape from the members of the orchestra, who feel their relative position towards a Conductor, whose knowledge is power.”³¹

A second beneficiary of this new concern with scores was, of course, the publisher (and we should bear in mind that music publishers typically had a stake in musical journals, which were becoming crucial circulators of a new discourse about music). Several of them quickly saw that the new authority scores might claim could be commercially exploited, as can be seen from the flurry of “authentic” editions that were hitting the market. Ignaz Moscheles’s new edition of Beethoven’s First Piano Concerto was praised because “Mr. Moscheles has stamped a value on the work by his careful and judicious superintendence . . . The whole publication is essentially valuable.”³² Another review praised in extravagant terms Cipriani Potter’s “new and correct” edition of Mozart’s piano works, deploying a rhetoric still encountered today among the more incautious proselytizers about critical editions: “It is indeed gratifying to find such masters as . . . Potter . . . exerting their experience . . . in promoting the laudable design of effecting a more general circulation of the works of the great masters, purified from the numerous errors that had so long defaced those monuments of genius.”³³

One last agent of the score-based economy brings us still nearer home. In November 1836, the composer and lecturer Charles Purday wrote a letter to *The Musical World*, pointing out the “inattention observable in [the] conduct” of audiences at certain instrumental concerts. His remedy was a novel one (if, given his profession, not entirely disinterested): it was to “render musical performances as intellectual as they are sensual.” This would be achieved if a “prologue . . . should preface every performance of the works of the great masters, giving brief and pithy analysis of the composition to be performed.”³⁴ As least so far as I know, this revolution did not come about; but there is no doubt that what we might call score-based exegesis was also on the rise. The Gresham College lectures in music, which had been a London institution since the sixteenth century, took a decisive new turn in 1838. Instead of narrow technical matters directed towards budding composers, the Gresham Professor of the day decided that “the real benefit of music lectures consists in the extension and enlightenment of the musical public – and these purposes will be always answered, when a conscientious musician, earnest in the cause which he advocates, endeavors to influence the thoughts and feelings of his audience in behalf of that which is really good, by setting before them, in as complete a state as possible, a series of choice compositions.”³⁵ Professors of music were on the march; and they

armed themselves with a potent new scripture engraved with musical notation.

At the start of this chapter I described London in the 1830s as poised between thoughts of the new and thoughts of the old; if you will, in a crisis of confidence over the modern. But what haunts *me*, looking back at this past, are the multiple ways in which the preoccupations of “progressive” concert-goers of the 1830s seem, after nearly 200 years of then-unimaginable technological change, still to be our own. There is, though, an important difference. What they were fighting to acquire, we seem to find ourselves fighting to maintain: a tradition of silent, attentive listening; a canon of musical works from the past, endlessly repeated for humanity’s edification; a fetishization of musical scores as projections of a composer’s authority; a belief that “analysis” of these scores will enhance understanding; and so on and on. It hardly needs saying that another striking similarity between their musical world and ours is the pervading cultural pessimism that these attitudes seem inevitably to engender – the fear that any new music will be depressingly inferior to “the classics.”

Of course, there is one central difference. In 1830s London the Other standing in the way of these developments took the form of Italian opera, with what contemporaries regarded as its “event-based” rather than “score-based” economy. Nowadays that nexus of opposition has all but disappeared: for the simple reason that the economy of Italian opera has been almost entirely absorbed by its former antithesis. As mentioned above, the complaints *après* Dahlhaus’s reinvention of the “Beethoven vs. Rossini” binary were about his failure to understand that Rossini was indeed “score-based” and (thus) indeed worthy of serious attention. No-one, so far as I know, strove to argue the other way around; no-one attempted to rescue Beethoven from the prison-house of his “score-based” identity. Indeed, it is testing to imagine how such an argument might be constructed in our present musicological world. Probably it would start with a reminder that our Other to the “classical” is a type of music barely emerging in 1830s London (in promenade concerts and other mass entertainments) but now all around us. Today we call it “popular” music; score-based it is not.

But the parallels are still arresting. One conclusion to draw from them might be merely to reiterate something we thought we all knew already: that the virtual edifice we continue to call “classical” music is in many ways the product of a robust material edifice which is also still with us, indeed within which many of us live: the edifice of the nineteenth-century city.

Were I bolder and had I more space, I would want to develop that point a good deal further. Recall the passage cited earlier, about a Philharmonic Society concert:

The subscriber enters the room, and takes the seat he may have selected for a dozen years past ... the members of the orchestra have no difficulty in immediately proceeding to occupy their well known stations. The performance commences, perhaps with a symphony of Beethoven ... Move the members of the band from their accustomed places, you lose the spell, and destroy the unique character of the performance.³⁶

Or recall that description of a Beethoven performance which remarked on "the death-like stillness of that immense audience throughout the performance [which] amply testified the highly intellectual gratification they had received."³⁷ One could, if so minded, turn at this stage to any number of cultural critics who have discussed the nineteenth-century city: to Benjamin, to Foucault, to Richard Sennett, more recently to Lynda Nead. But for my purposes the best point of reference for the phenomenon of the "classical" concert lies in Michel de Certeau's celebrated distinction between the aerial view of the city (denoting mastery, control, legibility) and the anarchic, resistant, forever renegotiated view of the pedestrian. Sitting in your accustomed seat, listening to a familiar Beethoven work, under the conductor's calm control, was in this sense to take the aerial view, the call to urban order; and if, as the most dedicated were wont to do, you brought with you an "authoritative" score, one that could (perhaps bolstered by previous "analysis") furnish you with a map of the entire work, and could prevent you from being distracted by the performers and their all-too-human gestures, then so much the better.³⁸ A potentially unpredictable, "pedestrian" event such as musical performance could, by these means, become almost entirely aerial, almost entirely legible.³⁹ Small wonder, in this context, that as the city became increasingly ordered and controlled in the middle decades of the century (by the ordnance survey grid, by the Metropolitan Board of Works, by Bazalgette's intricate web of underground circulation), concert life, which had been novel and contested in the 1830s, became normative, its mores and modes of behavior gradually absorbing its operatic rival.

So London in the 1830s remains distant but also close. The sense of distance is in some ways comforting: reports of the pollution and noise are appalling, the stench unimaginable, the poverty harrowing even to contemplate. For some, though, there were means of escape. Henry Mayhew, that tireless chronicler of London's most unfortunate inhabitants, flew above the city in a hot air balloon:

as the intellect experiences a special delight in being able to comprehend all the minute particulars of a subject under one associate whole, and to perceive the previous confusion of the diverse details assume the form and order of a perspicuous unity; so does the eye love to see the country, or the town, which it usually knows only as a series of disjointed parts – as abstract fields, hills, rivers, parks, streets, gardens, or churches – become all combined like the coloured fragments of the kaleidoscope, into one harmonious and varied scene.⁴⁰

This beautiful description may seem to strive for a version of pastoral, but in the present context it betrays me back, back to those silent listeners busy at their Beethovenian work, trying to grasp the form and order of a perspicuous unity. Perhaps there's always that sense in which the past haunts the present. We who deal in "classical" music should know all about this. It is our legacy from the urban past, amongst whose material and non-material traces we continue to negotiate our sometimes aerial, sometimes pedestrian paths.

Notes

- 1 Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City" in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91–110.
- 2 Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 8.
- 3 Letter to Clara Maffei dated June 9, 1847. *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio (Milan: Commissione esecutiva per le onoranze a Giuseppe Verdi, 1913), 457. Verdi's companion Emanuele Muzio was still more graphic, writing of "this continual fog that taints and blackens the face and burns the eyes"; letter to Antonio Barezzi dated June 29, 1847, *Giuseppe Verdi nelle lettere di Emanuele Muzio ad Antonio Barezzi*, ed. Luigi Agostino Garibaldi (Milan: Treves, 1931), 332.
- 4 *The Musical World* (henceforth *MW*) (May 17, 1838), 47. As in almost all subsequent quotations, this contribution to the journal is unsigned.
- 5 *The Musical World* started life in 1836 as the "house journal" of the music publisher Novello, and went through a number of editorial transformations before being taken over by J. W. Davison in 1843. In the early years, it strove for extensive coverage, with a wide variety of musical events and other phenomena discussed, both at home and abroad. However, there is no doubt that its attitude was in general suspicious of contemporary Italian opera and welcoming of German instrumental music. In the first of these attitudes it was typical of the British musical press of the period, although each publication had its own biases. For a general background to musical journalism at this time, see Leanne Langley, "The Musical Press in Nineteenth-Century England," *Notes*, 46/2 (March 1990),

- 583–592; for more detailed information, see the same author's "The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. dissertation: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1983); for more about Novello and the early years of *The Musical World*, see Victoria L. Cooper, *The House of Novello: Practice and Policy of a Victorian Music Publisher, 1829–1866* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), esp. 138–145.
- 6 *MW* (April 26, 1838), 273 (italics in the original).
 - 7 For the most acute discussion of the situation in Paris, see Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. 210–256.
 - 8 George Hogarth, *Musical History, Biography, and Criticism*, vol. II (London, 1838), 215.
 - 9 Ella's *Musical Sketches* were not published until 1869, but excerpts appeared as early as 1836–1838. This quotation, from an article entitled "Music in Paris in 1837," comes from *MW* (January 12, 1838), 26. For further information about Ella, see Christina Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture: John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007).
 - 10 *MW* (March 25, 1836), 27.
 - 11 It is in this sense no accident that the bulk of my quotations come from *The Musical World*, which explicitly styled itself as the mouthpiece of this newly confident audience. However, equally dismissive comments – albeit with variations – could come from many other prominent journals and newspapers.
 - 12 The classic English-language account remains William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848*, 2nd edn. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). Weber's preface to this volume offers a lengthy account of other recent work in the field.
 - 13 *MW* (March 18, 1836), 4; this was the inaugural issue of *MW*, and thus one in which polemic could be expected.
 - 14 *MW* (June 30, 1837), 46.
 - 15 *MW* (March 3, 1837), 168.
 - 16 *MW* (June 21, 1838), 125.
 - 17 *MW* (January 12, 1838), 18.
 - 18 This point is explored in great detail in Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London 1780–1880* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007), esp. 227–264.
 - 19 *MW* (February 3, 1837), 109.
 - 20 *MW* (March 22, 1838), 201–202.
 - 21 Hall-Witt's *Fashionable Acts* cites many examples; see esp. 232–234. Davison was particularly vociferous in this matter, his rhetoric only increasing with time. In 1851, outraged by the vocal act a soprano was performing in *Fidelio*, he commented: "It is one thing to sing an Italian *aria*, another to execute one of the pieces in *Fidelio*. It is one thing to give the music of Beethoven in its integrity, another to alter it in such a manner as to bring it within the range of mediocre capabilities"; Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 234.
 - 22 *Memoirs of Maria Malibran, by the Countess of Merlin, and Other Intimate Friends*, vol. II (London: Henry Colburn, 1840), 266.
 - 23 Dahlhaus, *NCM*, esp. 8–15. The matter goes unmentioned in Douglas Johnson's review of the original German edition (1980), which appeared in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 36/3 (1983), 532–543.
 - 24 Kiesewetter, *Geschichte*.
 - 25 Philip Gossett, "Carl Dahlhaus and the 'Ideal-Type,'" *19th-Century Music*, 13/1 (1989), 55–56. For further critiques along the same lines, see the same author's review of *NCM*: "Up from Beethoven," *New York Review of Books*, 36/16 (October 28, 1989).
 - 26 *MW* (August 4, 1837), 113.
 - 27 *MW* (June 24, 1836), 22.
 - 28 Vocal scores were of course in circulation; but these fall into a different category, and were certainly regarded more as "arrangements," "recipes for performance" indeed, than as conduits to the composer's thoughts.
 - 29 *MW* (May 19, 1837), 152. For some general considerations of the emergence of the "study score" in various European cities in the early years of the nineteenth century, and of their close association with the emerging "classics," see Cecil Hopkinson, "The Earliest Miniature Scores," *The Music Review*, 33 (1972), 138–144; Rita Benton, "Pleyel's *Bibliothèque musicale*: The Earliest Miniature Scores," *The Music Review*, 36 (1975), 1–4; and Hans Lenneberg, "Revising the History of the Miniature Score," *Notes*, 45/2 (1988), 258–261.
 - 30 *MW* (June 14, 1838), 110.
 - 31 *MW* (June 14, 1838), 112. Such hymns to baton-wielding power were very common, London critics realizing that they were behind continental practice in this respect. In 1832 the critic of the *Athenaeum* pitched in concerning the need for an operatic conductor. He had heard that a virtuoso violinist "is in treaty with Mr. Mason as leader of the German opera; we hope, however, that it is not true, and that we may see a *conducteur* with a score before him, a small baton in his hand, and every performer, without distinction, subservient to one general law. It is probable that we may hereafter publish a letter on this subject, from a German musician, who was some time in this country; his views perfectly coincide with our own, and his suggestions are applicable to all orchestras"; *Athenaeum* (March 3, 1832), 148.
 - 32 *MW* (May 26, 1837), 168. It is also interesting to see that this new score, just like modern critical editions, declared its seriousness and worth by means of unusual typographical distinctions: "The tutti parts are all engraved in a smaller character."
 - 33 *MW* (September 16, 1836), 9.
 - 34 *MW* (December 2, 1836), 191.

- 35 *MW* (November 29, 1838), 190. It is intriguing to learn that this same Gresham Professor, Edward Taylor, had shortly before written to *The Musical World* concerning a new history of music he had just read, a volume by one R. G. Kiesewetter. Unfortunately, he mentioned nothing about the epoch of Beethoven and Rossini; his sole concern was the outrageous fact that no English composer apart from Tallis defined even the smallest epoch; *MW* (November 22, 1838), 180.
- 36 *MW* (January 12, 1838), 18.
- 37 *MW* (February 3, 1837), 109.
- 38 Such attentive score reading, mentioned earlier in the context of *Don Giovanni*, did indeed frequently occur, particularly it seems at chamber music programs of the “classics.” A little later in the century, Berlioz remarked on the practice at a Beethoven Quartet Society concert, suggesting by his tone that it was not usual in Paris: “You see these English people following on little miniature scores, printed in London for the purpose, the unpredictable flight of the master’s thought.” *Méchant* as ever, though, he pronounced himself skeptical of their musical abilities: “when looking over the shoulder of one of them, I discovered that his eyes were glued to page four though the players were already at page six.” Hector Berlioz, *Evenings with the Orchestra*, trans. and ed. Jacques Barzun (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 244.
- 39 The most influential musical analyst of the twentieth century serves my purpose almost uncannily well. As Heinrich Schenker instructed his readers in *Der freie Satz*, “every [musical] relationship represents a path which is as real as any we ‘traverse’ with our feet”; Schenker, *Free Composition (Der freie Satz)*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York: Universal, 1979), 6.
- 40 Henry Mayhew and John Binny, “A Balloon View of London” in Mayhew and Binny, *The Criminal Prisons of London and Scenes of Prison Life* (London, 1862); quoted in Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 79.

6 | Looking north: Carlo Soliva and the two styles south of the Alps

MARTIN DEASY

In February 1817, the Milanese impresario Angelo Petracchi, alarmed at the possibility that Rossini might renege on a long-standing agreement, urged the composer not to delay his planned trip to Milan to begin work on a new opera for La Scala. Hoping to goad him into action, Petracchi sketched in a letter the current state of Milanese musical life, playing on Rossini’s amour-propre as well as his competitive streak. Prompt – even early – arrival would be in the composer’s interests, Petracchi wrote,

granted, not *because of any need* [for glory] on your own part (since your reputation is still well respected here), but because this public, which you know well, is becoming more difficult by the day, and is presently enthused by the works of Soliva and Winter; to the extent that everyone believes you capable of emulating them (and I first among them), the task and the incentive become greater for you, and the time allotted – scarcely amounting to two months – is certainly not overlong.¹

Petracchi’s letter paints a picture strikingly at odds with traditional narratives of Italian musical life in the mid-teens, more often couched in terms of the unstoppable momentum of a rising Rossini. In fact, it is testament to a substantial change in Milanese musical taste resulting indirectly from the international political upheavals of 1814–1815. With the reassertion of Austrian control over the city in 1814² came an influx onto its stages of influential German and Austrian musical works: Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* (1814), *Don Giovanni* (1814, 1816), *Die Zauberflöte* (1816), and *La clemenza di Tito* (1817, 1819), together with a glut of operas by other German composers, prominently Peter Winter’s *Maometto* (1816) and Weigl’s *La famiglia svizzera* (1816).³ The effect on Milanese musical taste was marked. A correspondent in the *Wiener allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reported chauvinistically that “[t]he Milanese public is at present accustomed to German music, and often becomes dissatisfied [*ungeduldig*] at the contemporary empty Italian music.”⁴ The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in turn observed that “on account of the frequently given operas of German composers, taste here has changed completely.”⁵ Writing a few years later, in 1819, an Italian commentator noted that “since [German composers] have revealed to us the extent of the treasures that musical science possesses, even