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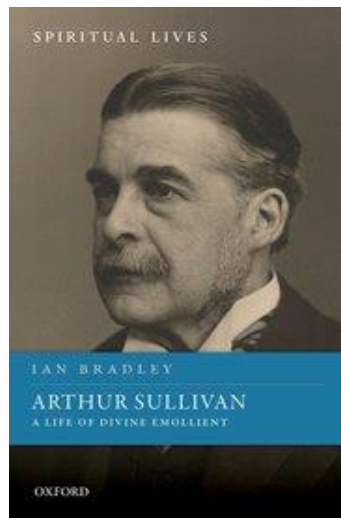
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Thornton Miller, Editor

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Ian Bradley, *Arthur Sullivan: A Life of Divine Emollient*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 240 pages. ISBN 9780198863267 (hardcover).



Ian Bradley's new biography of Arthur Sullivan is remarkable for the number of fresh perspectives it condenses into such a short frame. The slim volume passes briskly through the whole of Sullivan's life, with the elements of Christian faith and practise consistently and fairly highlighted. Most of it is existing knowledge, though Bradley has uncovered a few previously-overlooked letters or diary entries that play their part in his thesis. By the end, it is hard not to agree with the central argument that Sullivan's religious beliefs have been unfairly downplayed or ignored. From training in the Chapel Royal (pp.26–39) to his work as a church organist (pp.53–58) to a spell as a hymn composer (pp.103–09), all interspersed with the completion of several major sacred oratorios, there seems to be real truth in the feeling that many had at his death of the value of his religious output (pp.189–93). The occasional sketches of Sullivan's conducting career (starting pp.123–24) are especially welcome, as this aspect of a historical composer's professional activity is so frequently

overlooked. Bradley makes a convincing case that Sullivan's choral conducting, especially at the Leeds Festival, demonstrated his devotion to this form of music-making even during periods when he was not actively engaged in composing sacred works (or struggling to do so, in the case of some later commissions). Only the section on Freemasonry feels underdeveloped, occupying only a single side of prose (pp.74–75) and the odd passing reference. Bradley may well be correct that this association meant more to Sullivan than previous scholars have acknowledged, but the full evidence of it is not to be found here.

Bradley's approach is an excellent fit with Oxford University Press's "Spiritual Lives" series, edited by Timothy Larsen, seeking as it does to "recast important figures in fresh and thought-provoking ways."¹ The series presents a timely challenge to the common twentieth-century

¹ Timothy Larsen, "Spiritual Lives" series editorial statement, *Oxford University Press*, last accessed 21 December 2023, <https://global.oup.com/academic/content/series/s/spiritual-lives-spl/?cc=gb&lang=en&>

approach to history, which generally favored implicitly secularizing narratives, in line with wider societal concerns. Larsen is one of a number of scholars who have started to recognize the impoverished perspective this gives us for historical figures, and musicology has seen its share of renewed attention to spiritual concerns in the last twenty years (as just one example among many, see Susan Cooper's recent exploration of the orthodox Christian thought in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, often assumed to be a more humanist than Christian work).²

Provocations, though, can lead to reconsiderations in directions that their authors might not have intended. Bradley's account leaves little doubt of Sullivan's fundamental faith, but as a result he raises new questions about how Sullivan might have compared with his contemporaries. Indeed, Bradley directly invokes the comparative mode in his conclusion, stating that the roughly 25 percent portion of his output devoted to sacred music is

... a much lower proportion than for his Tudor heroes, Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, for whom the comparable figures are respectively 90 and 70 per cent, but it is very similar to what might be called the 'sacred score' of Henry Purcell (around 25 per cent of whose output was music for worship) and rather more than that of George Frederick Handel (roughly 18 per cent). Yet we do not hear of either of them being criticized for dissipating their talents and being seduced by the lure of the theatre and concert hall (p.202).

It is hard to argue with the figures in themselves, but these are strange (not to say strained) comparisons. It would surely have been more meaningful to set Sullivan alongside his contemporaries rather than his distant predecessors, but the results might undermine Bradley's thesis. How would Sullivan's "sacred score" stand up when put next to his teacher Sir John Goss, his colleague Sir John Stainer, or against any number of now less-remembered composers from the time who specialized in church music? Paradoxically, these names would presumably be ineligible for inclusion in the "Spiritual Lives" series on account of Larsen's stated focus on those "whose eminence is not primarily based on a specifically religious contribution." As a result, we could potentially be left with a rather warped sense of what it might mean to be "spiritual." Sullivan's contemporary defenders may well have countered accusations of shallowness from the critics by pointing to the religious music (Bradley's approach of course has its precursors); but I wonder if they would have cited Sullivan first and foremost if the task had been reversed and they had been asked to make a list of composers famed for their faith and religious output.

All this is assuming that we are only addressing the music; were we to turn to personal ethics, it seems even less likely that anyone familiar with Sullivan's distinctly unchristian conduct in his relationships with women or love of the gambling table would cite him as one of the more faithful of the age. It is to Bradley's credit that he cites these aspects of Sullivan's character at regular intervals in the narrative, making no attempt to whitewash his protagonist. He instead focuses on what he can deduce about Sullivan's core faith from letters, diaries, professional choices, and accounts by close contemporaries. The picture that emerges is of a simple, straightforward, almost innocent faith in the truth of God and an afterlife to come, and Bradley puts this image to effective work in understanding the emotional qualities of Sullivan's religious output. Nonetheless, this is (by design) a compressed and partisan account of Sullivan's life, and some of the darker sides of Sullivan's personality are liable to be discussed more in passing,

² Susan Cooper, "Beethoven's Faith and Beliefs in the Context of His Age: Some Unexplored Avenues and Reassessments, with Special Reference to Sailer," in Barry Cooper and Matthew Pilcher, eds., *Manchester Beethoven Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), 244–78.



especially in the final chapters. Bradley cites approvingly a *Daily Telegraph* report from Sullivan's funeral in 1900 that presents the two sides of the composer's character as being more aligned than one might imagine (pp.189–90), and it is easy to understand the appeal of a narrative that sees Sullivan's life and music reconciling the sacred and the earthly into a harmonious unity. In theory, Bradley's work has set in place much of the groundwork necessary to underpin that perspective (if one considers such a reconciliation to be possible or even desirable); but with his own narrative so firmly focused on the religious side, it is clear that Bradley was not intending to offer this sort of balanced appraisal himself.

For all that Bradley's focus on Sullivan spiritual life and religious output is refreshing, in the end he retains a larger framing device with a venerable pedigree for Sullivan scholarship, namely the "rescue" biography. The scholars who engaged seriously with Sullivan over the twentieth century, among whose number Bradley should be counted, clearly felt that his standing was lower than it ought to be, and their work used a variety of strategies to try and improve his reputation. Bradley takes a different approach here from his predecessors and contemporaries insofar as he turns his attention to the religious music instead of (as was more often the case) trying to make the Savoy Operas seem in some sense "worthier," but the underlying aim is the same. Viewed in this light, the focus on religious music seems an odd choice. Is it really Sullivan's religious music that will "rescue" his reputation in the present day? Reverend Bradley may well be impressed by the devotion and simple, straightforward faith he finds in Sullivan's character and music, and perhaps Christian communities worldwide will find much to admire in music that may be unfamiliar (such as the oratorios), or indeed may be very familiar without full awareness of the authorship (such as the hymn tunes). However, I find it hard to believe that the public in the broadest sense would agree. Instead, I feel that we should be asking whether a composer whose music has demonstrably survived far better than that of many of his contemporaries is really in need of "rescue." Why do we still cite the critiques of the Fuller Maitlands and Stanfords of the nineteenth century when it is quite clear whose work has the greater "popularity score" (to adapt Bradley's formulation) in the present day?

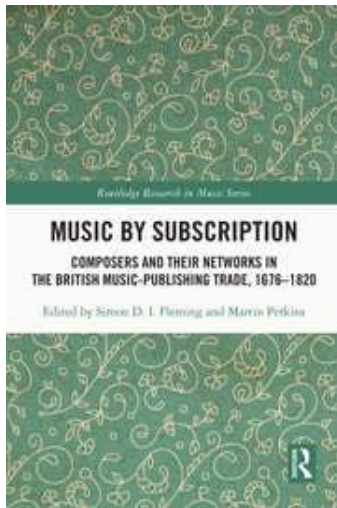
Regardless of the framing, the detail and insight in Bradley's biography make it essential reading from a scholarly perspective. The question of whether his work will achieve its larger aims regarding Sullivan's reputation is more difficult to answer. In the end, only time will tell how future generations will view Sullivan's "sacred score."

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Simon D. I. Fleming and Martin Perkins, eds. *Music by Subscription: Composers and Their Networks in the British Music Publishing Trade, 1776–1820*. Abingdon: Routledge. 270 pages. ISBN 9780367748500 (hardcover), 9780367756833 (paperback), 9781003163558 (Ebook).

Subscription lists have been an invaluable document for eighteenth-century British music studies for decades. Prior to publication of this collected work, no comprehensive study had endeavored to compile "copies of all the lists attached to every music related publication issue in Britain and Ireland up to and including the year 1820" (p.1). Creator-editors Simon D. I. Fleming and Martin Perkins curated what they named the *Dataset of Subscribers*, an assemblage of all names that appear on 760 subscription lists. The recently published collected work is the first concerted effort to assess and analyze the *Dataset*, and in so doing, responds to previous calls for broad study of the "patterns, trends, and associations [between subscription





lists] that had, hitherto, not been seen before” (p.11). Across twelve chapters, an international team of musicologists produced thorough, systematic representations of these patterns and revealed compelling insights into the economics, ethics, and impact of patronage in British musical life. This scholarly effort, and the resulting measure of depth in the collected work, is its most valuable asset to its intended readership.

Chapters in this collection are divided into sections according to the economic orientation of each author’s research question on either side of a commercial transaction: production and consumption. Within each section, chapters are further organized in a semi-chronological and topical manner, beginning with the earliest extant subscription list from 1676 through 1820. Chapters are organized with similar efficiency and clear writing, followed by copious, mineable footnotes and bibliography. This structure allows readers

to discover the essential role of subscription lists in connecting not only composers and patrons, but perhaps more importantly, the placement of individuals and institutions into evolving political, social, and economic musical networks.

Emphasis on the acute detail of case studies allows scholars to draw connections from individual composers and patrons to broader religious, intellectual, and social histories. In Section 1, Stephanie Carter’s opening study of Thomas Mace’s 1676 *Musick’s Monument* provides a documented starting point for subscription practices and offers insight into the composer’s otherwise unknown professional network and activities. Michael Kassler’s case study of Cecilia Maria Barthélemon’s *Three Sonatas*, Op. 1 similarly unearths a network between families of musicians and patrons across classes, highlighting that these networks can be a key component of professional success for performers and composers. Two chapters by editor Simon Fleming present additional case studies with conclusions that synthesize themes in the first half of the collection. The first chapter relies on subscription lists to demonstrate the increasing involvement of female patrons across eighteenth-century Edinburgh. The second of these chapters asserts the practicality of the subscription method for avocational musicians through studies of vicar composers, even accounting for their above-average quantity of subscribers due to their social position in their respective communities.

Chapters in Section 2 examine the fascinating habits and tastes of subscribers as consumers, bringing to life British musical networks with individual patron identities, daily musical activities, and the inner workings of music society clubs. Studies by Roz Southey and editor Martin Perkins each corroborate subscription list data with other household records, including ledgers from Mary and George Bowes of Gibside (p.114) and diaries of Lady Elizabeth Bridgeman (p.131), to discover intimate details of daily musical life. These studies additionally demonstrate the extent of influence of particular patrons within social-musical networks. Editors Fleming’s and Perkins’s “big data study” of British music societies offers an institutional counterpoint by examining the genre-crossing subscription practices of music societies, both for performance and the curation of members’ lending libraries. Karen McAulay’s study of Scottish dance music collections connects subscription lists with repertory, highlighting not only the popularity of certain tunes and the eclectic tastes of subscribers, but also regional—and therefore political—differences in repertory across collections between metropolitan and highland communities. David Hunter then critically examines the thorny ethics of music patronage sourced by wealth accumulated from the transatlantic slave trade. Hunter raises an essential issue for contemporary musicology: “Music-making is possible today in part, and was so in previous



centuries, thanks to ill-gotten gains. By calling to account yesterday's perpetrators of one of humankind's worst activities, we also acknowledge the continuing existence of the problems caused by racism" (p.212). Fleming's concluding chapter contextualizes the role of foreign composers in British musical life and their use of the subscription method as one of several historical revenue streams. This chapter further interrogates prejudices surrounding Britain as "The Land Without Music" (p.13).

The commitment of the creator-editors and contributors to systematic documentation in their research process and presentation—including 23 tables and 16 illustrations—offers replicability to scholars immersed in British musicology. Their reframing of existing narratives in light of subscription data broadens the potential audience for this collection to a wide range of readers interested in economic, political, social, and ethical dimensions of musical networks. But to those uninitiated to histories of seventeenth- through nineteenth-century British life, not to mention archival research methods, this same meticulous attention to detail comes at the expense of historical context. Although typical of academic collected works, many contributors presumed reader knowledge about the intricacies of contemporaneous politics and social practices—both domestically and on the continent—not to mention an understanding of the origins of subscriptions as commercial practice and an ability to perceive existing gaps in musicological literature. This efficiency narrows the likely readership of this collection: on the one hand, selections from this work might be challenging in even a graduate-level classroom; on the other, this same brevity is likely to be appreciated by seasoned scholars eager to incorporate the *Dataset* into their own pursuits.

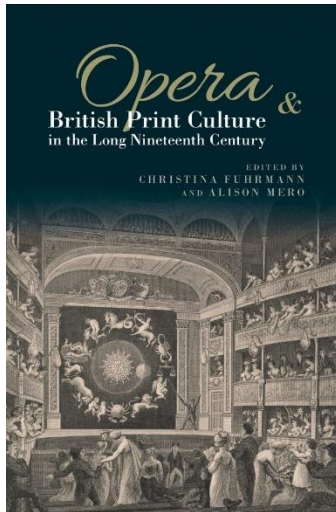
For these specialists and wider audiences alike, the value of this collection is in the *Dataset* itself and the historical narratives that contributors reveal in each chapter. Musical networks are enlivened not simply by names of patrons, but their daily activities and the reach of their influence on composers, clubs, and one another. The *Dataset* sheds light on the identities of listeners and patrons, the complexities of evolving gender norms among patrons and composers, and the politics of audience communities through displays of wealth. The resultant narratives in this collection give vitality to seventeenth- through nineteenth-century music history that will undoubtedly inspire future research. Through methodical study of historical records, this collection proves perennial the music industry advice to focus on building relationships rather than simply making sales.

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Christina Fuhmann and Alison Mero, eds. *Opera and British Print Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2023. 392 pages. ISBN 9781638040422 (hardcover).

The idea for this edited volume of essays on opera and British print culture was sparked by a workshop at King's College London, and the structure retains the spirit of a symposium. An introduction by the editors is followed by five panel-like sections of two or three chapters each, with an afterword by Leanne Langley, surveying the emergence of print culture studies from an array of scholarly traditions to an ever-expanding field in its own right.





The scope of the book is hugely ambitious, not simply because of its time frame (the long nineteenth century), but also because of the breadth of sources it embraces as examples of print culture. These include periodicals and newspapers, playbills and advertisements, libretti and word books, scores, novels, poems, and opera as represented in fiction. This wide-ranging approach is a reflection of just how far the study of print culture has expanded in recent years, both within musicology and in other disciplines. “Ephemera” is thankfully never mentioned here; this volume neither bundles together disparate print materials nor ranks them with the traditional sources of reception history at the top, but rather it is the volume’s remarkably open approach to what each source might offer the historian that is at the core of its interdisciplinarity. Each chapter merits far more discussion than I have space to offer here.

In the first section on “The Interdependence of Print and Opera,” Peter Horton’s chapter is a thoughtful evaluation of William Hawes, a musician whose overlapping activities as a composer, arranger, music director, and publisher played a pivotal role in London’s “Weber-mania.” A critical overview of Hawes’s early publishing and arranging activities highlights the weak copyright regulations of the early nineteenth century, while the heart of Horton’s study is an extraordinary account of Hawes’s arrangement and performance of Weber’s *Der Freischütz* for the English Opera House, and the subsequent publication process of the score. In the second chapter, Christina Fuhrmann examines the role of print culture in the creation and reception of the *Don Juan* burlesques popular in London following the British premiere of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. The wide scope of Fuhrmann’s study, from playbills and advertisements, word books, libretti, and surviving scores, reveals the multiple sources and influences for these works, from reworkings of Mozart’s music and popular songs to novellas, poems, other stage works, and contemporary political events.

Like Horton’s study, Jennifer Hall-Witt and Matildie Wium focus on the working lives of individuals in the second section, “Shaping a Public Persona.” Hall-Witt’s subject is the managerial memoir as historical document; John Ebers’s *Seven Years of the King’s Theatre* (1828), widely reviewed in the press following publication. Rather than glean from the memoir what it might tell us about the opera industry of the day, Hall-Witt’s approach is a fascinating exploration of the production of the memoir itself, especially the complex question of authorship, centering on William Harrison Ainsworth, Eber’s son-in-law and publisher, and his friend John Aston. Hall-Witt illuminates the people and processes behind the single name on the cover, revealing the creation of a book designed to maximise marketability and repair the public reputation of the bankrupt Ebers. Reputations and mythmaking of another kind are the focus of Wium’s study of media reactions to the vocal troubles of contralto Mary Shaw in the early 1840s. Wium explores how an image of English femininity was created around Shaw, later influencing the public framing of her vocal loss following family illness and bereavement. Having been largely London-based up to this point in the book, the three essays of the third section, “Shaping National Identity,” make a welcome move to Scotland and Ireland. Tensions in the dynamic between music-making in London and elsewhere are apparent throughout Jennifer Oates’s essay on opera and print culture in Edinburgh during a time of rapid expansion in the city’s opera culture and periodical press. Oates first explores the repertory of touring companies in the mid-1890s, especially works by British composers; the print culture surrounding the Edinburgh premiere of MacCunn’s *Jeanie Deans* (1894) is an illuminating case study. The latter part of her essay is a striking account of press coverage of The Denhof Opera Company’s massively ambitious 1913–1914 touring season, its financial collapse, and revival.



Timothy Love's essay on Ireland presents opera as a battlefield for issues of national identity, a conflict shaped by print culture. He examines the religious, social, ideological, and economic divides between the city-based "English" composers represented by Field, Balfe, and Wallace, and the traditional music of the rural population. Against the backdrop of a heavily London-influenced opera culture, Love's study of John O'Keefe stands out for its nuanced exploration of O'Keefe's presentation of national elements in his operas. Following on chronologically from Love's study, Maria McHale's chapter further explores the growth of Irish revivalism at the *fin de siècle* and its impact on Irish opera culture, including the press discourse surrounding two Irish-language operas, *Muirgheis* (1903) and *Eithne* (1909).

Michelle Meinhart's chapter in "Shaping Taste," the fourth section of the book, examines the intertwining debates surrounding the role of women, social class, philanthropy, nationalism, and the declining discussion of opera in women's high society magazines of the late Victorian and Edwardian period. After discussing the magazines and their readership, Meinhart presents a nuanced exploration of the interconnectedness of British opera culture and social class, positioning the magazines' depictions of opera as a social (rather than musical) event against a backdrop of changing audiences and musical practices. Moving away from the opera house, Charles Edward McGuire's essay explores press responses to Wagner performances at British musical festivals, focusing on discussions of the merits or otherwise of concert performances of stage works. McGuire's illuminating study not only positions British music festivals within wider Wagner discourse, it presents a fascinating account of the debates surrounding the controversial decision of some festivals to perform extracts from *Parsifal* in a cathedral setting.

British responses to Wagner are also the subject of Julia Grella O'Connell's opening chapter in the final section, "Operatic Literature, Literary Opera," from the early emergence of Wagnerism in the British music press, to its absorption into wider British intellectual and cultural life in the 1880s. The study examines the diversity of intellectual thought spurred by Wagner's art and philosophy in Britain, perhaps the most complex of which is the intertwining of Wagnerism with Catholicism. O'Connell's study of George Moore's novels *Evelyn Innes* (1898) and *Sister Teresa* (1901) is a fascinating analysis of the intersection in literary form of established forms of faith with the quasi-religion surrounding Wagner's aesthetics.

In his absorbing essay on early nineteenth-century opera reception by Cockneys and Protestant dissenters, James Grande frames discussions of opera not through ideas of national character or class politics, but religious politics. Grande's exploration of Cockney writers' responses to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and beliefs surrounding religious song in dissenter communities, contextualizes the aversion of some writers to opera, but also—and most intriguingly—some far more receptive responses to individual performers. The final essay by Phyllis Weliver positions *Oliver Twist* within *Bentley's Miscellany*, the magazine in which it was first serialized between 1837 and 1839. Exploring the influence of the musical aspects of non-patent theatre on the novel, Weliver makes a compelling argument for the novel as "performative, enacted literature," first by explaining the musical framing of Dickens's prose in each issue by poems and songs which responded to the themes of the novel, yet whose tone appears to be out of step with its serious social message, before presenting an illuminating discussion of the vocal sound world of the novel itself.

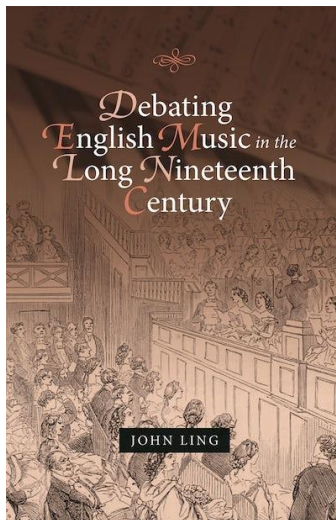
It is particularly notable that the titles of the three central sections all contain the word "shaping"—from the shaping of the information offered about music to the public, the shaping of scores by music publishers (in the form of excerpts, arrangements and variations), to the shaping of the discourse around music by writers and critics. This points to a sense of print



culture-as-process, conveyed throughout the chapters of the book, whether unfolding over a programme of performances, issues of a periodical or decades of an individual's life and career. Regarding the latter, print culture intertwines with biography, painting a deeper picture of working lives at a time in which print culture permeated every facet of artistic, creative, and literary experience. In this respect especially, Langley's afterword mirrors the content of the book; her own multifaceted career positions her at the intersection of an array of disciplines, each of which—as this excellent volume exemplifies—contributes, in her words, to a “genuine expansion of knowledge.”

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John Ling, *Debating English Music in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2021. 258 pages. ISBN 9781783276165 (hardcover), 9781800101500 (Ebook – EPDF), 9781800101517 (Ebook – EPUB).



Debating English Music (Ling casually explains his use of “English” rather than “British” as reflecting the context of the discussion) presents a chronological sequence of published critical commentaries on music and musical activities, starting in 1815 with the Britain of the post-Napoleonic wars, and ending with a rather arbitrary seeming termination in 1907. Although, as Ling points out, “one has to stop somewhere” (p.3), he resists the more obvious caesura of 1914 and the First War, which brought the Victorian-Edwardian epoch to a close. Ling presents his selection as an integrated narrative, contrasting with the thematic approach Merion Hughes followed in his earlier study of published criticism, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850–1914: Watchmen of Music* (Ashgate, 2002). There, Hughes focused his discussion on four specific titles (*The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Athenium* and *The Musical Times*) and their treatment of three composers, Arthur Sullivan (“Jumbo of the Moment”), Hubert Parry (“English

Master”), and Edward Elgar (“‘Self-Made’ Composer”). In *Debating English Music*, Ling looks at commentaries on music by both professional critics and others from across a broad range of mainly London-based periodicals. He divides his account into seven chapters: 1815–1825: an unmusical nation?; 1826–1875: hope deferred; 1876–1877: the impact of Wagner; 1888–1892: dissenting voices; 1893–1897: the expression of feeling; 1898–1902: the limits of musical expression, ethical and theoretical; and 1903–1907: the younger generation. As the briefer spans of these later chapters suggest, the British musical climate becomes more eventful as the century progresses, indicative of changes in the British musical context. How this musical environment develops is something Ling seeks to explain in the two discussion-based chapters, “Demand and supply” and “Themes and issues,” which conclude his survey.

The ping-pong of irreconcilable critical opinions so characteristic of contemporary perspectives about nineteenth-century British music is abundantly evident across Ling's rich selection of commentaries. To give some examples, taken from later in the century: “[H. F.] Frost observed [in the *Athenium* (1896)] that the public were prepared to recognise British music when it was good, as the positive reception of Sullivan, Mackenzie, Parry and others showed” (p.176); while, on the other hand, E. A. Baughan [in the *Musical Standard* (1898)] thought “the public's



coldness was justified: Stanford, Mackenzie and Parry could not be claimed as the equals of Brahms, Dvorák, Tchaikovsky or Wagner” (p.177). The *Saturday Review*'s Barclay Squire, writing in 1891, thought that “Wagner’s highly-coloured orchestration and sensuous effects appeal to intellects which are incapable of appreciating the delicate workmanship and refined expression of a Mozart or a Haydn” (p.168). Taken as a whole, readers unfamiliar with such texts may come away with the feeling that there is less of a musical debate happening in any constructive sense of the word, but rather more of a trumpeting of ideological positions and aggressive virtue-signalling redolent of today’s social media. There is also the question of how much individual “authority” some of these voices have—apart from their being published, that is—an issue that Ling does not dwell on. A recurrent theme is the idea of “artistic progress,” an umbrella phrase that could be used to mean anything, while drawing attention to its writer’s belief in their own high-minded sensibilities. Inevitably, comments about the “English Musical Renaissance” take the stage in the latter part of Ling’s discussion, though as he argues, “one of the main contentions of the present study [is] that making this a central narrative seriously distorts the account of the contemporary debate about the development of English composition” (p.209).

It is interesting to contrast the critical preoccupation over “artistic progress” against the necessarily more financially attuned perspective informing Hubert Foss’s verdict in his *Music in My Time* of 1933: “One can almost hear [Victorian] English composers saying under their breath, ‘Well, I can’t be sparkling so I’ll at least be purposeful.’ ... The newest phase of English composition has at least got over this.... Their music has at least broken down some commercial barriers: they do not disdain human amusement.” Foss was that rare thing, a successful publisher of serious contemporary British music, the person who made Oxford University Press the go-to publisher for modern British composers (with Vaughan Williams, Walton, and Constant Lambert on its books). Foss’s guiding principle was that music should be able to motivate audiences to want to listen to it. For he had, in a practical sense, learned the cautionary lesson of nineteenth-century Britain, in which audiences had become so reluctant to attend concerts with hefty doses of British music, that promoters had become averse to taking the commercial risk of presenting them. A striking example came with the 1903 announcement of a “National Festival of British Music,” but this much vaunted venture failed to get off the ground, because the money to guarantee the event could not be raised. Contrast that with the successful and royalty-supported three-day Elgar Festival held at Covent Garden in 1904. Clearly, the lesson here was that audiences would show up for British music that appealed.

Ling helpfully highlights the damaging effect on nineteenth-century musical activity caused by the British obsession with free trade. A society that so prioritised competition and competitiveness in trade and manufacture was not of a mind readily disposed to give substantial financial support to the more ephemeral art of music and its costly institutions. As the music columnist of the *London Magazine* observed in 1821: “Perhaps the grand reason why music fails to receive the same constant encouragement in that it does abroad ... is that music is *dear* in this country, and *cheap* everywhere else” (p.6). Conducting musical life on the basis of financial stringency while expecting results in abundance might be counted one of the constants of the British musical environment. Ling shows this to have undermined mid-century attempts to establish a national opera company (pp.21–22) using the argument that giving public subsidy to music would open the door to the preserving of poor works against the competition of better ones (p.38). The irony was, of course, that relatively few composers were prepared to risk everything on writing serious orchestral music; pragmatism instead led many more to concentrate on genres, such as ballads, and church and choral music, for which there was a ready and lucrative market, as the Novello sales figures demonstrate. So it was hardly surprising that in so many of Ling’s commentaries we encounter an acute sense of musical



inferiority, sometimes covered up by nationalistic bombast. And areas in which British musical enterprise could justifiably have been celebrated, particularly its strong amateur traditions of choral singing and wind or brass bands with their many offshoots, went largely ignored, together with much of the music that composers supplied for them. These were not “renaissance” compositions, as Ling says about Stainer’s *Crucifixion*, one of the most frequently performed works of its time. This question of whether works were “renaissance-worthy” in terms of seriousness and compositional quality frequently occurs, although the issue of whether or not they also possessed musical appeal seems to have concerned only a minority of commentators, such as E. A. Baughan, quoted above.

The absence of an effective musical infrastructure in Britain until the end of the century had a seriously enervating effect that is not always appreciated. Ling does not comment on the *Musical World’s* 1851 claim (p.29) that the country had “first-rate orchestras.” Yet nothing could have been further from the truth. The free trade mentality welcomed the arrival of the cheap labour of displaced European orchestral instrumentalists, while not being at all worried about the heterogeneous sound that was a consequence of the variety of different European playing traditions. It was the opposite of Paris, where the players making up the orchestra of the Concerts du Conservatoire had all been schooled at the Conservatoire. London’s first properly trained concert orchestra was August Manns’s at the Crystal Palace, whose Saturday Concerts dominated the London concert scene in the second part of the century. Not for nothing did Joachim warn Brahms against having anything performed by the Philharmonic Society’s inadequate pick-up band under Sir William Cusins, its lacklustre conductor. In terms of professional formation, it was not until the founding of the Royal College of Music in 1883 and Stanford’s orchestral class that systematic orchestral training first became a core element of the British music college curriculum. It is a weakness of this book that Ling does not give music education the serious consideration it requires. For not only did the RCM, the reformed RAM and Trinity College transform British professional music education, but the performers emerging from them helped bring about a more propitious climate for composers, showing strong advocacy for the music of their fellow composition students. It was the gradual accumulation of a critical mass of expertise and developing interest that transformed British musical life. One of the most persuasive accounts of this growing enthusiasm for music at this time, though not referred to in *Debating English Music*, is given by George Grove’s Preface to the 1879 first edition of his eponymous *Dictionary*. In it, Grove described his Dictionary as a work “intended to supply a great and long acknowledged want.” Another significant factor was the act of making music examinable, just as any other school subject, through the Trinity and the Associated Board grade exams. The effort required for these exams, and those of the professional diplomas offered by the music colleges, had the effect of substantially enhancing the music profession’s standing and respectability across society. Thus, music teaching became a viable middle-class career that also offered many women the chance of economic independence.

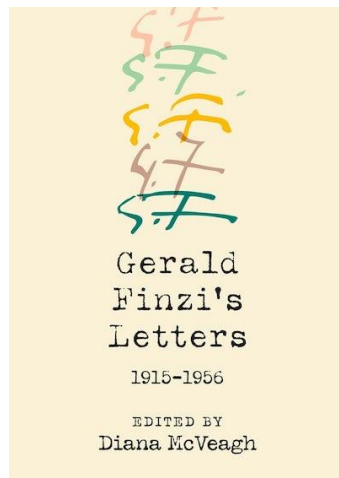
Debating English Music is a valuable contribution to nineteenth-century British music studies for bringing together a broad range of critical discussion published in newspapers and periodicals. But it is on Ling’s two concluding chapters, “Demand and supply” and “Themes and issues” that the weight of contextual explanation falls. The last is the more successful in its task of drawing these threads together, while the examination of demand and supply never convincingly explains a situation in which, as Ling describes it, “Many critics saw the commercial pressure on the provision of music as a hinderance to artistic progress, and the appearance of flourishing concert life in London as deceptive” (p.167). Much importance is placed on the Henry Wood Queen’s Hall Proms, and indeed Ling argues that “The Proms presented the surest sign of progress” (p.208). But Ling’s representation of the Proms is indicative of the underlying weakness, as I see it, of this book’s historiography. Ling refers to Leanne Langley’s account of



their early history, in which she argues that the Proms were so vital because they were a *discontinuity* or “a subversion of prevailing concert practice.” Here I must declare an interest as one of the editors of *The Proms: A New History* in which this chapter appeared. In a footnote reference, Ling remarks that Langley’s account, “draws on what may be called ‘internal’ material – memoirs, letters, programmes ... and makes only one reference to the contemporary press” (p.172, fn.49). But what Langley so vividly does, is to convey a real sense of the Proms experience and what it was about the Proms which made these concerts both innovative in their musical content, while being also so attractive to the audiences that flocked to them. Langley takes into account not only the programmes and the repertory patterns, but essential aspects of the orchestra and conductor that performed them, the audiences and the ways they were targeted (including how these concerts were publicized and marketed) and the venue (including its appearance and audience refreshments). The resulting richness of contextual detail demonstrates to the modern reader the significance of the Proms and just why this series represented such a departure from the routine of London’s established concert life. Studying the Proms in this way tells us so much more about the British musical environment, its tastes and enthusiasms than musical criticism either can, or seeks, to tell us. *Debating English Music* presents a wealth of published commentaries and viewpoints. But it is much less convincing about grounding these statements within the actual historical circumstances of musical practice across nineteenth-century Britain.

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Diana McVeagh, ed. *Gerald Finzi’s Letters, 1915–1956*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2021. 1,080 pages. ISBN 9781783275724 (hardcover), 9781805430704 (Ebook – EPDF).



One wonders how many music critics could have accurately predicted Gerald Finzi’s posthumous reputation when he died in 1956. At the time of his death, the prospects for his music looked bleak. While virtually every new work by Benjamin Britten received international and often hyperbolic praise, Finzi was often overlooked or viewed as deeply parochial. Finzi stubbornly adhered to his tonal idiom, a choice that seemed outdated and irrelevant compared to the cutting-edged post-war modernism of Peter Maxwell Davies and the rest of the “Manchester School” composers. Although he was published by Boosey and Hawkes, no prominent conductors beyond John Barbirolli and Bernard Herrmann had championed his music. His widow Joy (née Black), was an effective advocate for his music, and his friend Howard Ferguson prepared Finzi’s late works for publication, but a dark pall of neglect had fallen over Finzi’s reputation by the midcentury, and it showed no sign of lifting.

However, those who had consigned Finzi to obscurity in the late 1950s and early 1960s were wrong. Finzi’s songs, justly beloved by singers, continued to be sung in unpretentious venues, and his Anglican church music quietly but firmly entered into the choral repertory. His music—touching, well-crafted, melodically vital, and useful—survived in these venues until there was an uptick in recordings beginning in the late 1960s. His commitment to amateurs insured the performance of his music and its popularity has only widened over time. In the twenty-first century, star singers record his songs; famous clarinetists constantly perform his Concerto and



Bagatelles; and there are multiple recordings of his larger choral and orchestral scores. In Anglophone countries and beyond, Finzi has, against all odds, become a fact of musical life.

He has also been the subject of two fine biographies. One of his biographers, Diana McVeagh, has produced a capacious, carefully edited, and comprehensive volume of his correspondence entitled *Gerald Finzi's Letters: 1915 to 1956*. By including both Finzi's own letters and his correspondents' replies, McVeagh presents a panorama of British musical life during the first half of the last century. The musical life contained in these letters is not that of the international stars and royalty who flocked to Britten's posh Aldeburgh Festival, however. Instead, we get a glimpse of the quotidian but essential music-making that pervades the lives of orchestral musicians, choirs, and community orchestras such as Finzi's own Newbury Players. The letters particularly reveal interactions between Finzi and the gifted composers, such as Edmund Rubbra, Elizabeth Maconchy, and William Busch, who also created music for both unpretentious professionals and aspiring amateurs. Like Finzi, virtually none of these composers or performers were musical snobs, but, like Finzi's hero Ralph Vaughan Williams, they made signal contributions to the life of British music on multiple levels.

A brief review cannot touch upon everything in this rich correspondence—McVeagh's collection runs to over a thousand pages—but particular topics encompass Finzi's love of Ernest Bloch's music and his service in the Ministry of War Transport during the Second World War. One interesting exchange that McVeagh includes are the letters that passed between Finzi and the Rev. Walter Hussey, the vicar of St. Matthew's, Northampton. Hussey, who later was appointed Dean of Chichester Cathedral, was an artistically astute member of the Anglican clergy; he had commissioned sculptor Henry Moore's "Madonna and Child," as well as scores from the composers Lennox Berkeley, Herbert Howells, Michael Tippett, and Benjamin Britten (whose *Rejoice in the Lamb* was written for St. Matthew's in 1943). In 1946, Hussey commissioned Finzi as a last resort, tactlessly writing in June 1946 that Alan Rawsthorne, his first choice, "does not think that he can possibly manage it in time" for the church's patronal festival on 21 September (pp.578–79). Finzi ignored the slight and produced a masterpiece, "Lo, the full, the final sacrifice," Op.26, an extended anthem for chorus and organ. Finzi selected passages from the writings of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poet Richard Crashaw (c.1613–1649), who was initially ordained as an Anglican clergyman but later converted to Catholicism. Finzi excerpted verses from Crashaw's translations into English of two Latin hymns by St. Thomas Aquinas that focused on Eucharistic adoration. Although Finzi himself was an atheist of Sephardic Jewish heritage, "Lo, the full, the final sacrifice" is a moving and profoundly mystical musical meditation on Eucharistic transubstantiation. Even the Catholic composers Lennox Berkeley and Edmund Rubbra never surpassed Finzi's ecstatic exposition of this central tenet of Catholic belief. Between 1946 and 1953, Finzi followed up the success of "Lo, the full, the final sacrifice" with three attractive Anglican anthems and he also wrote a Magnificat that was premiered at Smith College in 1952. All of these scores are regularly performed today in both churches and concert halls.

While Finzi's letters to patrons, friends, colleagues, and musicians are fascinating, the heart of this volume is the correspondence, published here for the first time, between Finzi and his wife, Joy. These epistolary exchanges display her radiant sensibility, and the portraits reproduced in this volume demonstrate that she was a gifted visual artist. This marriage between artist and composer was a true love match. Joy Finzi was admirably direct and unfussy: Ralph and Adeline Vaughan Williams were amused "when Joy, given her marriage lines by the Registrar,



said matter-of-factly that she would that she would put it away with her dog license.”³ At the same time, she could write poetically to her husband, stuck in the Ministry of War Transport during the dismal year of 1942: “For my darling – a grey green still spring morning, with the cuckoo calling calling. I wish I could send it in this parcel to you. The return of spring, the never failing return makes wars & our sorrows & strife a very shoddy little affair” (p.476). For his part, Finzi was deeply and unfailingly grateful for her companionship and support. Shortly before his death at age fifty-five from complications due to Hodgkin’s Disease on 27 September 1956, Finzi completed his final song, a setting of Robert Bridges’s poem “Since we loved,” which contains the lines: “All my joys my hope excel, /All my work hath prosper’d well, /All my songs have happy been, /O my love, my life, my queen.”

What is Gerald Finzi’s place in the twenty-first century? Considered somewhat eccentric during his lifetime, some of his preoccupations were gently mocked by his eldest son as “dad’s fads.” Seen in light of the present era, however, Finzi’s urge to preserve and collect—varieties of apples, the music of eighteenth-century British composers, precious antique books—now seems prophetic in its rejection of the cold fetishization of technology that has grown to blight our current culture. His determined advocacy of the music of Ivor Gurney and Hubert Hastings Parry, both neglected during his lifetime, has been vindicated in revivals of those composers’ works. Most importantly, perhaps, and evinced throughout Diana McVeagh’s superbly annotated volume, was Finzi’s unwavering loyalty to his musical loves and his decisive rejection of the false gods of high modernism. He wrote music that was often characterized by an individual strain of masculine tenderness arising from the core of his rich inner life. He strove for perfection within a narrow compass and achieved it in songs, choral pieces, and in larger scores such as *In Terra Pax*, Op. 39, the moving “Christmas scene” that was premiered successfully at a Three Choirs Festival just weeks before his death. Was he, in the end, like Gurney, a miniaturist? Who cares? His music improbably endured and is loved by performers and listeners alike. This was more than enough to have accomplished in the brief span of time allotted to him.

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³ Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 197.



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