Introduction

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The transposition of data, figures, and events from a printed historical narrative onto a two-dimensional surface such as a map opens up numerous research opportunities, but it also entails significant risks. Once plotted spatially, data may reveal patterns that might otherwise remain unnoticed: unexpected presences, unforeseen absences, juxtapositions, clusters, sparse areas, and disappearances—to the point that one may be tempted to conclude, with a certain enthusiasm, "I know what I see." The visual arrangement of these elements enables the construction of alternative storymaps and narratives, at times diverging from or even challenging official accounts, thereby transcending a hegemonic conception of reality.

At the same time, this visual, two-dimensional perspective, unlike the progressive and linear structure of narrative discourse, can create the illusion of grasping elements we do not yet fully understand, leading us to believe: "I see, therefore I know." This is, however, a deceptive perspective. Viewing such a map may also weaken our engagement with the tangible, embodied dimension of experience—the one encountered while moving through the streets and soundscapes of a city—replacing it with a detached bird's-eye view. Yet precisely when this elevated perspective reveals so many things simultaneously, it also risks flattening or distorting their interconnections; conversely, it may encourage us to associate elements that are, in fact, separated by insurmountable obstacles, simply because of their apparent proximity on the map.

Moreover, writing history also involves establishing hierarchies, without necessarily aspiring to completeness or exhaustiveness; it requires selecting material according to individual choices and priorities. To what extent, then, can the co-planarity inherent in the simultaneous visualization of data shape the selection of that very data?

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The two introductory reflections in this volume, by Louis Epstein and Roger Parker respectively, draw attention to these issues in different, though not incompatible, ways. The former adopts a decidedly pragmatic and multifaceted approach: *The Musical Geography Project* surveys a range of contexts shaped by a shared graphic and cognitive model, partly developed for pedagogical purposes. The discussion ranges from the activities of the Ballets Russes to the minstrel troupes active in North America after the mid-nineteenth century, from the travels of Renaissance polyphonic singers to a broader set of related phenomena, with particular attention to musical life in Paris during the interwar period.

Much of the success of such undertakings clearly depends both on the quantity of available data and the development of adequate methodological training in its use—a concern that lies close to the author's heart. The creation of a cultural map of this kind, unlike that of a merely physical geography, is ultimately a deliberate and interpretative act that presupposes a series of prior choices. Such a map does not constitute neutral territory: it must be approached critically, and one must be able to engage with it effectively both at the stages of data input and analytical output.

Roger Parker's approach, by contrast, is more ontologically oriented, adopting a perspectival framework: what changes in our experience of an environment when we traverse—even if only imaginatively—the places we are studying, rather than observing them from above through the mediation of a map? These questions closely align with the aims of the project *Music in London, 1800–1851*. The presence of a more clearly defined physical space (as opposed, for example, to the imagined community of the nation-state associated with the traditional notion of "national schools") entails specific methodological challenges and commitments.

With regard to musical life in the 1830s, London has long been regarded as lagging behind other European cities and countries, all of which were undergoing rapid transformation. The challenge, then, is to use the opportunities offered by the project to explore new ways of narrating musical history, in which the physical absence of composers canonized by traditional historiography no longer appears decisive. Consequently, the aim is to develop new approaches capable of accounting for emerging discursive networks, while also engaging with the perspectives opened by contemporary global history.

The presence of a dozen instances of musical activity in non-traditional venues in London during those years points to the existence of multiple, coexisting urban soundscapes—likely closer to the lived experience of con-

temporaries than a history centered exclusively on great composers and canonical works would suggest. This is clearly not a matter of replacing traditional symphonists or opera composers with those ephemeral (and often lost) musical presences, but rather of producing a fuller and more realistic account of "what happened, musically, in London in the 1830s."[1]

The other five essays in this volume examine the relationship between music, the city, and cartographic representation in a deliberately different manner. Each essay focuses on a distinct city—Rome, Florence, Paris, Madrid, and New York City—within a specific and clearly defined historical period. These case studies, arranged chronologically in the volume according to their subject matter, are characterized by the diversity of their themes as well as by the varied uses of the "bird's-eye view" afforded by cartographic representation.

The articles by Elena Oliva and Alessandro Maras stem from research carried out within the project *Mapping Musical Life* (MML).[2] The first seeks to construct a sound map of the "Feste michelangiolesche," a series of celebrations held in Florence in 1875 to mark the 400th anniversary of Michelangelo's birth. The second explores the soundscape of Rome at the height of the Risorgimento (1850s–1870s). In both cases, cartographic representation sheds light on social and political dimensions that are less apparent when attention is confined to individual musical events. In the Roman case, this ultimately leads to a broader rethinking of the city's musical historiography.

In Louise Bernard de Raymond's essay, this bird's-eye view "zooms in" on the Chaussée d'Antin, a neighborhood of the French capital particularly rich in musical institutions, as well as in musicians' and artisans' homes, instrument-making workshops, and publishing houses. The essay centers on the musical gatherings hosted in the homes of two amateur musicians—Baron de Trémont and the pharmacist Paul Antoine Gratacap—during the 1830s and 1840s, as documented in diaries, correspondence, and music collections. A nobleman and a bourgeois sharing a passion for music, they regularly welcomed both professional and amateur musicians into their homes in a manner reminiscent of public concerts, yet grounded in a gift economy, thus offering professional musicians opportunities to build and consolidate their networks.

1 Roger Parker, "Music and the Urban: London in the 1830s," *infra*.

2 For further details, see Mila De Santis, "Urban Musical Life in Post-Unification Italy: The MML Project," *infra*.

Matteo Giuggioli's essay is the only one addressing a musical work both as symbolic space and representation of urban space. Luigi Boccherini spent at least ten years working on *Musica notturna delle strade di Madrid* for string quintet, producing two versions preserved in manuscripts now held in Paris and Berlin—evidence of the circulation of this "local" music beyond the city that inspired it. The author highlights the modernity of the work, particularly in its attempt to evoke the city in musically realistic terms—a practice more fully developed in twentieth-century soundscape compositions—while also including explicit references to Spanish folk traditions.

Finally, the essay "For a Micro-spatial Musicology: Julius Eastman and the CETA Orchestra in New York City, 1978–79" by Ryan Dohoney challenges dominant spatial narratives of musical life in 1970s New York City, which have often been organized into a tripartite schema of Midtown (associated with the institutions and repertoires of the classical tradition), Uptown (academic composition, commonly—but reductively—linked to serialism, though in practice considerably more heterogeneous), and Downtown (hybrid, experimental, and cross-genre practices). Against this cartographic partitioning of musical culture, the essay proposes an alternative reading of the city's sonic geography through the figure of the composer, performer, improviser, conductor, pianist, and vocalist Julius Eastman, examined here in relation to the two-year period of his involvement with the CETA Orchestra.

Whilst the introductory essays by Louis Epstein and Roger Parker are grounded in wide-ranging research projects, the contributions by Wilson (*et al.*) and Mila De Santis, which conclude this volume, present fully developed accounts of recently completed research programs. These contributions adopt different perspectives: on the one hand, *Mapping Viennese Concert Life around 1800: An Interdisciplinary Journey*—a project involving the interdisciplinary collaboration of John D. Wilson, Francesca-Maria Raffler, Viktor Kochkin, and Nicole Yeung—focuses on a single city, Vienna; on the other, The *Mapping Musical Life* project examines six Italian cities (Milan, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Naples, Palermo) from a north-to-south perspective, across the decades surrounding Italian unification. The two projects also differ methodologically. The first excludes open-air concerts from its scope, whereas the second regards them as a significant component of the urban soundscape. Finally, the former explicitly aims to reconstruct the biographies of lesser-known musicians through archival research, while the latter draws on an extensive body of information from

newspapers, building on and expanding the *ArtMus* database (*Musical Articles in 19th-Century Italian Newspapers*).[3]

At the same time, the two projects share significant common ground, first and foremost in their aim to catalogue both well-known and lesser-known musical venues and events and to locate them on historical maps. They also share the objective of creating publicly accessible databases intended for scholars across different disciplines as well as for a wider audience.[4] In both cases, cartographic representation enables a reconstruction of musical life that extends beyond designated venues, canonical figures, and major events, instead revealing the richness of everyday musical activity and the social interactions surrounding it.

The overall picture emerging from this volume is a compelling illustration of the possibilities offered by mapping, and more broadly by digital humanities, for reconstructing the musical and sonic realities of urban centers—including those imagined within artistic creation— across scales ranging from the local (a neighborhood) to the metropolitan (and even to comparative studies of cities within a single nation). Apart from Epstein's contribution, which explicitly articulates an educational aim, all the essays also imply, albeit implicitly, an educational and disseminative function for the results and methodologies they employ.

3 *ArtMus. Articoli musicali nei quotidiani dell'Ottocento in Italia*, accessed May 23, 2026. https://www.artmus.it/public/.

4 *Concert life in Vienna 1823–1826*, accessed May 23, 2026. https://viennaconcertlife.univie.ac.at/; *MML – Mapping Musical Life*, accessed May 23, 2026. https://www.mml-project.it/en/.