

# Music and the Urban: London in the 1830s

Roger Parker

After centuries in which music history has been routinely parceled according to genres and/or national schools, the idea of “urban music,” of music in and of the city, has suddenly become a compelling category, one I take to be celebrated and explored in the present large project. The sense of escape, of liberation from previous, constraining and now outmoded terms of reference, might seem immediately obvious: whether from ideologies of “the music itself,” or from contentious and self-serving divisions between categories such as “popular” and “serious,” or from vague—more often unspoken—articulations of the inevitability of the nation-state as a defining artistic category. The case of music in London in the 1830s provides an evident example of this and much more.<sup>1</sup>

It would be comforting to be able, now some years after the end of the project, to refer to my own culminating monograph: one that seeks to offer an imperial, imperious, imperative overview of the topic;<sup>2</sup> if you will, a

1 It is a topic that, beginning in 2013, I had the great fortune to spend five years (and more) examining thanks to the support of the European Research Council. The project involved myself, a total of eight postdocs and a host of visitors. Basic to the personnel was an interdisciplinary division: historians, literary scholars, musicologists and art historians were always part of the mix, other disciplines appearing from time to time. The basic *modus operandi* was to produce themed investigations that then became publications (special issues of journals, edited books, single-authored books); these investigations (which almost always started out as conferences) came about because of individual enthusiasms among the members of the core group.

2 My alliterative epithets come, of course, from Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and a classic melding of two grand Empires separated by almost 2000 years: “We think of Rome, imperial, imperious, imperative ... What was their civilisation? Vast, I allow: but vile. Cloacae: sewers. The Roman, like the Englishman who follows in his footsteps, brought to every new shore on which he set his foot ... only his cloacal obsession.” James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1922), 126. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Ulysses,\\_1922.djvu/129](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Ulysses,_1922.djvu/129).

mapping of the terrain that would neatly demonstrate its significance and achievements. Alas, I am not in a position, and—my guess—will never find myself in a position to offer such an overview.<sup>3</sup> There are many explanations for this inability, some too personal to be of much interest here. But my preferred justification is to return to an old distinction made by Michel de Certeau, one with which many will be familiar. It involves, in a famous article, a distinction Certeau makes between *voyeurs* and *walkers*. The former gaze down on the city from a skyscraper, isolated from its noise; “above these waters, an Icarus can ignore the tricks of Daedalus in his shifting and endless labyrinths. His attitude transforms him into a voyeur. It places him at a distance. It changes an enchanting world into a text ... The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive.”<sup>4</sup> The scopic and gnostic: the desire to see and the desire to know melding together. But then there are also what Certeau calls “the ordinary practitioner[s] of the city,” there are the *walkers*. These he calls “*Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write even though they are unable to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen: their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms.”<sup>5</sup> Certeau also uses other ways to configure this distinction which may be useful for my purpose here.

3 Book-length collections did, however, appear in abundance during and after the project’s tenure. So far these have included: James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart (eds.), *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789–1851*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Oskar Cox Jensen, David Kennerley, and Ian Newman (eds.), *The Art of Miscellany: Charles Dibdin and Late Georgian Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Katherine Hambridge and Jonathan Hicks (eds.), *The Melodramatic Moment: Music and Theatrical Culture, 1790–1820* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Gavin Williams (ed.), *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sound and the Unmaking of Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Sarah Collins (ed.), *Music and Victorian Liberalism: Composing the Liberal Subject* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Roger Parker and Susan Rutherford (eds.), *London Voices, 1820–1840* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Oskar Cox Jensen, *The Ballad-Singer in Georgian and Victorian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Roberta Montemorra Marvin (ed.), *Opera Outside the Box: Notions of Opera in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2022); Christina Fuhrmann and Alison Mero (eds.), *Opera and Print Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2023); James Grande and Carmel Raz (eds.), *Sound and Sense in British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); James Grande and Brian H. Murray (eds.), *Scripture and Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023); James Grande, *Articulate Sounds: Music, Dissent, and Literary Culture, 1789–1840* (Oxford: British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2024).

4 Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 102.

5 *Ibid.*

One is to talk about the planned and readable city on the one hand (and this might seem inevitably to involve mapping of a kind), and—on the other—what he calls the *migrational* city. Perhaps at base, this is a recycling of the older anthropological distinction between place (in French, *lieu*) and space (*espace*). In Certeau's words, place is comparatively neutral, "an instant configuration of positions"; while space is what he calls "a practiced place," an "intersection of mobile elements ... actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it."<sup>6</sup>

And thus to my explanation. I have always been, and I think will remain, at heart one of those *Wandersmänner*, more comfortable moving through the terrain, approaching the next prospect chiefly through the experience of the last rather than from a preconceived plan, reacting (if you will) to the changing weather (that is, for the most part, the changing academic weather) as I move. It is, then, for this reason that I can present here nothing like an imperial overview; instead, I need to offer something more like a chronological tour of research progress: I want, in other words, to tell you something about how my London-based "music in the city" project *became*, the governing themes/schemes through which it passed, and then proceed to some ruminations about the book I am about to complete.

Let me start by rehearsing a question that—alas—was posed quite often when I first announced my topic. The question, not meant at all aggressively, went something like this: "But tell me: what *happened*, musically, in London in the 1830s? Why choose that particular place and that particular decade?" Behind the question was, in many cases, a common-enough music-history assumption, even in today's radically altered scholarly landscape. Even without rehearsal of that over-quoted dictum about "Das Land ohne Musik,"<sup>7</sup> general musical histories of the past century or so are likely to feature nineteenth-century London as a distinctly marginal venue. Of course, for those determined to name-check the metropolis, various straws can be grasped at. It is a matter of fact, for example, that Felix Mendelssohn, certainly a canonic history-book figure, visited London very often during this decade, premiered some of his famous works there and seemed in many ways to become a poster-boy of evolving British musical attitudes. Indeed, on his first visit in 1829, one might find the traces of something

6 Michel de Certeau, "Spatial Stories," in *Defining Travel: Diverse Visions*, ed. Susan L. Roberson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 90.

7 The epithet has its origin in the title of a book about England: Oscar A. H. Schmitz, *Das Land ohne Musik: Englische Gesellschaftsprobleme*, 4th ed. (Munich: G. Müller, 1914).

world-historical. As if to announce the departure of the last remnants of the eighteenth century, Mendelssohn encountered the castrato Giovanni Battista Velluti in London and pronounced him literally the stuff of nightmares: “his voice so excited my loathing that it pursued me into my dreams that night.”<sup>8</sup> It is also the case that several luminaries from the Romantic-era opposing camp (as it were) also stepped off the continental ferry: during the 1830s Bellini, Paganini, Liszt, Chopin all set foot in the city; Verdi and Wagner would follow in the next two decades, both seeking the injections of cash for which London was famous and both, for their pains, encountering strenuous opposition.<sup>9</sup>

The pattern of reference says something unmistakable about those general histories of music. Their attitude to London might remind us of a Russian joke that apparently circulated in the Brezhnev era:

Q: What is the great world-historical event of 1875?

A: Vladimir Ilych Lenin turned five!

The joke serves as an epigraph in Michael André Bernstein’s book *Foregone Conclusions*, and involves what he famously called the historical method of “backshadowing.”<sup>10</sup> In this instance, London becomes worthy of comment only when the true objects of history, those great men and their musical works, entered its portals. And alas in the 1830s such men graced London rather infrequently, did not tend to settle, and rarely gave the city the prestige granted by world premieres of their most important creations. The

8 Letter of May 18, 1829, quoted in J. Q. Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 13. I should add that Davies’s work in this book, which began as a dissertation on London in 1829, completed at the University of Cambridge in 2005, was a crucial influence on my entire *Music in London* project.

9 As a recent case-in-point of the attitude of general music histories, one might go no further than Richard Taruskin’s monumental *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The General Index in vol. 6 has just four entries for “London” that refer to the nineteenth-century volume (vol. 3). Three are indeed references to visits from “great” composers: “Liszt in,” “Paganini concerts in,” and “Verdi commissions from”; the fourth, “music criticism in,” might seem more promising, but in fact refers to Addison and the eighteenth century. For the tendency of Taruskin’s in so many ways deeply impressive music history to default into a history of canonic composers and their works, see Gary Tomlinson’s review, “Monumental Musicology,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 113, no. 2 (2007): 349–74.

10 Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1, 9.

ironies of this circumstance, the absence of “great men” and their “great works,” and thus the absence of the basic raw materials of one conventional kind of music history, are many. One of the sharpest is that London was, as it turns out, a prime mover in setting into sounding motion, of making an active industry from, the ideology that fueled such historical attitudes. It was, sooner than Paris, sooner than Vienna, the first city to establish a substantial archipelago of concert venues and organizations dedicated to “classical” music in the modern sense.<sup>11</sup> But the music history books of old didn’t talk about that kind of circumstance: theirs was—to repeat—a history of composers and their works; and in this game London was (and not just in the 1830s) distinctly lacking.

So, the starting point of the ERC group was to explore ways in which, spurred on by a city-based inquiry, the project could strive to narrate a new kind of musical history, one in which the physical absence of Great Composers would be irrelevant and in which a fresh kind of chronicle could be constructed, one that would avoid technical analysis of musical works and attempt to confront the issue of musical meaning from larger, more socially grounded perspectives. It would be a story that privileged listeners at least as much as it did performers and creators, and would—for this reason alone—feature women as prominently as men. What is more, we imagined that this new story would fundamentally be constructed from what one might call the emerging discourse networks that were such a proliferating feature of London’s musical scene: the explosion of writing about music (from journalists and others) that was one noticeable product of the city. We wanted, in short, to consider the manner in which journalists and other writers in London started to respond to music, looking and listening in different ways as they began to think more and learn more about the art form they were required to attend and discuss.<sup>12</sup> In short, we wanted to explore some of the myriad ways in which, via the press, discourse about the styles and manners of playing and listening to music were reconfigured during the period. The cumulative effect, we hoped, would be to make clear that many of the broadest cultural and political transformations then taking place in society had *musical windows*: that specific musical events or new

11 For some essential background here, see William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Music Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

12 The place to start here is still Leanne Langley, *The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century*, PhD diss. (University of North Carolina, 1983).

musical circumstances could, usually fueled by the press but sometimes by humbler communication networks, be seen to have broader resonances within the public imagination.

Some further background may at this point be useful. It's an historical cliché of the greatest respectability that the 1830s in Britain marked a period of change or, as they called it then, of Reform. Whether or not such special pleading on behalf of an entire decade can ever be justified, there is little doubt that cultural commentators of the time, overwhelmingly based in the metropolis and perhaps caught up in its pervading rhetoric, were prone to see their milieu in such dynamic terms. And, as mentioned a moment ago, this rhetoric clearly spread to musical developments. In that sphere, reform has usually been characterized as the decisive emergence and growing self-confidence of a realigned audience for symphonic and other types of German instrumental music, a movement whose trajectory clearly encouraged the long-lived English enthusiasm for rabid, xenophobic polemics against opera, in particular Italian opera.<sup>13</sup> The decade also saw an accompanying celebration, sometimes verging on idolatry, of German instrumental music and its talisman, Ludwig van Beethoven. This story—the rise of a newly-configured “elite” audience in London, together with different kinds of concert, fresh repertoire and adjusted behavior both in listening to and in discourse about music—has of course been told many times. Less often mentioned is that its attractions in our present, concert-music-beleaguered period, are obvious: in many ways the London sea-changes seemed to introduce a kind of musical world we still tenuously inhabit, or at least like to idealize. The capital's musical realignments around the 1830s could, in other words, be thought to put in place, and just as Queen Victoria began her long tenure, yet another example of what one recent book has called “the spectral presence of the Victorian past ... all around us”:<sup>14</sup> in this case a presence found not so much in the persistence to the present day of the nineteenth-century fabric of our cities, but in the surprising longevity of the cultural practices those cities did so much to enable and then foster.<sup>15</sup>

13 For an acute examination of this opera-going attitude, and much else, see Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780–1880* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007).

14 Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham, “Introduction,” in *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, ed. Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xi.

15 Such sentiments are central to a book that, although devoted to visual culture, proved decisive in its influence on many aspects of our project: Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon*:

It was, then, with an awareness of the potential seductions of this sense of historical kinship and closeness—of the sway that spectral presences can have over us, not least when gazed at nostalgically from supposedly bleaker times—that the *Music in London* team began to examine afresh some fault lines that accompanied the musical 1830s in London, some new tensions that seemed to shadow the locomotive cultural energies of the age.

An immediately arresting aspect of this period is that music in general was thought to be in the ascendant; more disconcerting is that this state of affairs was not always greeted with enthusiasm. Some critics were indeed triumphant. A correspondent of the aptly, imperialistically, entitled new journal *The Musical World*, writing in 1838, used language similar to that applied to the burgeoning railway network now spreading around London's periphery and even penetrating the city itself: "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."<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, this metropolitan expansion (which was a pan-European phenomenon, but with London, the world's largest and most developed metropolis, in the vanguard) could also be seen in terms of the darker side of urban expansion, the side that brought poverty, overcrowding, pollution, and disease. To escape from London for a moment, at around the same time that *The Musical World* was celebrating the metropolis's "powerful and rapid" musical expansion, the French journalist Albert Cler described Paris as in the grip of "so-called amateur concerts, which have lately increased and multiplied in a most fearful manner, and which now constitute a perfect pest, [one that] we might term the musica-morbus. All these frightful abuses are caused by the mania which has seized the Dilettanti of the middle-classes."<sup>17</sup> This negative image—of music-making as dangerously porous, spreading through the population, oblivious of class structures, just like the cholera epidemics that periodically ravaged so many nineteenth-century cities—is echoed surprisingly often in the English press. Here is one deluded commentator:

*People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> *The Musical World* (17 May 1838), 47.

<sup>17</sup> Albert Cler, "The Dilettante," in *Pictures of the French: A Series of Literary and Graphic Delineations of French Character by Jules Janin, Balzac, Cormenin ...* (London: Orr and Co., 1840), 153–60. For further information about Cler and his attachment to the satirical magazine *Le Charivari*, see David S. Kerr, *Caricature and French Political Culture 1830–1848* (Oxford, 2000), p. 31.

England, more than any nation in the world, is governed by fashion ... She controls our opinions, our manners, our habits of social intercourse, our tastes; reconciling us to error in our judgements, discomfort in our lives, and barbarism in the fine arts. Music is a fashion at present, and therefore everyone is musical ... Its influence is almost as extensive as that of the blessed sun himself, cheering and animating all nature. [...] But we abuse this ... by sacrificing the genuine delights which we could derive from music suited to our different degrees of taste and education, to a vain and heartless affectation and parade of technical learning and skill.<sup>18</sup>

There are strands to this commentary that we can revisit later, in particular the idea that music should be calibrated “to our different degrees of taste and education”; but for the moment we might follow its broader argument a little further. It becomes clear that this writer’s discontent focused principally (as it did for Albert Cler) on one instrument: the domestic piano. What had gone wrong? After all, the technological developments of the instrument—due (it was routinely claimed) in no small part to triumphs of British engineering—were significant, and in tune with the progress of the age. However, this writer declared that “while the powers of this noble instrument are daily extended by our manufacturers, those powers are every day more and more abused by our performers.”<sup>19</sup> What he called this “general contagion” could be easily summed up. “The established forms of the concerto and the sonata are thrown aside, and all instrumental compositions, for public or private performance, consist of *fantasias*, *capriccios*, *pot-pourris*—any thing, in short, that releases the author from the fetters of art and enables him to string together as many flourishing vagaries as he may think proper.”<sup>20</sup> Bewigged, ever-youthful Mozart remained untouchable within this new economy, a paragon of high-mindedness and classical spirit; but even the sublime Beethoven

in his grand and expressive compositions for the piano-forte, introduced passages similar to those of which the music of Czerny, Herz, Pixis, &c. is almost entirely made up. [They] have fallen into the error of mistaking the means for the end, of indulging in difficulties for the sake of outreaching each other.

18 “Fashion in Music,” in *The Metropolitan: Monthly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 1 (May–August 1831): 23.

19 “Fashion in Music,” 23–4.

20 “Fashion in Music,” 24.

They have ransacked their brains for strange modulations; and have put their fingers and instruments to the torture to achieve surprising feats of dexterity; while their auditors, bewildered by their intricacies, or wondering at their sleight-of-hand, have fancied themselves delighted with their music.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, and as mentioned earlier, music was multiplying dangerously: its new cascades of notes and proliferating harmonies, now unfettered by formal constraints and causing agonized distortions in the performing body, were spreading through the urban population, unheeding of divisions between public and private space, and even of the class divisions that urban proximity had made so newly fraught.

These and other questions sustained the opening years of the ERC adventure. One might characterize what was happening as a process of seeing the conventional concerns of musical history through an alternative lens: one that was less concerned with what (still) is sometimes called “the music itself,” and more concerned with the manner in which the changes occurring in urban society were inflecting the manner in which music was performed and the way it was perceived.

But then—in part through changing circumstances, but very largely through the initiatives of the non-musicological postdocs, who had none of my musicological baggage and who ranged far further than me in so many directions—these concerns began to seem to me unduly limiting. What I had imagined as *the* “musical world” of London began, in other words, to seem constrained: too tied to the disciplinary restrictions of the past. I might have liked to see myself as one of those Certeauvian *Wandersmänner*; but my footsteps seemed resolutely to tread along certain paths, above all the paths in which elite music activity took place, and resolutely avoided others, in which musical activity took other, startling forms and manners. In short, it became clear to me that my already-drafted chapters, all of them concerned with the debates outlined above, were now only half the monograph I intended to write.

Although this sounds like a damascene moment, it was actually a gradual realization that the question I had been so insistently asked at the outset—“What happened, musically, in London in the 1830s?”—might have a more complete, in a way a more naïve, less mystified answer; that, if you will, I was still too chained to older ways of configuring what constituted the basic material of music history. In response, a new space began to

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

emerge; one that, if you will, used the streets of the city as a laboratory for stretching previous disciplinary boundaries. Readers will, I hope, bear with me if I now attempt to answer that “What happened?” question in as determined a prosaic manner as possible: one released from the disciplinary shackles that had earlier detained me. How many types of music can one imagine taking place in the city, and—to take the question as close to ground zero as possible—not in a decade, or a year, or a month, or even a week, but simply in one day. Here are twelve categories of such diurnal musical activity: ones that could, if with a certain bending here and there, be arranged into one of those “around the clock” confections so popular in London at the time.<sup>22</sup>

1. Inhabitants of all kinds hum or whistle in the street; a mother sings to her children at night; children play rhyming games. There is no notation, there are relatively few traces or means of recuperation; but the challenge of writing about this music is nevertheless there; also, the challenge of capturing what differences have come about as times and technologies change (such activities indeed have a history, not least a history within a definable local habitation).
2. Music in the streets more generally, perhaps supplied by ballad singers or by child labor—the latter often immigrants trafficked from other countries—operating mechanical instruments. This was, as it happens, a thriving industry in London at the time, and became much involved in emerging debates about music and class, music and technology, music and race.
3. Music in pubs or taverns, which often crossed over with street music (ballad singers in particular moving from one venue to the other).
4. Band music, whether played by *ad hoc* groups in the street (often, again, by immigrants), by the military or (increasingly as the decade goes on) by groups of factory employees. Sometimes this music took place in the streets, sometimes on the move, sometimes in the burgeoning green public spaces that were forming in London at this time.

<sup>22</sup> The most famous of these is George Augustus Sala, *Twice Round the Clock; Or, The Hours of the Day and Night in London* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1859); but there is a huge weight of such “*flâneur*” literature devoted to London, not least of which is Charles Dickens’s first book publication, his *Sketches by “Boz”: Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People*, 2 vols. (London: John Macrone, 1836).

5. The huge industry of tonic sol-fa education and other mass choral activities, usually organized by the middle-classes and directed at the classes below them, often explicitly with the intention of occupying such groups with “useful” leisure and thus (it was hoped) keeping them away from the entertainment on offer in category 3 above.
6. The entire edifice of music featuring in religious worship, whether in churches or other buildings, purpose-built or not. An enormous volume of musical activity occurred here, rarely talked about in today’s “urban culture” industry.
7. Theatre music in “illegitimate” establishments: popular entertainments, licensed and unlicensed, that flourished in London at this time. In the mid 1830s there were approximately twenty theatres in London, most of them featuring far from elite entertainment.
8. Music in pleasure gardens: another meeting place for people of different classes, with outdoor dance floors a central feature.
9. Music in dance halls, from the popular to the exclusive. This activity might form part of the broader category of “music on the move,” which could encompass most of the other categories listed here.
10. Music in hybrid entertainments of many kinds: in panoramas, in scientific displays, in lectures, etc.: entertainments catering for a broad social spectrum of consumers.
11. Music in the domestic sphere, which might stretch from—say—a guitar-accompanied song among the laboring classes to a piano recital in the bourgeois or aristocratic drawing-room.
12. Music education: vast numbers of children and others learned musical instruments both in private and public contexts.

And, after those twelve categories, we would then, as a tiny, minority-interest affair, add the elite venues that had earlier been my sole focus: the operatic events, the concert halls, oratorio performances, glee clubs and

exclusive “ancient music” groups, and (just beginning at this time) chamber-music societies.<sup>23</sup>

Just to compile this list makes one realize that, to embrace a city’s entire musical activity, let alone for a decade, looks newly daunting. And there is even then so much that has been ignored. One thinks of all the “para-musical” activity that inevitably collects around all the activities listed above. To name just three, musical instrument-making, music publishing, and musical journalism were all hugely expanding—assuming, one might say, industrial proportions—in London at just this time. And it also becomes clear that these categories, rather than (or, perhaps better, as well as) needing separate treatment, are also, and irremediably, enmeshed with each other, so much so that my numbered list is nearer illusory than illustrative. To give two of the most obvious examples: religious and educational uses of music occur through the entire social gamut, from (almost) the lowest to the highest rungs of society. There are also startling intersections: one of the lowest, most indigent groups, the street musicians, typically used as their repertoire fragments of Italian opera melodies, which occupied the very pinnacle of aristocratic amusement.<sup>24</sup>

How to marshal, to write about this expanded list of activities? There are of course too many to encompass in individual chapters, but I wanted in some way to make their existence felt within the structure of my rapidly changing book. At one point I did indeed imagine a chapter devoted to just one day’s music in London: a time-co-ordinated peregrination through London in which all such activities would be encountered. There was also the thought that this aspect might become an ideal place for “musical mapping”: for a demonstration of how such activity migrated around the London streets. However, my preferred method has been to present the variety as a series of quotations from journalistic and novelistic sources, with

23 When this paper was first delivered, an interlocutor pointed out that this list of activities could apply to virtually any Western city, the implication (I think) being that such an enlarged inquiry might risk losing any historical specificity. My reply to this perfectly reasonable objection would be that the specificity, in virtually all cases, can be restored (indeed, must be restored) in the particularity of the events in question, each of which will take a different configuration according to the local habitation in which it originated.

24 The literature on London’s “street music” debates is now large; for one summing-up, see James Winter, *London’s Teeming Streets* (London: Routledge, 1993), 69–79. For a fascinating account of the intersection of high and low culture around this topic, see Mary Ann Smart, “The Traffic in Voices: The Exchange Value of Italian Opera in Giuseppe Mazzini’s London,” in *London Voices, 1820–1840: Vocal Performers, Practices, Histories*, ed. Roger Parker and Susan Rutherford (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 33–50.

footnotes then supplying the narrative connection: a kind of dual exegesis in which one level (the footnotes) doesn't merely document but actively comments on (and sometimes actively critiques) the other—an experiment famous in fiction from Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*. Again, and to stress: it is worth thinking actively about the gains and losses of alternative methods of presentation. What would “mapping” achieve that my “documentary” approach would not? Geographical specificity, obviously. But what would be the losses?

After that intermediate chapter, my much altered book now contains a selection of topics from the non-elite musical world: the music of a woman called Elisa Flower, part of a dissenting religious group;<sup>25</sup> the sonic traces that remain of the “panorama” craze that gripped London, and contributed so much to the mythology of its self-representation in these years; the sad tale of juvenile “organ boys,” many of them trafficked from northern Italy and effectively employed as slave labor on the London streets.<sup>26</sup> A new, much less celebratory picture of “music in London” emerged.

All this might be judged enough for one monograph but, somewhat late in the day, one further aspect impinged, and began to insist on itself as a separate subject of discourse. Perhaps the first inkling of this emerged with the publication in English translation of Jürgen Osterhammel's magnum opus, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, whose chapter on cities the *Music in London* group read closely.<sup>27</sup> This “global” history serves to remind us that many types of city have existed in the world, even in the last 200 years: cities of wood, cities of stone; colonial cities, port cities, imperial cities, pilgrimage cities; there are even examples of “mobile cities” in which vast collections of dependents and infrastructure are permanently on the move as the ruler travels incessantly within his domains. But even among this variety, Osterhammel tells us that during most of the nineteenth century there was just one example of a “globally hegemonic city”, and that was London. And the question of *how* such a position had been achieved began to press insistently.

25 Inspiration here came from discussions with Kate Bowan; see also Bowan and Paul A. Pickering, *Sounds of Liberty: Music, Radicalism and Reform in the Anglophone world, 1790–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); in particular, pages 234–42.

26 As well as those publications mentioned in n. 21 above, see John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-century Paris, London and New York* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

27 Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 241–321.

An urban aspect that Osterhammel explores in depth is, very broadly, the idea of *circulation*: a process essential to any city on so many levels. The most obvious of these, often talked about, might be that of infrastructure: how the nineteenth-century city distinguished itself from predecessors in the elaboration of its circulatory infrastructure, its roads, its harbors, its railways, its lighting systems and, increasingly as the century progressed, its network of underground passages, initially for circulation of fresh water and waste water, latterly for storage, travel and the consequential creation of what Osterhammel calls “a mysterious underworld.”<sup>28</sup> In all these internal circulatory systems, which were in essence retrospective, in reaction to the crises that unchecked urban expansion caused, London was—often for reasons of governance and political culture—stuttering and belated by comparison with European rivals. But cities also expanded and accumulated wealth and power by means of larger circulatory systems. And in two of these, London, as the capital city of Great Britain, undoubtedly led the world.

The first of these circulatory systems marks the start of the Anthropocene. The presence of an accessible power source in the form of coal, and transport hubs that could make it available, famously fired the industrial revolution that, as well as creating “shock cities” like Manchester in the northern part of the country, assured London its global hegemony. This much is a cliché of urban history, not to mention a cliché of Britain’s self-definition as a nation-state. But behind that phenomenon was, of course, another form of global circulation. The raw materials that fueled the industrial revolution (especially cotton, but many other substances) were supplied via vast estates in the American South and the Caribbean, estates that were enabled by a circulation in human bodies: London’s wealth and prominence was, in this sense, fundamentally enmeshed in the slave trade.<sup>29</sup>

As it happens, the decade of the 1830s was a key moment in this tragic history. In 1807, after many failed attempts, the British parliament passed an Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, but this was (as its title proclaims)

<sup>28</sup> Osterhammel, 246. A key text in this matter of urban circulation is Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> It is worth stressing that, while many European (and non-European) countries were involved in this trade, Britain’s prominence as a naval power granted it a central role and made it a central beneficiary. It has, for example, been estimated at half of all slaves in the eighteenth century were transported by on British ships; see David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History*, rev. ed. (London: Picador, 2021), 199.

restricted to *trade* in slavery rather than to slave ownership, which continued to flourish. Perhaps incidentally at first, the 1807 Act also served to improve the country's international trading hegemony. But then in 1833, and in part in reaction to slave rebellions in Jamaica and elsewhere, came the Slavery Abolition Act, which gradually made illegal slave *ownership*. This was fiercely contested and required many compromises, not least a compensation package of some £20 million (40% of the British treasury's annual income). The act was also deeply compromised by the fact that the slaves thus granted their "freedom" remained as (unpaid) "apprentices" for some years after this, and even then often had nowhere else to go and no resources to make choices, so remaining *in situ* (mostly in the Caribbean islands), their state little changed.<sup>30</sup>

One might at first wonder what music might have to do with such dreadful circumstances, but it quickly becomes obvious that music was, in an apt locution, *instrumentalized* frequently in the endless debates that surrounded slavery during this period. We could point to various appropriations that might seem comforting: ones in which anti-slavery poems were aided in their distribution by musical settings, or in which the presence of musical cultures among the enslaved was marshalled as evidence for the inhumanity of their condition.<sup>31</sup> However, it was also at least as ubiquitous for music to be used in the opposite cause. The fact that slaves sang together and sometimes employed musical instruments became, indeed, something of a trope in the pro-slavery argument: used as a demonstration of their contentedness and general advancement.<sup>32</sup> What is more, there is evidence

30 This history has of course been recounted many times. Olusoga, *Black and British*, offers an excellent recent account. For a global perspective on the trade, see C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 402–10.

31 For the former, a notable example is Henry Bishop's "operatic drama" *The Slave*, first performed at London's Covent Garden in 1816, with much-reprinted songs such as "Sons of Freedom hear my story." For the latter, the classic iteration is from Frederick Douglass's autobiography: "I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find person who could speak of the singing among slaves, as evidence of their contentment. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy"; see Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave*, 6th ed. (London: Collins, 1851), 20.

32 On 1 July 1830, Henry Brougham spoke in Parliament about various defenders of the condition of slaves, even those on notoriously lethal transport ships. He reports their words thus: "The slaves on board are comfortably lodged ... they are amused with instruments of music: [they have] food and raiment for nothing; music to charm the sense." "Proceeding in Parliament of the Subject of Colonial Slavery," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 3, no. 16 (1 August 1830): 325.

that some slave owners actually went so far as to give some of their captives a musical education, teaching them instruments and then forming them into *ad hoc* musical bands that could impress visitors in ceremonial and other occasions, thus demonstrating the educational opportunities that slavery could bestow on its supposed victims.<sup>33</sup>

### Conclusion

From all this material, there emerged, then, a final chapter of my book about music in London in the 1830s: the hardest to write in many ways, albeit one that returned in some respects to the elite discourse with which I started. The book that I planned all those years ago has been interrupted by many circumstances but is now near its end. To put this another way, my career as one of those *Wandersmänner* is coming to a close: I have strolled enough, taken sufficient turns through the city.

As discussed earlier, there is no doubt that the idea of “music and the urban” presents many new possibilities for the writing of music history. However, amid those celebrations of release it may also be salutary to pause for reflection, in particular to pause and contemplate the constraints that may be brought into being by the embrace of this new category. We will agree, at the least, that presence of a definable material space (as opposed, say, to the imagined community of the nation-state) has its own challenges and commitments. In particular, and as mentioned much earlier, the desire to map, to form an overview, while itself laudable, may be open to critique.<sup>34</sup> To return for a moment to Certeau, one of the questions he asks,

33 As apologist Charles Telfair put it, “Believing in the influence of music in civilizing mankind, a vocal and instrumental band was formed among the Slaves, who, for above three years, learned the principles of this art from the best European masters.” See his *Some Account of the State of Slavery at Mauritius since the British Occupation in 1810* (London: James Ridgway, 1830), 64. Later in the book Telfair approvingly quotes a letter from “Quartermaster Kyle,” dated Port-Louis, 27 September 1826: “When I was music-master of the 82nd regiment [the slaves] learned music, reading and writing, for upwards of three years, during which time I had many opportunities of hearing them, in their private conversations, hold forth in praise of the kindness of their master and mistress, not only to themselves, but also to the Slaves in general” (p. 183).

34 For a classic instance of this critique, complete with Foucauldian undertext, see J. B. Harley, “Maps, Knowledge and Power,” which first appeared in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277–312; it

after descending from the skyscraper, has continued to obsess me. He asks, with typical Certeauvian resonance: “To what erotics of knowledge can the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos be connected?”<sup>35</sup> The map, according to this formulation, is a seductive object, one that can give you illusions of possession. The *Wandersmänner*, on the other hand, are resolutely erratic (rather than erotic); their itinerary is haphazard if only because, when they turn a street corner, they are often greeted by different weather.

was then reprinted as the second chapter of Harley’s *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 51–82. In the opening paragraph comes the *credo*, the call for a new regime in which: “maps cease to be understood primarily as inert records of morphological landscapes or passive reflections of the world of objects, but are regarded as refracted images contributing to dialogue in a socially constructed world.”

<sup>35</sup> Certeau, “Walking in the City,” p. 101.

## Works Cited

- Arias, Rosario and Patricia Pulham. "Introduction." In *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction*, edited by Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham, xi–xxvi. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Bayly, C. A. *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
- Bernstein, Michael André. *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Bowan, Kate and Paul A. Pickering. *Sounds of Liberty: Music, Radicalism and Reform in the Anglophone world, 1790–1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.
- Certeau (de), Michel. "Spatial Stories." In *Defining Travel: Diverse Visions*, edited by Susan L. Roberson, 88–104. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001.
- . "Walking in the City." In *The Certeau Reader*, edited by Graham Ward, 101–18. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Cler, Albert. "The Dilettante." In *Pictures of the French: A Series of Literary and Graphic Delineations of French Character by Jules Janin, Balzac, Cormenin ...*, 153–60. London: Orr and Co., 1840.
- Collins, Sarah (ed.). *Music and Victorian Liberalism: Composing the Liberal Subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Davies, J. Q. *Romantic Anatomies of Performance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.
- Davies, James Q. and Ellen Lockhart. (eds.). *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789–1851*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Dickens, Charles. *Sketches by "Boz": Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People*. 2 vols. London: John Macrone, 1836.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave*, 6th edition. London: Collins, 1851.
- "Fashion in Music." In *The Metropolitan: Monthly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 1 (May–August 1831): 23–4.
- Fuhrmann, Christina and Alison Mero (eds.). *Opera and Print Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2023.
- Grande, James. *Articulate Sounds: Music, Dissent, and Literary Culture, 1789–1840*. Oxford: British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2024.
- Grande, James and Brian H. Murray (eds.). *Scripture and Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. London: Bloomsbury, 2023.
- Grande, James and Carmel Raz (eds.). *Sound and Sense in British Romanticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.
- Hall-Witt, Jennifer. *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780–1880*. Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007.
- Hambridge, Katherine and Jonathan Hicks (eds.). *The Melodramatic Moment: Music and Theatrical Culture, 1790–1820*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Harley, J. B. "Maps, Knowledge and Power." In *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, edited by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, 277–312. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- . *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Jensen, Oskar Cox. *The Ballad-Singer in Georgian and Victorian London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

- Jensen, Oskar Cox, David Kennerley, and Ian Newman (eds.), *The Art of Miscellany: Charles Dibdin and Late Georgian Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1922.
- Langley, Leanne. *The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century*. PhD dissertation. University of North Carolina, 1983.
- McVeigh, Simon. *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Montemorra Marvin, Roberta (ed.). *Opera Outside the Box: Notions of Opera in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2022.
- Nead, Lynda. *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Olusoga, David. *Black and British: A Forgotten History*. Revised edition. London: Picador, 2021.
- Osterhammel, Jürgen. *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Otter, Chris. *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Parker, Roger and Susan Rutherford (eds.). *London Voices, 1820–1840*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.
- “Proceeding in Parliament of the Subject of Colonial Slavery.” *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 3, no. 16 (1 August 1830): 317–33.
- Sala, George Augustus. *Twice Round the Clock; Or, The Hours of the Day and Night in London*. London: Houlston and Wright, 1859.
- Schmitz, Oscar A. H. *Das Land ohne Musik: Englische Gesellschaftsprobleme*. 4th edition. Munich: G. Müller, 1914.
- Smart, Mary Ann. “The Traffic in Voices: The Exchange Value of Italian Opera in Giuseppe Mazzini’s London.” In *London Voices, 1820–1840: Vocal Performers, Practices, Histories*, edited by Roger Parker and Susan Rutherford. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. 33–50.
- Taruskin, Richard. *The Oxford History of Western Music*. 6 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Telfair, Charles. *Some Account of the State of Slavery at Mauritius since the British Occupation in 1810*. London: James Ridgway, 1830.
- The Musical World*. 17 May 1838. 47.
- Tomlinson, Gary. “Monumental Musicology.” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 113, no. 2 (2007): 349–74.
- Weber, William. *The Great Transformation of Music Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Williams, Gavin (ed.). *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sound and the Unmaking of Sense*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Winter, James. *London’s Teeming Streets*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Zucchi, John E. *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-century Paris, London and New York*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999.

## Abstract

After centuries in which music history has been routinely parcelled according to genre and/or national schools, the idea of “urban music,” of music in and of the city, has suddenly become a compelling category. The sense of escape, of liberation from previous, constraining terms of reference, whether from ideologies of “the music itself,” or from contentious divisions between “popular” and “serious,” or from vague sounding-articulations of the nation-state, might seem immediately obvious. Also beckoning are renewed conceptions of what could broadly be called “music and nature”: the manner in which music can define itself *vis-à-vis* the material world in which it exists. However, amid such celebrations it may occasionally be salutary to pause for reflection. What constraints are brought into being by the embrace of this new category of “the urban”? In particular, does the presence of a definable material space—as opposed, say, to the imagined community of the nation-state—have its own challenges and commitments? The present reflection addresses these issues with reference to a particular time and space: the case of London at a moment (the 1830s) when it liked to consider itself the pre-eminent “world city.”

**Roger Parker** is Professor of Music Emeritus at King’s College London, having previously taught at Cornell, Oxford and Cambridge. He is General Editor (with Gabriele Dotto) of the Donizetti critical edition, published by Ricordi, and Repertoire Consultant for Opera Rara. His most recent book is *A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years* (Penguin, 2012; rev. ed. 2015), written jointly with Carolyn Abbate. From 2013 to 2018 he was Director at King’s of the ERC-funded project *Music in London, 1800–1851*. He is working on a complete edition of Donizetti’s solo songs, and a book about music in London in the 1830s.