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Seeking a Philosophy of Music in Higher Education: the Case of Mid-Nineteenth Century

Edinburgh

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Abstract

In 1851-2 the Trustees of the Reid bequest at the University of Edinburgh undertook an investigation into music education. Concerned that the funds which supported the Chair of Music should be spent as efficiently and effectively as possible, they consulted professional and academic musicians in search of new forms of teaching music at university level. The investigation itself, and the resulting correspondence, illuminate the problems inherent in defining music for the academy. They reflect the difficult position of music as a profession, as well as its uneasy relationship with science and ideas of craft and genius. For modern music educators, such an investigation invites an opportunity to consider the basic tenets of music as an academic subject. The questions posed by the Edinburgh Trustees go to the heart of what it means to teach and study music, and demonstrate the value of historical perspectives for interrogating present-day norms and practice.

Keywords

Edinburgh; university; music history; music education; music theory

Scholars of music education have long used comparative studies as a means for critique and evaluation of practice. In this article I draw on historical circumstances as a prompt for deeper consideration of some of the present-day values and practices within higher music education. In the mid-nineteenth century, professors at the University of Edinburgh were obliged to define music education for the university from scratch when the wealthy amateur musician General John Reid (1721-1807) bequeathed funds for a music professorship. As the Reid Trustees discovered through an exploratory process in the late 1830s and 1840s, there was no suitable example of university-level music education to use as a model. The Edinburgh professors worked with their own prejudices about music as a profession or occupation, about music education in other contexts, and about the situation and purpose of a university education. Their prejudices and contexts were very different from our own. Moreover, practical music making had specific gender and class contexts which complicated its status. Without a history of higher-level music teaching, the problem of assimilating music to the university context meant examining some fundamental questions about the scope and meaning of music as a university subject.

Tensions between theory and practice, and questions over the relationship between theory and art, were overlaid on the types of student attending the University and the music classes, and their expectations. Three different modes of music study emerged: first, musical studies for the amateur or dilettante; second, music as an intellectual, university subject; and third, professional training in music. In each case the relationship between music inside and outside the University would be different. Within the three strands, correspondents debated the appropriate mix of theory and practice and the content of both elements.

The issues raised during these debates can both inform and challenge modern-day music educators, demanding consideration of identity and purpose. The ‘problem’ of music in the University, and the arguments recorded during the Edinburgh debate, recall the multiple options

and identities available for music education. Correspondents discussed possibilities including acoustics, performance, aesthetics, harmony and counterpoint, analysis and other areas of ‘theory’. In terms of students, they considered amateurs, aspiring composers, performers and teachers, those with a scientific interest, and even instrument makers. The potential of the university professor’s role to go beyond the classroom was also important. The questions raised by the correspondence were varied and apply equally to modern practice. What kinds of music education were, and are, relevant for performers, composers or amateurs? How long should a general music education last? And is the University a suitable institution for music at all? A broader question concerned the relationship between music in the University and music in ‘every-day life’. Although modern-day university schemes for music education usually cover broad areas of both theory and practice, the relationship between the two is rarely specified or interrogated, and juxtaposition, rather than integration, of various elements has become the norm. Finally, the problem of music raised more fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of higher education and its relationship to life and work.

The Edinburgh debates place current questions concerning the identity of music at the higher education level into a long historical perspective, drawing on a time when the precarious position of music within the university meant its very foundations were under consideration. In exploring the multiple identities of music and education both in the mid-nineteenth century and today, I identify both some of the problems facing music educators and the potential for a new way of valuing the multi-faceted nature of the subject.

The ‘Problem’ of Music at the University of Edinburgh

When a small group set about discovering the nature of music teaching at British and continental universities in 1851-2, the University of Edinburgh had already been attempting to define music as a university subject for 14 years. General Reid’s intention, stated in his will, was to

‘effectually establish and perpetually secure a fund for the endowment of a Professorship of Music... - an art and science in which the Scots stand unrivalled by all the neighbouring nations in pastoral melody, and sweet combination of sounds...’ⁱ The professor would be responsible for organising an annual memorial concert, as well as academic lectures. As the Fund’s Trustees noted, music was ‘a science which has not hitherto been the subject of Academical instruction in Scotland’.ⁱⁱ Undeterred, they set about defining music as a broadly scientific subject which could be taught and examined in the same way as other disciplines at the University. In practice, it proved difficult both to clarify the bounds of an academic musical subject, and to appoint a professor willing and able to lecture as well as to organize the annual concert and bring suitable status to the role.

In searching for a well-known practical musician who would bring esteem to the University, the Trustees had trouble engaging anyone who could also address the academic requirements, and who was willing to move from the centre of professional life in London. The first professor, John Thomson (1805-1841), was a relatively well-known Scottish composer. Thomson was appointed in 1839. He managed to put into action Reid’s requirement for a commemorative concert, but had given no lectures by his early death in May 1841. The second professor, Henry Bishop (1786-1855), fulfilled the need for an eminent performer, but boasted little academic distinction and was reluctant to move to Edinburgh. Although he gave two lectures, the class failed to attract students and Bishop resigned in November 1843. The third professor, Henry Hugo Pierson (1815-1873), was an English composer resident in Germany. Pierson’s short tenure was dogged by ill health and he tendered his resignation in February 1845, without carrying out any duties. By the mid-1840s it was clear to the Trustees that their approach of appointing well-known composers was not an effective way to run the professorship.

The fourth professor to be appointed was, therefore, a contrast. John Donaldson (1789-1865) was a local man with good connections, an amateur performer with an interest in acoustics.

Donaldson had been a close runner-up in the 1844 contest, and was elected to the professorship without a vote on 29 March 1845. He intended to establish the professorship as originally set out in General Reid's will and as detailed by the Trustees. The course of lectures outlined in his early manifesto included study of acoustics, musical instruments, music theory and analysis, history and philosophy of music, and technical composition. The subject as taught at Edinburgh was to be methodical, rigorous and, most importantly, scientific. Donaldson's insistence on scientific methods was, however, behind an eventual dispute and law case with the University. His methods needed expensive apparatus, and ample space. He claimed that Reid's bequest needed to provide not only the funds for his salary, but also money for equipment, instruments, books, and a music teaching room. Given the poor luck of the previous professors, members of the Senate were obviously keen that Donaldson should begin his teaching in the best possible way. Nevertheless, they did wonder 'whether Mr Donaldson could not undertake, with such apparatus and assistance as he can command, the preliminary course of Lectures which the Public and the Trustees have so anxiously looked for'.ⁱⁱⁱ Grants of £175 and £500 were made in January 1846, but Donaldson continued to make further demands on the Trustees.^{iv}

The Reid bequest was large – over £58,000, even after initial disbursements – but much of it had been earmarked by the Trustees and other professors for additions to other parts of the University: museums, the library, and the professors' pension fund. Additional spending on music was unpopular. It was the ongoing debate over funds that prompted a thorough investigation of what it might mean to teach music at university level in 1851-2. The Reid Trustees were determined that music should become a proper university subject, not just a practical, amateur interest: an identity for music inside the university had to be found. Yet they were not prepared to support the kind of teaching proposed by Donaldson. The investigation therefore had a specific purpose: to discover an academic identity for music which avoided the expensive focus on acoustics so far pursued by Donaldson.

Donaldson also considered his post important in the general promotion of musical activities and appreciation within the city. In July 1847 it emerged that the Trustees had deducted expenses for the Reid memorial concert and apparatus purchased for the classroom from Donaldson's salary. In response he emphasized the special nature of music, not only with regard to teaching materials, but in relation to its position in public life:

Music is an expensive pursuit, and if the Professor does not patronise, as it is termed, every scheme which may be supposed at all likely to promote it, he is reproached with lukewarmness and is sure to be stigmatised as "person who does nothing for music"! In truth he is expected to subscribe to everything connected with the Fine Arts... In conclusion, it ought to be prominently kept in view in considering my claims, that the Music Chair stands in a very different position from the other chairs in our University.^v

One of the key problems in defining music as an academic subject in the nineteenth century was striking this balance between imitating other subjects, and retaining a distinctively 'musical' curriculum. Emulating science, Classical languages or history was one key move in establishing music as worthy of university institutions; setting written exams and offering lectures were other, more general ways of clothing music in academic garb. These identified music as an academic subject inside the bounds of the University. Yet to achieve the aims understood to be central to Reid's will, to promote and safeguard Scottish music for its people, the Professor had to work both outside the University and outside the bounds of academic forms of music.

As Donaldson points out, the public also had expectations of a music professor, and within the university many students not interested in professional musical tuition were keen to take advantage of provision in music at a basic academic or practical level. We know little about Donaldson's students. In the early part of his tenure he reported large attendances at his classes, sometimes as many as 300 students. Of the 1849-50 session, Donaldson reported:

I have four courses of Lectures going on, and have allowed 302 to enrol their names. Of these 249 have matriculated; there are only 19 of our own Divinity Students. Of the remainder there are Professorial & Literary Gentlemen and Graduates of this University. Many of these have not enrolled their names in my Book.^{vi}

Reporting in 1852 to the magistrate attending to the dispute with the University, Donaldson listed ‘Dr Woodford, Inspector of Schools in Scotland, Mr Stephen, Author of the Book of the Farm’ and ‘Mr John Cay Advocate’ as examples of the gentlemen who attended his lectures.^{vii} We also know that one of the medical undergraduates, Stuart Lithgow, attended music classes during the 1852-3 academic year.^{viii} As the majority of students had matriculated, they would have been attending music classes alongside their studies in another subject, most likely medicine or law. The range of students, and the need for general interest rather than professional training, meant Donaldson ‘considered vocal and instrumental teaching, that is by exhibition of vocal and instrumental performers an impossibility. It seemed to him unsuited to such a class as his.’^{ix} Music was required to remain distinct from other subjects, and its special situation was certainly part of the reason for Donaldson’s high level of expense during the early, successful years of his professorship.

Prior to their formal investigation, the Reid Trustees sought further details of teaching from Donaldson himself, and his responses affirm his commitment to a scientific basis for music teaching at the university. As well as musical theory, the committee defining the post in 1838 had identified analysis and history as forming part of the Professor’s role. Donaldson explained how his teaching in acoustics was equally essential as a foundation for these wider musical studies: ‘A critical analysis of classical works would necessarily require a complex musical apparatus for the exposition of what is essentially beautiful – the science of Aesthetics, of which Harmonic proportion is the principal element.’^x Although Donaldson was the first Professor of Music to implement a full course including teaching on acoustics, these aspects of the subject had in fact been present in the Trustees’ initial outline for prospective candidates for the Chair in 1838.

Harmonics, Acoustics and ‘the principles of Musical Composition’ were judged by the Committee as aspects of musical study that would ‘ensure a course of Instruction fit to be adopted in a great University.’^{xi} Aesthetics was an intellectual element of musical studies, although Donaldson’s teaching utilized practical exercises, and was well-suited to the young gentlemen at Edinburgh. Donaldson therefore argued that his approach adhered to the terms of appointment, as well as representing the ideal academic and institutional identity for music. But Acoustics represented only a small part of what might be expected from a musical education, and required expenses unacceptable to the Trustees.

Within the University, therefore, music had problems of both status and identity. How should it compare to other subjects? How could its academic credentials be established, and what was the balance between academic and creative elements? And how did music study relate to music as a professional occupation or amateur interest?

Investigating Music as an Academic Subject

Seeking to gain a sense of the way in which music was taught at other institutions, and no doubt with the intention of proving Donaldson’s apparatus unnecessary, the Reid Trustees first approached representatives at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge for information. Both Universities had hosted music professorships since the Renaissance, when music formed a part of the core studies for the Quadrivium. However, both professorships were largely inactive until later in the nineteenth century, and there was little to gain from this correspondence. William Fishburn Donkin (1814-69), Savilian Professor of Astronomy, wrote on behalf of the University of Oxford. Donkin’s interest in acoustics might explain why he was thought a suitable respondent; his *Acoustics, theoretical: Part I* was published after his death.^{xii} He noted that the current Professor neither resided in Oxford nor gave lectures, although William Crotch, Professor from 1799 to 1847, had given lectures at the start of the nineteenth century.^{xiii} The only duty performed by the Music

Professor in 1851 (none other than Edinburgh's former Professor, Henry Bishop) was 'examination of the exercises written by Candidates for Musical Degrees.' The case at Oxford was complicated by the presence of a 'Choragus', appointed to teach, organise and oversee practical music within the university. Nevertheless, according to Donkin, 'I never heard of any other instrument or apparatus provided either for Choragus or Professor.' With regard to the Edinburgh Trustees' particular interests, Donkin had an interesting further observation: 'I may add that the subject of Harmonics is assigned to the Savilian Professor of Geometry... But that Professor has no apparatus provided for him and has never lectured on harmonics within my recollection.'^{xiv}

Cambridge's representative, Fr. C. Mathison, was even less forthcoming: 'There is no apparatus... It is not necessary to deliver any lectures. The present Professor who has held the chair about 15 years has never given any; but he intends I believe to do so next term... If he shall lecture the fee will probably be 2 guineas for the course (one term's lecture)'.^{xv} The Professor in question was Thomas Attwood Walmisley (1814-1856), who held the post between 1836 and 1856. Indeed, he had expressed his intention to give lectures again in a Royal Commission Report of 1852.^{xvi} The Commission commented favourably on Walmisley's proposals in terms that echo the scientific identity of music at Edinburgh and its suitability for the University environment: 'The science of Music possesses sufficient relations with the Exact Sciences to make its theory a branch of study which the University might very properly encourage; and there are very few subjects which would furnish the materials for a more attractive course of Lectures.'^{xvii} Walmisley's lectures, 'upon the Rise and Progress of the Piano-Forte School of Music from the time of Queen Elizabeth to the present', were held in 1853. While they reflected Donaldson's use of musical examples and excerpts, there is no suggestion that Walmisley touched on the subjects of acoustics that characterized Donaldson's teaching.

Finding the British responses of little use, the Edinburgh Trustees widened their investigations to continental Europe. The questions chosen this time were much broader and

concerned more abstract ideas about music teaching, rather than an account of current practice. The questions were prepared by Finlay Dun, a local musician best known for his editions of Scottish folk tunes. This work would have brought him into close contact with the first Reid Professor, John Thomson, and another local song collector and arranger who also commented on the Trustees' concerns, George Farquhar Graham. Both Graham and Dun had been unsuccessful candidates for the Edinburgh Chair of Music, and these circumstances no doubt influenced their opinions on the work of its current occupant. Dun's questions, reproduced below, show his concern with music's identity as an art, and how this could relate to the scientific approach taken by Donaldson. He also touches on an ongoing concern for modern practitioners: the potential differences between music as a professional subject of study, and as a liberal subject or amateur interest. Dun's final question is revealing of his particular concerns regarding the important context of the University education on offer in Edinburgh, and the necessity that the music course should adapt to its institutional context and its student body:

1. What do you understand by the expression "Theory of Music"?
2. What branches are included under the head of the Theory of Music?
3. Do Acoustics and Mathematics belong in any way or in any measure to the Theory of Music? And if so, in what way, and how far; and what is their direct influence if any, on Music as an Art, either as regards composition or performance?
4. What period of time would you consider requisite to impart to a public class of adult students a competent knowledge of the Theory of Music? And would you draw any distinction between the course requisite for students intending to make Music their profession, and for those, studying it merely as a branch of knowledge?
5. What Instrument or Instruments do you think necessary and best adapted for illustrating the subjects of a course on the Theory of Music?

6. Is a single teacher sufficient for instructing a large class in a given period- say two or three years- in all the branches included under the head of the Theory of Music?
7. If not, how many Teachers would be requisite for that purpose?
8. What course would seem to you that likely to be most practically and extensively useful, where the general attendance of Students as not likely to extend beyond one or two Sessions of the duration of six months each, where there was only one Teacher, and where the Professorship was not in an Academy of Music, but in a University where other branches of knowledge were taught, and where the prelections of the Professor were to be given as a branch of University education?

Responses were received from Louis Spohr and Adolf Bernhard Marx. Spohr had no obvious close connections to music education establishments, being engaged at the court of Kassel, and Dun described him as ‘the highest authority in musical matters in Europe... the greatest living composer of music’.^{xviii} In contrast, Marx was Professor and Director of Music at the University in Berlin, and had been involved in founding the Stern Conservatory in Berlin. Dun also included in his report passages from published volumes by Gottfried Weber, François-Joseph Fétis and Anton Reicha, relating to the objects of his questions (and supporting his own views on music education, particularly the place of acoustics).

The responses from the two continental musicians were similar in content. Dun provided a summary of Spohr’s letter, noting that ‘The branches he enumerates as coming under the head of the Theory of Music, all refer to the art of Musical Composition... And a knowledge of these branches is certainly requisite, either to compose music oneself, or thoroughly to understand and appreciate the musical compositions of others. What he understands by the practical part of music, is the performance of music...’^{xix} Spohr’s comments on acoustics are particularly interesting, as he draws distinctions between theoretical musical study and that intended for performers: ‘Acoustics

and that part of Mathematics which computes the vibrations of sonorous bodies are also considered branches of the Theory of Music. To the practical musicians, however they are superfluous, and are interesting only to the mere savant in music.^{’xx} A different type of music education was suitable for ‘such students as follow music merely as Dilettanti, then a part of the Theory is sufficient, namely Harmony, the whole of which may be taught in a year.’^{’xxi} For the serious music student, however, Spohr was not convinced that the University was able to provide an appropriate education. He advised that ‘a young man, who wishes to devote himself exclusively to music, ought not to attend a University, but ought rather to take private lessons in order to be able to give his undivided attention to the study of music; or better still he ought to repair to a Music school (a Conservatory of Music, such as now exists at Vienna, Prague, Berlin, Leipzig and Cologne) where he can receive instruction in everything worthy of his attention.’^{’xxii}

Marx, likewise, regarded the aim of musical instruction to be ‘the attainment of practical and useful results in respect of the art of musical composition and performance’.^{’xxiii} Marx was more familiar with the practicalities of teaching music and, of course, had experience in both a university and conservatoire environment. He immediately identified ‘the character of the institution’ as one of the aspects to take into account when planning a music studies. He had a broader idea of what might be contained in a Theory of Music curriculum: ‘The principal branches seem to me to be chalked out according to the object of instruction, 1st Theory of execution, vocal and instrumental, comprising the elements..., 2nd Theory of composition, the translation of which, either has been or will be published... 3rd Philosophy of the art, comprehending the basis of the whole superstructure, esthetics, method, &c.’^{’xxiv} Marx’s interest in philosophical approaches to music study may have been influenced by his location in a university. He emphasized the key place of practical experience in teaching music theory, concluding that ‘practice, aided and illustrated by theory profoundly based ought to be the principal end in view.’^{’xxv} Marx’s view on acoustics was similar to Spohr’s, restricting this subject to intellectuals (and instrument builders) rather than performers or

composers: 'I am not, at all of the opinion, that Acoustics & Mathematics pertain in any manner or degree to the Theory of Music, or that they constitute any part of the substance of the attainments necessary to the musician, whether he be composer, executor or instructor. It is only for a knowledge of the philosophical principles of musical science, & for the construction of musical instruments that these sciences are required.'^{xxvi}

The views expressed by Spohr and Marx were problematic for the University of Edinburgh. Putting aside Spohr's suggestion that serious music studies belonged outside the university at all, the continental approach clearly challenged the Edinburgh professors to decide the purpose of their teaching in order to clarify the appropriate content. The University had never intended, in its music provision, to act as a conservatoire. The students in the music classes mainly fell squarely into the 'dilletante' box, for whom Spohr recommended study of harmony alone. Yet the University was determined to set up a thorough scheme in Music Theory, and this appeared to take different guises for performers, composers and Spohr's 'savants'. Where did the philosophical and acoustical aspects of music studies stand in relation to Edinburgh's educational remit?

Finlay Dun himself was clear on his opinion on the appropriate form of music to be taught by the Chair, although we must not forget his status as a disappointed candidate for the position. Dun's own sketch of a 'Course of the Theory of Music' was restricted to musical rudiments, composition and analysis, beginning with musical grammar and counterpoint, covering Classical forms and ending with thorough bass in the following schema:

1. Musical Grammar, which treats of musical notation, tones, scales, keys or modes, time and other elementary materials of the arts...
2. The structure and laws of Melody...
3. The structure and laws of Harmony...
4. Counterpoint [involving] the practical application of all the students previously acquired musical knowledge...

5. figures and canons...

6 forms of the various kinds of the so called free style of composition, comprising the plan or design for the structure of a song, air with variations, Rondo, Sonata, Symphony &c....

7. Vocal and Instrumental Composition...

8. Thorough Bass.^{xxvii}

Dun argued that Reid's references to 'Theory of Music' should be understood to refer to composition and performance, and that 'the word science as regards Music is popularly used to mean Harmony or Counterpoint.'^{xxviii} Gottfried Weber's *Essay on the Theory of Music*, for example, was identified as a good model, shunning acoustics and other mathematical 'pedantry'.^{xxix} Acoustics and mathematics as a branch of music theory were dismissed as outdated, cast as an enemy to modern progress in composition:

if by the Theory of Music is meant speculations or experiments mathematical or acoustical in relation to sound, then I very much doubt the use of pushing these too far in trying to apply them to actual music, to the practice and composition of Music such as it is at the present day. We know indeed from the History of Music that from the earliest times theories and systems have proved the greatest obstacles in the way of the development and advancement of the Art.^{xxx}

According to Dun, an overbearing focus on theory, rather than composition, was harmful to progress in the 'golden age' of British music, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

'Notwithstanding the successful and useful labours of the men just referred to, the progress of Music was slow, and chiefly because it has been regarded and treated more as an object of learning- more as a science than as an art...'^{xxxi} Finally, irrelevance of acoustics for composers was confirmed by example and analogy:

For a man may be an accomplished composer or a great contrapuntist, much as a Mozart and Haydn, a Bach and Palestrina, without knowing that a given sound and its Fifth are in the

relation of 2 to 3; and according to my thorough conviction teachers of music make a very great blunder when they mix up with their teaching demonstrations by [19] means of Fractions, Powers, Roots and Equations and other forms of calculation. To set out with such things in the exposition of the Theory of Music appears to me just as if in teaching Drawing, one were to begin with the Theory of Light and of Colours, of straight and curved lines, or in teaching a language with the Philosophy of language; or in teaching a child to say Papa and Mamma with demonstrations of grammatical propositions.’

Dun sought to draw lines between the different branches of musical study, suggesting that Donaldson was more concerned with aesthetics than music.^{xxxii} He also dismissed the Professor’s claims for musical instruments and mechanical apparatus, arguing that mechanical means would be no substitute for live performance, and that the Edinburgh students were unlikely to reach the standards required to study instrumentation as a branch of composition.^{xxxiii} Dun’s idea of ‘music’ was clearly oriented around practical skills and real examples. Aesthetics and acoustics were based on more abstract ideas, better suited for an intellectual environment but perhaps too far removed from either professional training or appeal for amateur enthusiasts.

Dun further advocated studying theory alongside, and as a branch of, practice in an article published in October 1852, at the height of the University debate. He again made the distinction between practice-based theory, and the abstract acoustics pursued by Donaldson: ‘What I understand here by the term theory of music, is not abstract speculations on all the subjects having reference to the various phenomena of sound, but merely what immediately refers and applies to the practice of the art. By the theory then, I here mean the grammar of music, and the principles upon which musical composition is based, and the laws by which it was regulated.’^{xxxiv} Dun’s argument was helped by his references to the marriage of theory and practice in Germany, a country whose musical life and heritage was much admired (and envied) by the British. His comparison with German practice served not only to strengthen his argument for the importance of a practical

identity for theoretical studies, but further to argue for the place of music theory as a respectable and relevant subject for respectable people: ‘to make you aware of the fact of music being there considered a pursuit not unfit and ineligible, as a by-study, for men following the learned professions.’^{xxxv}

Such a damning account of the ‘scientific’ approach to music was essential for bolstering the Reid Trustee’s claims that Professor Donaldson had no need for elaborate apparatus in order to meet the terms of the post as intended by General Reid. The definitions we have seen of ‘Theory of Music’ show that Donaldson would have been unusual in prioritizing acoustics as central to music theory teaching. In practice, Donaldson’s own accounts show that his curriculum was as broad as those discussed by Marx and Spohr, with acoustics featuring among other subjects such as counterpoint, harmony, musical form and aesthetics. Yet Donaldson maintained that the acoustical basis for music was essential for a full understanding of the mechanics of composition and musical appreciation.

Although Donaldson was successful in securing support for his projects (witness the magnificent Reid Hall and musical instrument museum in Edinburgh today), his energy and health were spent on legal difficulties and his battles over the conduct of the Chair. His successors Herbert Oakeley (professor 1865-1891) and Frederick Niecks (professor 1891-1914) continued to struggle to find a form of music studies that could fulfil the terms of the Reid bequest, fit into the University and provide useful and appropriate education for the variety of students wishing to attend classes. Difficulties increased in the 1890s due to public and professional demands on the chair and amid calls for the institution of a professional training school for Scottish musicians.^{xxxvi} The tensions between theory and practice clearly continued to dominate and challenge the situation of music in the academic university.

Music and the challenges of modern Higher Education

Dun's questions form a stimulating starting place for considering the relevance of the 1852 enquiry for twenty-first century music educators. Some questions are, naturally, more concerned with practical problems (though the number of teachers employed, and amount of time reserved, for music theory teaching might present some interesting cross-institution comparisons). The place of acoustics and mathematics within music theory might provoke more debate among modern-day practitioners. Dun took the dismissal of theory and acoustics to an extreme, suggesting that the study of too much mathematics might be injurious to compositional progress. Yet Donaldson, and others, held that understanding music as an abstract science was a foundation for musical appreciation, analysis and composition.

A further important framework stems from the key questions I identified as facing the Edinburgh Trustees. How should music compare to other subjects? How could its academic credentials be established, and what was the balance between academic and creative elements? And how did music study relate to music as a professional occupation or amateur interest? Finding a place for mathematics and science within music was essential for establishing the status of music as an academic subject in the nineteenth century. Within the context of the University of Edinburgh, these were the best subjects with which to draw parallels. The same is not true of the modern university, yet music still borrows heavily from history and literature as models for academic identity.

In particular, the relationship between music 'inside' and 'outside' the University is identified as an overarching concern throughout the Edinburgh investigation, and remains particularly pertinent today. Is there merit in a specific 'University music' that bears no relation to the interests and values of musicians and listeners outside academia? Dun's probing questioned the connections between musical knowledge and musical artistry; between musical skills, processes and knowledge and the more difficult-to-grasp areas of creativity and flair. His assertion was driven by the belief that too much study of forms and processes would hamper creativity. What is the

value of music theory, skills and knowledge (whether for composition, performance or appreciation)? How do these translate into artistic achievement, often characterised by ‘genius’ or ‘talent’, or could there be a negative effect? Conversely, do artistry and creativity (core values of ‘real-life’ musical activity) have a place in the university?

Such concerns are not unknown to modern scholars. ‘Can composition be taught?’ ask Mandy Lupton and Christine Bruce, for example.^{xxxvii} The key elements in composition teaching described by Lupton and Bruce as ‘knowledge’ (imitation of the masters) and ‘skill’ (mastery of techniques) were central to nineteenth-century music education at university level. Not only were these aspects available to be taught via lectures and classes, and codified in books and treatises, they were also subject to examination. Yet these aspects are characterised by Lupton and Bruce as ‘craft’ (at the bottom of a hierarchy) rather than ‘art’ (at the top), and it is the transition from craft, skill or knowledge to art and (eventually) genius which caused problems for late-nineteenth century musicians and their institutions. Moreover, while free composition might have a higher musical status, composers struggle to defend their academic credentials in the face of increased quantification in appraisals of both research and student achievement.

Although musical performance and composition are now commonplace in university music offerings, both have struggled to find full assimilation in the academic environment. Free composition often continues to require an academic cloak in the form of reflections, programme notes or explanations. Both composition and performance are seeking academic validation under the guise of practice-led research. Paul Draper and Scott Harrison, for example, assess the ‘growth pangs’ of practice-led research in an Australian DMA programme.^{xxxviii} They show that the relative academic merit of practice-based and written work remains skewed towards the traditional thesis model. The authors close with the hope that ‘creative and performing artists will increasingly colonize, then dominate their own unique research space’.^{xxxix} This hope seems surprising given the central place of composition and performance to some concepts of music education in the mid-

nineteenth century. Yet creative work is still considered in many contexts to be fundamentally non-academic.

Recent debates among UK scholars have highlighted the particular problem of the academic value of composition in the context of research quality assessments. John Croft identifies the ‘delusion’ shared by many composers who believe ‘that they are doing a kind of ‘research’’, criticizing the pretence required in order to gain grants and maintain academic status as anathema to the norms of compositional practice and the production of ‘good’ music.^{xi} In the same way that the Edinburgh Trustees sought assimilation to academic models from other disciplines, Croft suggests it is the ‘institutional imposition of the research metaphor’ that is both inappropriate and destructive to compositional practice, suggesting instead that composers insist on ‘using a vocabulary appropriate to music’.^{xii} In response to Croft’s comments, Ian Pace has argued that composition and performance can, indeed, embody many of the characteristics of academic research, and ought to do so within the modern academic environment.^{xiii} However, Pace identifies the same kinds of ambiguities that dogged music in the mid nineteenth century, and begins to ask some of the fundamental questions raised by the Edinburgh Trustees. The distinction between technical and academic education and between liberal and professional aims remain key: ‘Crucially, if one comes to study composition, whether at a university or conservatoire, is one seeking to learn essential technical skills, or to engage with a much wider reflective and critical approach to composition?’^{xliii}

Madden et al go further, suggesting that the difficulties inherent in measuring musical achievement affect not only issues of status, accreditation and funding, but mark music out as a ‘luxury’ subject.^{xliv} The context of university regulations and expectations, structures of examination and measurement, models of historical and scientific subjects, and the subsequent history of academic assimilation perhaps help explain why practical and creative elements have ended up so far outside the academy mainstream.

The Edinburgh case study suggests other ways in which study of historical debate can help focus interrogation of present-day practice and understanding. One important question which has remained high on the agenda is the relationship between academic education and professional needs and identities. The role of the University with respect to professional musicians was one of the challenges facing Edinburgh. The Trustees chose to focus on the theory of music as a non-professional subject, and avoided notions of a practical music school or academy within the university. The profession of musician would have been considered unsuitable for many of Edinburgh's students. Certainly, the status of the music professor was an issue for the University. As the correspondence shows, though, opinions varied on whether academic studies could be relevant to professional musicians, and how much musical study was suitable for amateurs.

Dun's question on the course of musical study suitable for professionals and amateurs was, of course, particularly relevant to the Edinburgh context. Donaldson considered a particular form of musical tuition suitable for his students, mainly amateurs. Spohr and Marx also identified different types of musical education for different cohorts of students. Spohr's comments on the unsuitability of a university environment for aspiring professional performers raises questions about the value of 'university music' for practitioners. Marx, likewise, suggested that music theory and philosophy was suited only for intellectuals and instrument makers. For both writers, music theory was very much a secondary consideration; both prioritised performers and composers in their responses. On the other hand, Spohr considered a year's worth of harmony tuition sufficient for any musical amateur. Music departments in universities still teach those intending to make music their profession, and those who will seek other employment.

Placing high-level music theory and academic studies within professional programmes, and performance and composition within universities, are now accepted as standard practice. However, the relationships between university and conservatoire music, and the role of academic work in professional training, continue to create tensions. Ought professional orientation to direct music-

educational content, or should we disagree with Spohr and Marx's approaches and posit a core of music skills and knowledge for both professional and liberal ends? Music as a liberal art remains important in colleges on both sides of the Atlantic, and the spectrum of 'employability' relevance for music students is not new; as Allen Britton suggested in 1961, music educators see music education 'in the dual sense, taking it to imply not only instruction in music but also a more general, extra-musical education through or by means of music'.^{xlv} 'Transferable skills' are still key selling-points of music degrees, whether overtly academic or practically-oriented. Music continues to provide the general intellectual development identified by our Victorian forebears, and to narrow curricula by professional intention at an early stage would stunt both creative and intellectual growth, both musical and extra-musical. For both students and employers, the liberal or non-vocational ideal remains relevant. Yet asking questions about the relevance of each aspect of music curricula and the relationship of 'university music' to 'music', together with investigating the constitution of our student cohorts, might produce a more nuanced approach to teaching as well as a more honest conversation about the links between education and future opportunities.

Academic status in the context of Edinburgh's University heritage played an important part in the forms music could take as a subject. There was an obligation to steer clear of overtly vocational studies, and to assimilate music into other forms of academic study – in this case, the sciences. Status and expectations of higher-level study remain important concerns. The correspondents involved in the 1852 investigation were working in different, and emerging, spheres of institutional identities, whether within Britain or in continental Europe. Music was required to identify with its institutional context – academic or vocational, and within these, humanity, art or science. Dun was careful to clarify that the music professor was working within a university environment, rather than an Academy of Music. As the distinction between university and conservatoire fed into different models of music education, ideas about the purpose and role of each received further attention.

Donaldson also struggled to balance the demands of the University with the public. Some members of the public became part of the amateur attendance at his popular classes, but others expected the professor to provide for them via concerts and support of local initiatives. While ‘theory of music’ seemed to preclude musical appreciation, public performances were part of the Professor’s role under the auspices of the annual Reid concert. Moreover, Reid’s will had implied a general concern for the state and preservation of Scottish music, and its appreciation. Then, as now, universities were a force for public, as well as individual, gain, and carried obligations towards general education and what might now be called ‘outreach’. These circumstances underlined music’s identity as different from other subjects. This difference played out in recruiting professors, setting boundaries and forming a class of students, as well as defining the academic subject.

Music not only straddles the different forms and identities of academia, but challenges its boundaries. The difficulties inherent in placing music within the academy prompt questions about the nature and purpose of higher education which also have historical roots. Writers such as John Henry Newman give some indications of the issues involved in defining education in the mid-nineteenth century, and the role of the educator and educational establishment. Newman’s 1853 treatise *On the Idea of a University* gives one early-nineteenth century account of the tradition of liberal education. Newman famously described the University as ‘a place of *teaching* universal *knowledge*’. Rather than subject-specific education or research, it would train the intellect and fit young men for life in general: ‘it educates the intellect to reason well in all matters, to reach out towards truth, and to grasp it.’^{xlvi} With his Oxford allegiance firm, Newman wrote scathingly of those who suggested the University might teach in relation to a trade or occupation.

Some of these conflicts continue to arise in modern scholarship. Ronald Barnett’s work, most notably in his 1990 volume *The Idea of a University* continues to draw on the intellect-training model of higher education espoused by Newman, and the associated emancipation from discipline-specific knowledge and direct economic gain.^{xlvii} John White notes, however, the

philosophy of higher education is more difficult to define than that of the education of children, because higher students have *chosen* to study: students at University may be at any stage in their post-school lives, and the relationship of their studies to their lives is an individual one.^{xlviii} As White suggests, ‘Some of them will be equipping themselves for a profession; others immersing themselves in an activity they love; others standing back from their lives to reflect on their social world and their place in it, or on the purpose, if any, of human life.’^{xlix} The course content, and the student experience, may be the result of factors including the student’s own choice, academic values and decisions, institutional policy and external regulators. It is not surprising, therefore, that identities within modern higher education range as widely as those identified during the Edinburgh investigations.

For modern practitioners, the context of higher education represents a different force. No longer the preserve of the elite, students attending Universities now are almost certainly in the position of needing to build a career on their education. The University has taken on a new role in relation to society and to its students. The debates which took place surrounding music education and the music degree, particularly encapsulated in the correspondence to and from Edinburgh University in the early 1850s, illustrate a subject on the cusp of older, liberal values and the demands of professional education and a new identity. As a degree subject, music had always straddled the professional and the liberal, appealing chiefly to the highest-status among professional musicians (mainly organists), and musically-gifted amateurs, for whom a career in music would have been unthinkable – on grounds of the gender and social class. The example of mid-nineteenth-century Edinburgh therefore illustrates not only the process of grappling with a new University subject, but a new way of thinking about higher education.

Modern higher education bestrides the two philosophical standpoints of liberal and vocational, developing a student’s mind for general purposes as well as developing skills and knowledge for specific ends. Music is perfectly placed to sit across this boundary, and while this

was part of the problem facing educators at Edinburgh in the 1850s, it provides important opportunities for new meaning and relevance in the modern curriculum. However, one result of the multiple aims and meanings of music in the curriculum has been a fragmentation of its academic identity. Too often students meet a range of uncoordinated elements of a music degree course, presented without reference to the intended outcomes. While allowing students to pursue individual aims in exactly the way outlined by John White, at the same time the course becomes fractured and incoherent. Straddling the bounds between liberal and vocational education is, therefore, a trait that needs to become a defining – and celebrated – feature of the music degree curriculum, rather than a continuing obstacle.

What can be learnt from the experiences in Edinburgh of over 150 years ago? I have suggested that Music should be valued precisely for its ability to draw together elements of intellectual work and creativity, professional skills and liberal development, both examinable science and abstract genius. In these features it answers the many and varied requirements of modern institutions and their students. Perhaps, then, when the question of ‘what is a University for?’ is raised, the answer should include all these elements. And when the ‘ideal’ University subject is sought, newer subjects, with Music at the helm, should be celebrated for their diversity and flexibility.

Conclusion

Music in the academy continues to be shaped by its context and heritage, while remaining unique as a subject. It is important to recognise the impact of this heritage on the subject’s form and identity, as a key part of disciplinary formation. Yet ‘it’s always been done this way’ is no longer an adequate explanation for disciplinary content, either to students or to funders. Music inside the university undoubtedly has a strong connection with music in the wider world: students gain professional skills, either directly or indirectly, as well as knowledge which will inform future

work. Musicology also carries an influence on musical composition and performance, education and appreciation. And, finally, there remains a firm place for the ‘science’ of music, knowledge and discovery for its own sake, for amateur enjoyment and personal development.

The historical case study examined here has provided a window onto concerns of theory and practice and their place within music teaching. Revisiting the basic questions of what we teach and how we teach it gives us the opportunity to examine fundamental ideas about music teaching and its relationship to skills, knowledge and professional practice. It suggests we tackle some of the basic questions about who we are teaching, and why, and how different aspects of music intersect to produce a curriculum for different ends. It also points to continuing problems of status and identity where creative elements are adopted in academic contexts, which we will need to navigate in the ongoing process of developing music as an academic subject. The same questions might be applied more broadly when we consider the merits of a liberal education, the place of creativity in the university, or the relative demands and approaches of technical, vocational and academic studies. It is vital that we critique, articulate, and celebrate the multiple aims and outcomes of higher music education, in all its forms and to all its audiences, if the subject is to thrive, maintain status, and remain meaningful for future generations.

ⁱ Will contained in Edinburgh University Archives [EUA]/Da 46.9. Further details of the early Edinburgh professorships can be found in Rosemary Golding, *Music and Academia in Victorian Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

ⁱⁱ ‘Report of the Committee on the Endowment’ in *Minute Book of the Reid Trustees* (EUA/Da 46.1) 29 October 1839, 17.

ⁱⁱⁱ Extract from Senate Minutes, 16, in *Copies of minutes of the Senatus Academicus relating to the Chair of Music, together with copies of other documents 1845-51* (EUA/Da 46.13.3), 11.

^{iv} See *Scroll Minute Book of the Reid Trustees* (EUA/Da 46.2), 17 January 1846 and 22 January 1846. A Catalogue dating from 1852 includes acoustical apparatus designed to produce tones of different qualities and for precise

measurements to be made. Items included musical instruments and ephemera, such as ‘cornets of different shapes and sizes producing thereby different qualities of tone’, organ pipes and stops, monochords and tuning forks. Other accounts show spending on musical instruments from around the world, printed music from Renaissance motets to contemporary publications, theoretical books in English, French and German, sets of concert programmes, and subscriptions to music journals. See Music accounts (EUA/Da 46.11). In an early report relating to the alleged mismanagement of the Reid funds, the Edinburgh Magistrates suggested that ‘Professor Donaldson with all his talents never could, in accordance with... Gen. Reid’s will give “a critical exposition of all musical works, ancient and modern” without an entire musical library; and he never could give instructions on the Philosophy of Sound, Musical Intonation &ca., without an entire set of instruments, adapted to these purposes.’ See Magistrates of Edinburgh and Reid Trustees, ‘Report relating to alleged mismanagement of funds’ (1848) in Papers relating to the Reid bequest 1848-1855 (EUA/Da 46.13.1), 9.

^v Letter from Donaldson dated 14 July 1847 in *Minute Book*, 31 July 1847, 261.

^{vi} Letter from Donaldson dated 31 March 1849 with later amendments, 217 in *Copies of minutes 1845-51*. Of the previous session, 1848-9, Donaldson had reported enrolment of 223, though he estimated that ‘not more than 150 attended pretty regularly’. During 1849 he had also given a summer course of two classes, ‘the larger portion of those who attended did not matriculate’.

^{vii} ‘Notes of Proceedings at Meeting before Mr George Moir Advocate’, 8 Sept 1852 in *Papers 1852-1855*, 7.

^{viii} Lithgow’s diary and notebook is preserved in the National Library of Scotland MS 2551.

^{ix} ‘Notes of Proceedings’, 5.

^x Letter from Donaldson dated 31 March 1849 in *Copies of Minutes 1845-51*, 236-8.

^{xi} *Minute Book*, 23 June 1838, 18.

^{xii} W.F. Donkin, *Acoustics, theoretical: Part 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1870).

^{xiii} letter from W.F. Donkin dated August 14 1851 in *Papers 1848-1855*.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

^{xv} letter from Fr. C. Mathison dated August 15 1851 in *Papers 1848-1855*.

^{xvi} Royal Commission on the State, Discipline, Studies and Revenues of University and Colleges of Cambridge, *Evidence* (PP 1852-3 [1559] XLIV.1), 137.

^{xvii} Royal Commission, 1852-3, *Report*, 68.

^{xviii} Dun, overview of responses from Spohr and Marx in *Papers 1852-55*, 5.

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- ^{xix} Ibid., 3; all emphasis original.
- ^{xx} Ibid., 12.
- ^{xxi} Ibid.
- ^{xxii} Ibid., 13.
- ^{xxiii} Ibid., 7.
- ^{xxiv} Ibid., 20-21.
- ^{xxv} Ibid., 22.
- ^{xxvi} Ibid., 21.
- ^{xxvii} Dun, ‘Memoranda regarding the branches usually included in a Course of the Theory of Music’ in *Papers 1848-55*.
- ^{xxviii} Dun, ‘Notes as to the Musical Construction of General Reid’s Will and Codicil’, 7 July 1852, in *Papers 1848-55*, 1-3.
- ^{xxix} Ibid., 17.
- ^{xxx} Ibid., 7.
- ^{xxxi} Ibid, 13.
- ^{xxxii} Dun, ‘Additional Notes by Finlay Dun on ‘Statement for the Information of the Patrons’, 16 September 1852, in *Papers 1852-55*, 6.
- ^{xxxiii} Ibid., 9-11.
- ^{xxxiv} Finlay Dun, ‘On the Advantages of Studying the Theory along with the Practice of Music; with suggestions as to methods of teaching the combined study’, in *The Scottish Educational and Literary Journal* Vol. I no. 1 (October 1852), 33.
- ^{xxxv} Ibid., 34.
- ^{xxxvi} See Golding, *Music and Academia*, chapter 4.
- ^{xxxvii} Mandy Lupton and Christine Bruce, ‘Craft, process and art: Teaching and learning music composition in higher education’ in *British Journal of Music Education* vol. 27 (2010), 271-287.
- ^{xxxviii} Paul Draper and Scott Harrison, ‘Through the eye of a needle: the emergence of a practice-led research doctorate in music’ in *British Journal of Music Education* Vol. 28 (2011), 87-102: 97.
- ^{xxxix} Ibid., 100.
- ^{xl} John Croft, ‘Composition is not Research’ in *Tempo* Vol. 69 no. 272 (2015), 6-11: 6.
- ^{xli} Ibid., 11.

^{xlii} Ian Pace, ‘Composition and Performance can be, and often have been, Research’ in *Tempo* Vol. 70 no. 275 (2016)

accessed via <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/12804>

^{xliii} *Ibid.*, 2

^{xliv} K. Madden, D. Orenstein, A. Oulanov, Y. Novitskaya, I. Bazan, T. Ostrowski, and M.H. Ahn,

‘Music Education, Aesthetics, and the Measure of Academic Achievement’ in *Creative Education* Vol. 5 (2014), 1740-1744: 1.

^{xlv} Allen Britton, ‘Music Education: An American Specialty’ in P.H. Lang (ed.) *One Hundred Years of Music in America* (New York: Schirmer, 1961), 211.

^{xlvi} John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University defined and Illustrated In Nine Discourses Delivered to the Catholics of Dublin* (1853), accessed via <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/24526/24526-h/24526-h.html#toc15>, 126.

^{xlvii} Ronald Barnett, *The Idea of Higher Education* (Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 1990).

^{xlviii} John White, ‘Philosophy and the aims of higher education’ in *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 22 no. 1 (1997), 7-17: 12.

^{xlix} *Ibid.*