Finding Musicology in nineteenth-century Britain: contexts and conflicts

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The academic study of music can be traced back as far as the middle ages in Britain, when music featured as one of the three subjects of the ‘Trivium’, the higher arts that formed the pinnacle of a gentleman’s education. Music was not treated as a practical subject (though many gentlemen would learn to play music, or sing) but as a science, as a set of physical laws, and in relation to magic and superstition. Despite these origins, music as a subject of study at universities, and the kinds of studies that might nowadays be identified as ‘musicology’, did not become part of the requirements for music degrees until the second half of the nineteenth century. With the waning of the middle ages and new enlightenment ideals, music’s mystical attributes were put aside and its physical study located firmly within the sciences. Music degrees, granted at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, were awarded on the basis of a compositional exercise alone. Candidates were not required to reside at the University, and so formal lecture courses were few and far between.\(^1\) William Crotch’s lectures of 1799-1806, addressing topics of music history and aesthetics, were a notable exception; the several series were attended by interested amateurs (both male and female) from the university and beyond but lapsed on Crotch’s move to London.\(^2\)

Although absent from the universities, amateur interest in the physics of music was a popular topic at gatherings and scientific societies, where inventive instruments demonstrating the phenomena of harmonics or tuning systems might be exhibited and investigated.\(^3\)

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\(^{1}\) An overview of the history of music at the universities during the nineteenth century can be found in Rosemary Golding, *Music and Academia in Victorian Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

\(^{2}\) Crotch was Professor of Music at Oxford between 1797 and 1847. Many of his Oxford lectures are held in autograph form at the Norfolk Record Office, NRO MSS 11064, 11229 and 11232. An edited form of some of Crotch’s lectures were published by him as *Substance of Several Courses of Lectures on Music* [1831] reprinted and introduced by Bernarr Rainbow in the series ‘Classic Texts in Music Education’ (Clarabricken: Boethius, 1986). A related publication, bringing together many of the music examples in a historical framework, is the *Specimens of various styles of music, referred to in a course of lectures, read at Oxford & London, and adapted to keyed instruments by Wm. Crotch, Mus.Doct. Prof. Mus. Oxon* (London: Printed for the author by R. Birchall, 1807).

the end of the eighteenth century this kind of activity was also to be found at informal parties of intellectuals, where musical items might sit alongside other entertainments. The increasing trend for collecting also extended to musical ephemera, and musical instruments, manuscripts and publications were the focus of amateur enthusiasts keen to collect and catalogue historical curiosities. Scholarly and professional societies, unconnected to the universities, sometimes included the study of music and would receive and publish papers. Journalism, criticism and education all pointed towards a formalisation of musical discourse and the accompanying advance in serious study of music.

The dates contained in the table at the head of this chapter give just a window onto the difficulty in identifying the different aspects of music’s establishment as a university, and academic, subject. ‘Music’ in British universities was certainly not ‘musicology’, in many ways until the middle of the twentieth century – much later than continental European counterparts. Whether considered in contemporary terms or judged with historical hindsight, it is impossible to pin down absolute musicological watersheds in the study and practice of music during the period under consideration. Rather, elements of music as an academic subject were adopted, discarded and constructed throughout the century as individuals and institutions, both within and outside formal academia, sought to fashion new directions and identities for their work.

This chapter will first consider the contexts for musical studies, and some of the key changes in music’s form and place at the universities. It is by examining historical turning points and conflicts that we can begin to identify where music-as-science was developing as distinct from music-as-art, and why. The second section of the chapter will survey some of the other contexts in which music as a subject for study began to develop, particularly the new associations founded in the second half of the nineteenth century. Finally, I will investigate the work of Frederick Niecks, Professor of Music at the University of Edinburgh at the turn of the twentieth century, and a key link between German developments and British musicological history. While elements of musicology can be found in many contexts, and alongside the broader study of music, it was not until the twentieth century that an independent academic discipline, both within and outside the universities, can begin to be identified.

Music at the universities
The history of music in British universities in the nineteenth century is closely tied in with music’s status as an accomplishment and profession. The majority of performers and composers in Britain during this period experienced a precarious social status. Music sat rather outside the careful structures of society. Musicians could be fabulously wealthy, or struggle to meet basic living costs. Some were able to enjoy the benefits of patronage from rich and influential patrons, and through them make enormous strides in their own social status. Musicians such as music hall performers were, on the other hand, associated with questionable morality. It was not unusual for musicians to build up a ‘portfolio’ of employment which might involve performing, composing, teaching, selling music or instruments, piano tuning, and other trades unconnected with music. As other professions consolidated their status through formal regulation and professional associations, it was clear that the disparate social and financial status of those earning some or all of their living through music would struggle to gain a place within a new social order. Even the most successful musicians were tainted by association with the poorly-paid, mistreated and sometimes dishonest casual workers at the other end of the spectrum.

The state of music in Britain was also cause for concern for many, both within and outside the music profession. Home-grown musicians, particularly instrumentalists and opera stars, were poorly treated; the glamour of a foreign name could command higher fees and large audiences. As an accomplishment music was firmly ‘feminine’, but music as a career was considered unsuitable for women or upper-class men. Until the foundation of the Royal Academy of Music in 1822, aspiring musicians were obliged to travel outside Britain to complete their musical education. Those who could not afford private tuition were educated via apprenticeships or taught by family members. Both routes often meant young musicians were put to work at an early age, teaching or performing in an orchestra, rather than spending time honing technique. There was almost no recognised system for nurturing young composers, and little opportunity for composition to become a stable career path. The revival of Anglican church music from the 1830s was one factor that exposed the poverty of musical talent and opportunities among the native population.

It was the poor state of church music that prompted Peter Maurice at Oxford to ask ‘What shall we do with Music’ in 1856. Maurice was not alone in arguing that associating music more closely with the universities, and bringing it into line in terms of academic and

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residence requirements, would help to raise its status. This in turn would encourage both participation and investment, improving the quality of performance and composition in all areas. Music’s lack of residence requirements was one of the key features that meant its degree candidates lacked the contacts and social formation experienced by all other graduates at Oxford or Cambridge. Music degrees were also without the requirements for general studies in the Classics (at Oxford) or Mathematics (at Cambridge) which remained the bedrock of a gentlemen’s education. But fundamentally it was the sense that music was not an ‘academic’ subject that posed a problem to its acceptance as a university discipline.

The first institution to tackle the problem of music’s academic status was driven initially not by concerns over social status or musical standards, but by an endowment. The University of Edinburgh received a large sum in the will of General John Reid, an amateur musician, dedicated to the establishment of a Professorship of the Theory of Music. Edinburgh’s reputation was firmly built on science, medicine and law, and the Reid Trustees, together with the University’s professors, were anxious that the new Professor of Music should conform to institutional norms as far as possible. When the endowment was made available in 1837 it soon became clear that there was no simple precedent for an academic professorship in Music.

Reid’s will had required that the Professor of Music would ‘contribute to give stability, respectability and consequence’ to the institution. Given the low associations of musical performance, it was clear that a ‘science’ of music was necessary, creating a body of knowledge which could be taught and assessed like other subjects. On advertising the Professorship for the first time in October 1838, the Trustees explained that they had endeavoured to select such terms, as shall ensure a course of instruction fit to be adopted in a great University; avoid the danger of too mechanical a course on the one hand; or a mere history on the other, to be collected from Books; and such in short as shall point out to those who may propose to become candidates the necessity of combining the higher departments of Harmonics with the very curious and interesting phenomenon of Acoustics and the principles of Musical Composition.⁵

⁵ Edinburgh University Minute Book of the Reid Trustees [EUL UA/Da 46.1] [MB], 23 June 1838, 18.
In setting the new Professor of Music firmly within the traditions of the University, the Reid Trustees were anxious that musical science should form the basis of the teaching. With that in mind, they drew up a schedule of topics to be covered:

We propose that the Professor shall give annually a course of Prelections and Instructions which shall comprehend the following Branches viz. the phenomenon and philosophy of sound in so far as connected with Musical Intonation; the laws of Harmonics, with their application to the Theory of Music; the Explanation not only of the ordinary rules of Thoroughbass, but also a clear exposition of methodical composition, in double triple and quadruple Counterpoint; and the practical application of all the principles and doctrines appertaining to the Science; Joined with these discussions we propose that the Professor shall exhibit the history of the Science with a critical analysis of the works of all the Classical Masters ancient and modern.6

The Edinburgh Trustees found it difficult to recruit a Professor to put into practice their specifications for a new musical academic subject. The first three professors, all practising musicians, failed to establish lecture courses, struggling to attract students. The role was incompatible with an itinerant performing career. Henry Bishop, the second Professor, left in order to return to his lucrative performing and conducting work in London. It was the fourth Professor, John Donaldson, appointed in 1845, who was most successful at implementing the Trustees’ vision of a musical science. Donaldson’s lectures, beginning in 1846, were not without stumbling blocks, but as a comprehensive approach to addressing a range of musical topics can perhaps be considered the earliest regular teaching. An amateur musician, Donaldson focussed his lectures on acoustics, making use of a range of musical apparatus and instruments. Donaldson’s plans foundered on other terms: his requirements for equipment and a dedicated space for teaching and housing the apparatus were opposed by the Trustees. Nevertheless, the Trustees stood by their intention to define music in the University as a science. Later in the century music professors were not allowed to use the music classroom as a space for rehearsing student performing groups, and professors were discouraged from taking private pupils for instrumental lessons: University music was to be disassociated from the trappings of performance, whether amateur or professional.7

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6 Ibid.
7 For further details see Golding, Music and Academia, 45, 149.
Music degrees received attention at Oxford and Cambridge in the second half of the nineteenth century. The status of music at Oxford is illustrated by the experience of Sir Frederick Gore Ouseley, baronet at Professor of Music between 1855 and 1889. Ouseley supplicated for his B.Mus. degree in 1850 and his D.Mus. in 1854. As Tuckwell recalled, his degrees ‘were looked upon by the Dons as ignominious condescensions’. The Dean of Christchurch is likewise recorded to have remarked that ‘it was utterly derogatory for a man in his social position to entertain such an idea’. Among musicians, however, it was considered ‘an honor that a man of rank, and a scholar, should seek the distinctions especially belonging to music.’

The identity of music as an academic subject was central to the reforms carried out by George Alexander Macfarren, Professor of Music at Cambridge between 1875 and 1887. Macfarren’s changes tackled the central problems of status and structure, and were intended to encourage formal musical study among university students, reflecting improved respectability onto the profession as a whole. The alterations to the way music was packaged as a degree subject, and the ways in which it was examined and administered, brought it in line with other degree subjects. One of the key elements was to introduce a preliminary examination in arts and science subjects, including English Grammar and Arithmetic, history, geography and languages (one of Latin, Greek, French or German), Euclid and Algebra. A similar requirement had been added to music degrees at Oxford in 1862 and Dublin in 1871. Music was also made an option for the Bachelor of Arts degree, thus introducing it to the suite of liberal qualifications. Finally, written examinations were added in music theory, compositional technique and aspects of general musical knowledge and history. This formed an undoubtedly academic basis for the compositional exercise which remained the focus of the B.Mus. degree.

The final written examination for Macfarren’s new B.Mus. degree demonstrates the dual identity of music as academic and vocational subject. The requirements were certainly ‘scientific’, allowing candidates to study to gain skills and knowledge and permitting the examiners to measure ability according to a set standard. However, their relevance to a...
musical career in performance and composition, most particularly for the organists who formed the majority of candidates, remains clear:

(1) Counterpoint, in not more than five parts; (2) Harmony; (3) Canon in two parts; (4) Fugue in two parts, especially as to the relation of subject answers; (5) Form in Composition, as exemplified in the sonata; (6) The Pitch and Quality of the Stops of the Organ; (7) Such knowledge of the Quality, Pitch, and Compass of Orchestral Instruments as is necessary for reading from Score; (8) The Analysis of some Classical Composition, both with regard to Harmony and Form, the name of which is announced by the examiners at least six weeks before the date of the examination; (9) The playing at sight from Figured Bass and from Score.  

Harmony and counterpoint in the Palestrina style remained central to the academic skills of a music degree well into the twentieth century, but also tallied with the demands of the role of a cathedral or church organist, or the formal training of a composer. The set works chosen for analysis also reflect a conservative compositional preference, with a marked focus on Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. An academic identity for music was sought that would straddle the demands of university and professional training.

The cumulative effect of these reforms was to alter the way in which music was perceived, and its presence within the university. At Cambridge, as at Edinburgh, reform was concerned with status. Re-branding music as a liberal subject was important for the upper-classes and, in turn, was intended to increase both participation and patronage. Improved status in the University would (it was hoped) filter down to the profession as a whole. The anonymous writer ‘Proteus’ mused on these effects in a letter to *The Musical World*, suggesting that the reforms would take effect in both directions:

whilst the University is thus boldly asserting before the world that music is a science, or art – whichever we may call it – fit to hold its own against any other included in the University curriculum, and the profession of which, in however humble or subordinate a manner, is as worthy of an educated gentleman as to be a clergyman, a barrister, or a physician – it is also determined to adopt a far higher standard of musical culture than that usually accepted. By the introduction of acoustics as treated we presume by Helmholtz and other great Physicists of the day, it proclaims its intention of raising

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12 *Cambridge University Reporter*, 11 December 1877, 169.
music from the ranks of empiricism into that of pure science, and giving musical study that basis of solid law which it so much needs, and which it is the peculiar function, as well as honour, of a University to give to it… Like the god Janus, it looks two ways. Turning to the musical profession, it says, ‘We wish to see you recognised as in every sense a liberal profession, by encouraging our undergraduates to join your ranks;’ turning to the ordinary young English gentleman, it says, ‘Let us have an end of all musical tinkling and pottering; add to your other learning and accomplishments music if you will, but let it be music in a form the mere learning of which will be an important aid to mental culture, and the possession of which when learnt will be for all your life long a source of keen intellectual and scientific as well as mere aesthetic enjoyment to you.’

At both Edinburgh and Cambridge, music relied on two aspects to gain status within the university. Firstly, it had to conform to established university subjects in terms of lectures, examinations and administration. Second, it was the introduction of acoustics that most clearly marked music out as a ‘science’. At Cambridge the award of honorary degrees to famous composers further cemented music’s new position in the University. As the Monthly Musical Record’s writer suggested, ‘it amounts to no less than a recognition, on the part of the representatives of one of our greatest seats of learning, of the worth of musical art as a subject of study, and as a profession.’ Yet the conflict between music’s identity as a science and as an art remained. The worth of music degrees, and their relevance to the profession, were frequently questioned. There was, as yet, no firm connection between the academic study of music and applications to the profession of performer or composer. Music Professors remained largely identified as performers or, more commonly, composers: academic studies were important for status within the university (and, from there, society) but had no autonomous identity.

Music degrees continued to place the compositional exercise at centre stage, and it is here that we might consider more closely the relationship between musicology and music, and the nature of musical enquiry. The compositional exercise had stood as the sole written requirement for a music degree at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge for several centuries, its performance and the ceremonies of supplication completing the conditions. The exercise was intended to demonstrate the candidate’s abilities in core compositional skills:

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13 MW, Vol. LV no. 23 (9 June 1877), 396.
14 Monthly Musical Record, 1 April 1877.
harmony and counterpoint of varying complexities; writing for voices and organ or instruments; text-setting; structuring a large multi-movement work. Some, such as William Pole’s D.Mus. exercise, a Mass setting, demonstrate additional ‘scholarly’ techniques such as composing in different modes and deliberately archaic styles. The exercise revealed, therefore, a composer’s abilities not only to create music, but to understand and interrogate the classic styles and idioms of a particular repertoire. For some, indeed, the exercise was too scholarly: the 1856 statute changes at the University of Oxford which introduced a written examination and removed the requirement for performance of the exercise were given the nickname ‘the Unmusical Statute’. Thomas Southgate complained in 1889 that

A pedantic acquaintance with the mathematical side of the art was hardly calculated to infuse life into the dry rules, a knowledge of which was quite sufficient to enable a scholar to pose as a musician, and indeed to advance a claim for a degree in the art. Discourses and “exercises” were regarded as of far more importance that the possession of technical skill, and so music, as we now understand the comprehensive appellation, met with little encouragement at the Universities… Perhaps it is to this stiff scholasticism and artificiality we must ascribe the failure of the Universities to have founded a true English school of music.15

Others defended the exercise and its performance as the musical equivalent of the presentation of an academic thesis. George Garrett, writing to Cambridge in 1878, argued instead that the performance was not intended as a ‘test of merit’ but as ‘the academical publication of the work.’16 It is clear that, while the universities strove to establish music as a viable academic subject, with particular care for its social and professional status, the resulting schemes were far from encouraging music theory, history or philosophy as subjects for research or extended study.

The first university to recognise academic studies at the higher level was Edinburgh: when introducing a D.Mus. degree in 1893, the Professor Frederick Niecks included three specialist strands in performance, composition and theory or history. Applicants were invited to write theses ‘on theoretical subjects which shall be the result of research and original thought, not

16 Cambridge University Reporter, 15 October 1878, 44. George Garrett (1834-1897) was organist of the university from 1873, and active as a composer of Anglican church and organ music. He took the degrees B.Mus. (1857) and D.Mus. (1867), and was awarded an honorary M.A. in 1878. He was unsuccessful in his applications to both the Edinburgh and Cambridge professorships. See Bernarr Rainbow, ‘Garrett, George’ in Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 2 May 2007), <http://www.grovemusic.com>. 
mere abstracts or compilations of existing works’. This was the first time that music as a scholarly discipline had been recognised as a specialised subject and career path, without requirements for practical skill (whether composition or performance) at a high level.

Matthew Shirlaw received the first degree of D.Mus. from the University of Edinburgh on 28 March 1913, with a theoretical specialism. His Doctoral thesis was on the subject *An examination of the Theory of Harmony of Jean Philippe Rameau* (1683-1764): *Its origin Development, and Subsequent Influence; with a Supplement on Rameau as a Man and Musician*. Of the next nine D.Mus. graduates, covering the period up to the end of 1935, only two others had a theory specialism, and both of these were in combination with performance. The two relevant theses were *A Student’s Guide to some Aspects of Orchestration* (John Petrie Dunn, 1928) and *The Organ and its Music from Medieval Times to J.S. Bach* (Wilfred Greenhouse Allt, 1930). While musical scholarship of this type had previously added a liberal note to examinations where performance or composition remained central, placing theory and history at the pinnacle of previously professional qualifications demanded a reappraisal. This move suggested an independent existence for musicology, within the universities, which separated it from its previous role as an academic prop. I will return to Niecks’s work in the final section of this chapter.

Music-as-science outside the universities

While musical scholarship remained largely absent in universities until the very end of the nineteenth century, academic approaches towards music developed steadily in other arenas. The century witnessed an enormous expansion in writings about music, particularly in the area of specialist journals. Often founded with a popular aim, the journals nevertheless promoted reading about, rather than just listening to, music, to a new and growing audience. Paul Watt has traced the increasingly specialised work of music critics through the nineteenth century, as largely descriptive or opinionated pieces were replaced by technical language and historical detail. The same phenomenon is to be found in concert programme notes. Some of the first notes to be published were written by John Thomson, the first Professor of Music at Edinburgh. By the end of the century the educational role of concerts was well-established,

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17 Scottish Universities Commissioners, Ordinance no. 34 (Edinburgh No. 8): Regulations for Degrees in Music. 3 August 1893. (Edinburgh: HM Stationery Office, 1893).
18 Shirlaw had also been the first graduate of the B.Mus. degree in 1898. I am indebted to Fiona Donaldson for providing me with information on early D.Mus. recipients at the University of Edinburgh, taken from the Index of Theses for Music, the *University of Edinburgh Journal* (first pub. 1925-26) and the Edinburgh Graduation ceremonial programmes from 1895 to 1935.
and programme notes a common feature. Instrumental pieces were usually described in some detail, with key themes and motifs identified, while songs were accompanied by text and translation.\textsuperscript{19}

The kinds of amateur antiquarian interest referred to in my opening paragraphs also took on a more formalised role during the nineteenth century. Here the universities also played a role, though it was not music professors or music students but enthusiastic undergraduates and academics that were to be found in motet and madrigal societies. Publications collecting such ‘ancient’ music date back to Burney’s \textit{La Musica che si canta annualmente nelle funzioni della settimana santa, nella cappella pontificia, composta da Palestrina, Allegri, e Bai}.\textsuperscript{20} Burney prefaced his publication with biographical details of the three composers and a note on performance in the papal chapel, but did not attempt to analyse the music. A further important collection is the ‘Specimens’ published from 1807 by William Crotch following his series of lectures in Oxford and London. Crotch united history with philosophy, considering the overall shape of musical development through time and the relative worth of different musical styles. As Sydney Robinson Charles notes, Crotch’s second volume can be seen as representing ‘the first history of music in examples’.\textsuperscript{21} The British Musical Antiquarian Society, founded in 1840, was intended to publish music of the English ‘golden’ era and Purcell, and some historical pieces made their way into the pages of journals such as \textit{The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular}. While some complete editions of composers’ outputs were attempted in the early nineteenth century, it was not until after 1850 that these also became a fashionable scholarly endeavour and the focus of organised groups.

Antiquarianism and the enthusiasm for collecting extended to musical instruments, and the period saw a flourishing of museums including musical instruments and other ephemera. The Victorians are not renowned for wishing to preserve the past, but an interest in historical


\textsuperscript{20} London: Roberto Bremner, 1771.

musical instruments extended to include performance, an important location of incipient musicology within the public realm of music. Arnold Dolmetsch’s concerts of historical music played on replica instruments represented a new scholarly interest in linking history and performance.

Societies such as the Royal College of Organists, founded in 1864, included academic papers on relevant topics as part of their regular meetings. In the case of the RCO, adding an academic element was part of the process of ‘professionalisation’. The aim of the RCO was very deliberately to enhance the status of organists as a sector of the music profession, and lectures and publications covering the theory and history of the instrument and its music were part of building a serious image as well as constructing a body of knowledge to be examined in the system of certificates and diplomas that helped to bring regulation and control.

It is clear, therefore, that both within and outside the universities, writing about music, discussing it in a scholarly manner and taking new approaches to preserving both repertoire and instruments were key elements of Victorian musical life. These trends perhaps culminated in the foundation of the (later Royal) Musical Association in 1874. With the stated aim of ‘the investigation and discussion of subjects connected with the art, science and history of music’, the Association offered opportunities for professional musicians, amateurs and enthusiasts to gather and discuss music from all approaches. The aim was strictly scholarly: public announcements revealed that ‘No concerts or musical performances of any kind are to be given, but the object of the meetings will be to read original papers and to discuss all matters relating to the art.’ In the early years papers covered technical topics not unlike the interests of gentlemen’s societies earlier in the century; in the first session alone papers were given on temperament, harmony, notation and a new instrument, the ‘mesotonic harmonium’. In the 1880s historical and critical topics took a greater share, illustrating the more recent work in areas of musical research. Is it here that incipient British musicology is to be found?

Writing in the 1970s, Gerald Abraham was scathing about the early attempts of Musical Association members to tackle music history and criticism in a scholarly fashion. Of some early papers he comments, ‘They seem to have been incapable of intensive and disciplined

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22 For an overview of topics related to the foundation of the Royal College of Organists, see the special issue of the Journal of the Royal College of Organists Vol. 8 (2014).
thought about musical topics, or indeed or selecting topics that demanded or lent themselves to intensive and disciplined thought.’24 The ‘shallow water’ metaphor with which Abraham characterises the musicological discussion reflects the paucity of serious academic consideration of music in Britain at this time. Moreover, if there was indeed serious musicological content to the RMA’s early papers, the members were far from being the country’s first professional musicologists. The Association drew together those with music as a profession, and amateur enthusiasts. It was these amateurs who provided much of the impetus for music as a scholarly undertaking. William Pole (1814-1900), for example, was Professor of Engineering at University College London, but maintained a parallel interest in Music, including an appointment as organist at St Marks, North Audley Street in Mayfair, London. Pole took his B.Mus. and D.Mus. degrees at Oxford and was pivotal in setting up the Music degree at the University of London in the 1870s; his musical writings included papers on acoustics, analytical essays and an 1879 volume Philosophy of Music.25 A later example, Edmund H. Fellowes (1870-1951), pursued a career as a clergyman while making important contributions to the publication and performance of sixteenth and seventeenth-century English music.

While there was plenty of pre-musicological activity in Britain throughout the nineteenth century, together with the introduction of historical and theoretical topics in music degrees, musicology as a distinct academic discipline was slow to flourish. In part, a low opinion of musicology as a formal activity stemmed from the uneasy relationship between music-as-art and music-as-science. This was not helped by the numerous ‘bogus’ degrees and diplomas available to British musicians, and the lack of standardised professional or academic qualification.26

Articles from the first half of the twentieth century suggestion a deep suspicion of the term ‘musicology’, and its implications for music and music studies. Waldo S. Pratt’s ‘On behalf of musicology’, published in January 1915, describes an ‘apparent chasm’ between the

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24 Ibid., x.
25 See ‘Dr William Pole F.R.S.’ in The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular Vol. 42 no. 696 (February 1901), 103-4. Pole was a founder member of the Musical Association
26 An anonymous author reflected on the spectrum of ‘Hoods and Falsehoods’ in The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular Vol. 30 no. 560 (October 1889), 590-1, noting with reference to post-nominal letters ‘The unthinking attach much mysterious importance to their use, as they do in every case, legitimate or otherwise, where such devices are employed’. The problem of unregulated degrees, secured simply by a payment of fees, was the key driver for the establishment of the Union of Graduates in Music in 1892.
proponents of music-as-art and music-as-science. Pratt’s article suggests that musicology in its many forms was well-established in the USA, even if the term and its institutional place were still unsettled. In Britain, the overlap was great, but the relevance of music history, analysis or theory to performance or composition had made little progress. Research into musical topics was undertaken by composers, performers and enthusiastic amateurs, many of whom (such as William Pole) used their expertise in unrelated subjects to bring new scientific approaches to the understanding of music as a science. It was here that the lack of a chasm meant musicology had no separate identity, and there were virtually no professional musicologists until the middle of the twentieth century.

Frederick Niecks and musicology at the University of Edinburgh

Frederick Niecks’s lectures at the University of Edinburgh in the late 1890s and early twentieth century represent one of the earliest systematic attempts to include music as an academic subject within a university context. Niecks was perhaps the first British Music Professor appointed primarily on the basis of academic, rather than practical, credentials. The Student of 1891 reported on his writings and scholarly activity rather than dwell on performing or composing, suggesting this would elevate the Chair to its intended position within the University. Among the testimonials provided as part of Niecks’s application is a recommendation from David Boyle Hope, Esq., Advocate, Sheriff of the Counties of Roxburgh and Selkirk, Edinburgh, which reflects the balance of practical and intellectual acquirements:

I have been profoundly impressed with his extensive knowledge of music, both as a science and as an art. His enthusiasm is unbounded, and his industry unsurpassed. I know of no one who could more worthily fill the Chair of a Professor of Music in a University, especially looking to the high view he entertains of the function of such a professor. As a teacher of Theory, as a lecturer of the History of Music and as an analyser and expounder of the compositions of the composers of all nations, I am certain that he would not easily meet with a rival. I may add that Mr Niecks is a good performer on the violin, viola, pianoforte, and organ, and, although he has not of late

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28 The Student, Vol. VI no. 6 (25 November 1891), 89.
devoted much time to composition, I believe he is qualified to earn distinction in this respect also. His accomplishments as a scholar are of a high order.  

Niecks’s approach towards music education contrasted with many professional musicians and commentators. He believed firmly in the relevance of both theoretical musical topics and general education to both professional musicians and elementary music education. In an address to a meeting of Edinburgh music teachers in 1900, he characterised the work of a professional training school as ‘systematic courses of lectures and demonstrations in technique, harmony, counterpoint, form, acoustics, history, aesthetics, ethics, and psychology.’  

Elementary music teaching, he considered, should include biography and history, and the discrimination of styles of different composers. Most teachers, he explained, were only concerned with exercises and pieces, ‘But that is only the mechanical substratum of the executive side, a small part of the art if we take into account the texture, structure, beauty, and expression of music, and the cultivation of the ear, mind, and heart of the learner.’  

Where university education was concerned, Niecks proposed to extend the remit of the Faculty in Edinburgh in both practical and theoretical directions, in order to form ‘a school of music where all that the composer, performer, and teacher requires shall be taught, and taught methodically and thoroughly’. He criticised the separation of theory and practice found in Continental training, where conservatoires offered an exclusively technical curriculum, arguing that the ear and intelligence needed to be trained together with the fingers and throat. Nevertheless, Niecks’ syllabus for the new scheme of Music Degrees initiated in 1893 was largely traditional, with technical skills of composition and basic knowledge of instrumentation and form, together with performing tasks, taking centre stage.  

Niecks’s university lectures were submitted to the Senate for approval in February 1892, outlining the syllabus as ‘History; Harmony, Melody and Rhythm; Formal & Aesthetical Analysis; Recitals and Lectures with illustrations.’ The syllabus demonstrates a new

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29 Testimonial preserved in Niecks archive at University of Edinburgh. Sherriff Hope (1833–1896) was a keen amateur musician and Secretary of the Scottish Vocal Music Association.
30 ‘Address to a Meeting of Edinburgh Music Teachers, called with a view to the formation of a Society for the Promotion of Musical Education and Culture’ By Fr. Niecks. January 31, 1900, 6.
31 Ibid., 7.
32 Ibid., 6.
33 ‘A Music School for Scotland. From the Introductory Lecture by Professor Niecks, Delivered in the University of Edinburgh on October 14, 1901.’, 3.
34 Ibid., 4-5.
35 Minutes of the Faculty of Arts Vol. III 1877-99: 19 February 1892.
emphasis on musicological topics while retaining the tradition of illustrated talks. The Niecks archive includes a number of sets of notes for historical lectures. One course, possibly dated 1901, ran to twenty lectures, covering the period from ‘The monophonic era, up to 1000’ to the various genres of the late Baroque with a focus on schools of composition and stylistic developments. Another, entitled ‘History of Music, esp. of the last two centuries’, began with a condensed account of medieval and renaissance music before picking up a narrative based around individual composers and performers at Dunstable, Lasso, Palestrina and Willeart.

Niecks’s notes reveal a variety of approaches to categorisation: Lecture IV, for example, discusses ‘Representatives of the Palestrina style in the 18th century’, A. Scarlatti ‘the founder of the Neapolitan School’ and ‘Other Masters of the Neapolitan School’. Lecture VI spans the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries with topics including Organists; Harpsichord Players; Violinists; Singing Masters; Famous Castrati; and Lady Singers. Lectures VII to IX are organised by country, similarly offering a sweeping account of developments from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries. From this point the focus on individual composers returns, from Handel and Bach (each of whom was allotted two lectures) to Mendelssohn, Schumann and Liszt. Lecture XXb brings the series up to date with compositions post-1896 and particular attention to Bruckner and Strauss.

The historical coverage of Niecks’s lectures is impressive, with as much detail paid to plainsong and medieval music theory as later analytical technique. Rather than perpetuate some of the myths commonly found in historical primers, he takes a critical approach. Lecture III of the first set, for example, includes critical examination of the widespread theories regarding the origins of Gergorian chant and its relationship with Pope Gregory I. Discussion of plainchant and early polyphony in Lecture I of the second set places the music firmly in its social and political context with ‘The Church & Feudalism, most important institutions’ and ‘Christianity, the genius of the barbarian races, & ancient art & literature, the principal factors.’

At the other end of the chronological spectrum, Niecks tackles modern music with remarkably advanced conceptual tools. A lecture from 1911 on Elgar’s ‘Dream of Gerontius’ (premiered only eleven years earlier) considers its reception in England and Germany before embarking on a consideration of the concept of modernism in music: ‘of course there have always been modernists. Beethoven, for instance, was in some respects so advanced a modernist that the foremost of the present-day have not yet come up to him.’. Niecks sets
Elgar within the context of Berlioz, Wagner and Liszt, dedicating further lectures to a comparison with Richard Strauss.

Niecks added to his lectures with numerous publications considering musicological problems. In addition to his interests in music education and pedagogy, he published on the challenges of what would now be termed historically-informed performance, on notation and on the relevance of acoustics to musical analysis and aesthetics. At the university his lectures were accompanied by series of ‘historical concerts’, which from 1896 included performances in period instruments. Much of his work, together with the topics addressed in his lectures, therefore falls well within the scope of what would nowadays be termed ‘musicology’, and his scheme for music degrees sets music history and theory alongside the skills found in degree requirements elsewhere. As noted above, Niecks’s D.Mus. scheme, allowing a specialism in theory or history, was revolutionary in recognising and giving a central role to written subjects within music.

A German by birth, and educated at the University of Leipzig in 1877-8, Niecks’s background undoubtedly influenced his approach to music. Leipzig, in particular, saw some of the earliest musicological teaching, including Oscar Paul’s lectures in music history, theory and composition following his appointment as associate professor in 1872. Niecks’s lecture syllabuses reflect Paul’s own specialisms in ancient and medieval music history and theory. The inclusion of theses on musical topics in Niecks’s 1893 degree scheme may well also have taken German practice as a model.

However, the German institutional model could not be imported wholesale to Edinburgh. Niecks criticised the continental distinction between university and conservatoire where music studies were concerned, and the lack of a Scottish conservatoire meant the University catered for some elements of performance as well as music theory. Niecks’s vision of a complete Scottish music school was far removed from the continental prototype, including music history and theory under a wide banner of professional music studies. In this case,

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36 See articles including ‘Historical Concerts’ in Monthly Musical Record [MMR] vol. XII no. 142 (October 1 1882) and Vol. XII no. 143 (November 1 1882), ‘Is it possible to perform Works of a Time far removed from ours exactly as the Composer intended them to be performed, and as they were performed by their Contemporaries?’ in MMR Vol. XIII no. 154 (October 1 1883), ‘A proposal’ suggesting a meeting of leading musicians to regulate matters of notation and terminology, in MMR Vol. XIII no. 155 (November 1883), ‘Musicians and Culture’ in Monthly Musical Review, vol. XVIII no. 205 (January 1 1888), ‘Acoustics and Aesthetics’ in MMR vol. XLII no. 501 (September 2 1912) and ‘The Teaching of Musical History’, a paper given to the Musical Association on 10 April 1900 and published in Proceedings of the Musical Association Vol. 26 (1899-1900), 161-181.
while many of the traits of musicological scholarship were present in lectures and writings, musicology remained largely at the service of musical training and education.

Twentieth-century developments

It was well into the twentieth century that Musicology began to take on a recognised form and place at the universities, and an identity independent from Music as a predominantly practical subject. Individual scholars were important pioneers in this work, both forging research paths of their own and consolidating and recognising work done by others both within and outside academia. Edward J. Dent is the most significant of these from the first half of the twentieth century, and his article ‘Music and musical research’ from 1931 provides a useful record of the state and status of musicology as it began to take shape as a bona fide discipline. Dent is clear that, even in the 1930s, music as an academic subject was a back water and lagged well behind comparable work in Germany. There were few students, no organisation, systematic training or standardisation, and little esteem attached to the work.

Dent asked the important question which had failed to be addressed by those involved with music as an academic discipline since the mid-nineteenth century: ‘What is the object of musical research?’ He directed his answer towards closing the apparent gap between music research and musical art, stating that ‘Musical research is useless unless it is directed towards the practical benefit of the art of music in general’. Acoustics was essential for practical problems of production and reproduction; historical context was useful for reading and understanding; analysis of ‘old music’ would teach us to read musical expression and meaning. In sum, studying music in order to approach it from an intellectual perspective would enrichen the experience of music for composers, performers and audiences.

Dent’s arguments are worthy, and perhaps reflect the burden of justifying academic studies where practical skills continued to dominate. Yet they indicate, and even perpetuate, the subservient position of musicology within music as a whole. As he noted in 1937, the term ‘musicology’ was still ‘not very willingly accepted’ in England: ‘English people are notoriously illogical; I think their underlying reason for rejecting the word “musicology” was...

38 Ibid., 6.
39 Ibid., 5.
40 Ibid., 6.
41 Ibid.
that, however keenly interested they might be in musical research, they refused to lose sight of the principle that music was an art'.

Dent’s reflections on the state of British musicology before the middle of the twentieth century reveal continued uncertainty, perhaps a lack of confidence, over its status as an intellectual pursuit rather than amateur interest. Even Dent himself reveals that his own vision of musicology was somewhat removed from developments elsewhere, both in the USA and Germany: ‘this new science which I was simple-minded enough to think had been pursued in one way or another since the days of Pythagoras’. He further recounts hearing from a German professor who ‘disapproved of [his] attitude towards musicology’.  

While Dent’s efforts to extend musical learning kept it well within the frame of a servant to musical practice and experience, British musicology was furrowing a narrow path compared to the independence of the discipline both in continental Europe and North America. As Nigel Fortune notes, pre-war activity at the universities remained centred around conducting, performance and technical studies, with professional musicologists absent. It was the appointments of Gerald Abraham at Liverpool, Anthony Lewis to Birmingham and Thurston Dart at Cambridge in 1947 that signalled the academic establishment’s identification of musicology, alongside music, as a university discipline.

Conclusion

It is clear that, while scholarly study of music began to be included in university curricula and lectures from the first half of the nineteenth century, the independent discipline of musicology cannot be identified in Britain until the middle of the twentieth century. Music history, analysis, acoustics and other subjects were introduced as part of schemes to give academic credentials to music degrees, in part in order to boost social status of the music profession and to encourage higher status of performance and composition. Academic studies were part of societies designed to endow professional status, such as the Royal College of Organists. At the same time, scholarly approaches were popular among amateur groups and found an outlet in the enormous wave of new journals, music criticism and other publications.

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43 Ibid., 2.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
The Musical Association brought together performers, composers and amateur enthusiasts to share the new intellectual approach to music. Some of these went on to make important academic contributions, particularly in the field of editing early music. Yet it was not until three-quarters of a century later that the work of individual scholars, university appointments and a critical mass in professional identity resulted in a shift in attitude towards musicology as a valid independent activity.

The summary dates given at the head of this chapter certainly belie the complexity of this slow, piecemeal development. To be sure, music took a place at British universities before many modern-day established academic subjects. Degrees in music were ancient institutions but degrees in musicology a relatively modern innovation. Lectures came and went in many different forms, and often without the context of an undergraduate course or any resident students. As an amateur interest the scholarly study of music found many enthusiasts, but as a professional occupation it gained little ground until the twentieth century. The struggle to find an appropriate form of study and research was a forerunner to that found in other disciplines, including English, and is still played out in many areas today. The issues hinged on the move from ‘music’ to ‘musicology’ and the careful balance and relationship between the two, together with the changing role and status of music and musicians within society.

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