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Introduction

Listeners in music history: studying the evidence

Helen Barlow and Trevor Herbert

Abstract

This themed issue focuses on the study of listeners in history. The articles address the personal responses to music of ‘ordinary listeners’ – that is, people whose experiences of music are recorded in personal documents and third-party descriptions (as opposed, say, to music critics who wrote about music in order to influence the ideas and tastes of a public readership). This overview essay proposes that the testimony of ordinary listeners can cast new light on musical practices, the way music has been heard and its role in past societies. It points to a perceived gap in historical musicology, whereby the evidence left by listeners in the past has been the subject of little targeted research, and has generally been relegated to a supporting role. The themed issue emerges from work conducted as part of the Listening Experience Database project, a research project set up to address that gap, and focuses on empirical historical research.

This overview essay discusses the types of evidence on which the articles are based and some of the issues and cautions they raise, and sets out to demonstrate the unique quality and value of the evidence through the exploration of five topics in the history of British music in the long nineteenth century. The approach they exemplify has potential to shed light on music as part of the experience of ordinary people, often in contexts and places that have not featured prominently either in nineteenth-century music history or in musicological study generally.

Author biographies

Helen Barlow is a Research Fellow and Staff Tutor in the Music Department of The Open University, and a member of the Listening Experience Database project team. Her publications include *Music and the British Military in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), co-written with Trevor Herbert, and *Listening to Music: People, Practices and Experiences* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2017), and *The Experience of Listening to Music: Methodologies, Identities, Histories* (Milton Keynes: The Open University 2019), both co-edited with David Rowland and available as open access publications at <http://ledbooks.org/> . While her academic background was originally in literature and art history, her research interests have since expanded to include the social history of music in nineteenth-century Britain, and Wales in particular.

Trevor Herbert is Emeritus Professor of Music at The Open University and Professor of Music Research at the Royal College of Music, London. Many of his books, articles and contributions to reference works are studies of brass musical instruments from the perspective of their cultural history, repertoires and performance practices. This has led him to publish on musical sub-cultures with which they are associated, such as *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and, with Helen Barlow, *Music and the British Military in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). His most recent book (edited with Arnold Myers and John Wallace) is *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Brass Instruments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). He has also published extensively on the influence of music on the cultural history of Wales and was Editorial Consultant for the *Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008).

Article text

The articles in this issue of *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* illustrate a core idea that can be applied to music history: that a body of empirical evidence from ordinary listeners can cast a new light on musical practices, the way they have been heard and the role of music in past societies. The term ‘ordinary listeners’ is used here to denote people whose experiences of music are recorded, often incidentally, in personal documents and third-party descriptions, as opposed to those such as music critics who wrote about music with the primary intention of influencing the ideas and tastes of a public readership. Historians refer to an approach that focuses on ‘ordinary’ voices as ‘history from below’. The term is often associated with narratives of working-class history, but not exclusively so, and it is acknowledged to be ‘an umbrella term... open to interpretation’, broadly characterised by an intention to question ‘official or otherwise authorised versions of the past’¹ by focusing rather on ‘the domestic and the local...., the intimate and familiar’.² This issue adopts a similar focus and a similarly broad understanding of what constitutes an ‘ordinary’ person, since ordinary listeners are not taken to equate simply with ‘the working classes’, nor is the distinction between ordinary listeners and influencers of ideas and tastes taken to be a binary opposition between the working classes and the middle and upper classes. While some of the evidence drawn on in these articles reflects the views of working-class people, some is derived from members of higher social classes. The defining characteristic is that, whatever their class, these were

The Listening Experience Database project has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), grants AH/J013986/1 and AH/N006720/1.

¹ Kevin Myers and Ian Grosvenor, ‘Collaborative Research: History from Below’: 10-11. The essay describes the background of ‘history from below’ in the ‘New Left’ histories of the 1950s and 1960s, and indeed its much earlier antecedents. It is part of the *Connected Communities: Foundation Series*, edited by K. Facer and K. Dunleavy (Bristol: University of Bristol/AHRC Connected Communities Programme: 2018).

² Myers and Grosvenor, ‘Collaborative Research’: 14.

people who did not record their musical experiences with the intention of affecting public opinion about music.

Many of the listeners discussed in this issue were writing about their activities and describing their reactions privately, for themselves, and sometimes for a close personal circle. Sometimes they were people who were not in a position, or to whom it would not have occurred, to leave a record of their musical life, and who are therefore captured only through the agency of a third party. [XX's] article in this issue explores a very specific instance of the latter circumstance in the listening experiences of asylum patients. The Listening Experience Database (LED),³ which underpins this issue of the journal, offers many other instances, such as this one, where a son recounts his elderly mother's memory of a ballad singer in the 1830s, and the fascination his performances exerted on the local children:

In August 1907, my mother, who was then 77 years of age, but was nevertheless able to sing with extreme accuracy of intonation, and had (and has) a marvellous memory, sang to me parts of two ballads in the manner in which she had heard Dic Tywyll [Blind Dick] sing them in the streets of Carnarvon in the thirty's... ['Morgan Jones'] was a ballad of twenty-seven verses, recounting the woes of two fond lovers, the one a lady of high degree, the other a humble swain, which was as interesting to the children of Carnarvon as a three-volume novel, and more so.... [H]e always followed it up with another, 'Lliw gwyn, Rhosyn yr Haf' ['The White Rose of Summer'], to

³ The database can be found at <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/>. The proceedings of two LED conferences can similarly be found as open access publications at <http://ledbooks.org>. The project team has published several articles on the technical nature and challenges of the project, including: Alessandro Adamou, Helen Barlow, Simon Brown and Mathieu d'Aquin (2015). The Listening Experience Database Project: Collating the Responses of the "Ordinary Listener" to Prompt New Insights into Musical Experience. *The International Journal of the Humanities: Annual Review*, 13, 17–32; and Alessandro Adamou, Carlo Allocca, Helen Barlow, Simon Brown and Mathieu d'Aquin (2018). Crowdsourcing Linked Data on listening experiences through reuse and enhancement of library data. *International Journal on Digital Libraries*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00799-018-0235-0>.

dissipate the grief occasioned by the sad death of both the fond lovers in the melancholy ballad of ‘Morgan Jones’.⁴

Many such listening experiences slip beneath the musicological radar, often because they crop up in sources with no obvious relevance to mainstream musical enquiry. The *Methodist Magazine* might be considered such a source, but in fact it regularly featured reports of the deathbeds of the faithful which turn out to have a great deal to say about the place of music in nineteenth-century spirituality. At the deathbed of ‘Mrs. Crane, Wife of Mr. Roger Crane, of Preston Lancashire’, the dying woman requested her companions to sing the hymn ‘My God, the spring of all my joys’, at which, we are told, ‘She expressed great satisfaction, and tho’ her weakness was such that she could not join in the song, yet her soul truly magnified the Lord, and her spirit rejoiced in GOD her Saviour’.⁵ This description relates closely to [XX’s] article in this issue,⁶ where [XX] explains how such reports of the experience of singing and listening to hymns function both to affirm the spiritual integrity of the dying person, and to encourage the spiritual devotion of the reader. What they also do, of course, is to shed light on music as part of the spiritual experience of people in contexts and places that have not featured prominently in musicological study.

The historical listening experience has been much less well-served in the literature than the psychology of listening experiences. Music psychologists have made important contributions to the study of listening (for instance, Clarke, *Ways of listening* (2005); Clarke

³ Alfred Daniell, ‘Some remarks on certain vocal traditions in Wales’, *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (London, 1909): 24-25. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1518710161575> accessed: 21 February, 2019

⁵ ‘The Experience of Mrs. CRANE, Wife of Mr. ROGER CRANE, of Preston in Lancashire’, *Methodist Magazine*, Jan.1, 1798-Dec.1821, vol. 21: 324-332.

⁶ We have deliberately included a range of examples in this introduction which do not appear in the articles that follow, in order to try to give some sense of the scope of the material gathered in the course of the research project.

and Clarke, eds, *Music and consciousness* (2011)⁷), but from an approach quite distinct from that of the LED project, which focuses on empirical, historical research facilitated by digital humanities techniques of data gathering and analysis. Reception studies is another area with responses to music at its core, but it takes an almost diametrically opposed perspective to that taken in this issue, in focusing on the study of the reception of *repertoires* (and primarily, though no longer exclusively, the bodies of work of composers in the western art music tradition), based on the expert opinion of critics, editors, scholars and performers.⁸ On the contrary, our central concern is to focus not on repertoire but on the *listener*, and in particular to capture the personal responses to music of ordinary people, in the belief that if we are to gain new insights into why the experience of listening to music is and has been important to people, and how music has affected the human condition, it is essential to focus on the voices that have not typically been heard in historical musicology.⁹

The effective absence of the historical listener from musicological research was recognised at least as far back as the 1990s. James Johnson's *Listening in Paris* (1995)¹⁰ sought to address that gap in terms of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Parisian audiences, famously making the claim – which others subsequently contested – that in this period audiences began to listen to music in a more engaged and intense way. ([XX's] article in this issue offers evidence that, while many British listeners in this period often enjoyed the social and non-musical aspects of performances at least as much as the music itself, others preferred to listen in a more intense and focused way.) In 1997, *The World of Music* devoted an issue to listening (39/2), and around the same time special editions of *Early Music* (24/4,

⁷ E. F. Clarke, *Ways of listening: an ecological approach to the perception of musical meaning* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); David Clarke and Eric Clarke, eds, *Music and consciousness: philosophical, psychological and cultural perspectives* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸ Jim Samson, 'Reception', in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edition, Vol. 20 (Macmillan, 2001). As Samson puts it, in this regard, the 'paradigmatic composer' is Beethoven.

⁹ However, this 'history from below' approach is far from the only use to which LED data can be put, and its adaptability to various interdisciplinary purposes is a characteristic that the LED project has always emphasised.

¹⁰ James Johnson, *Listening in Paris: a cultural history* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1995).

1997), and the *Musical Quarterly* (82/3-4, 1998) focused particularly on the need to develop a field of study in historical listening practices and contexts. Subsequently, a conference at the University of Cambridge in 2006 on ‘Listening: interdisciplinary perspectives’, and a related special issue of the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* (2010), edited by Nikolaus Bacht, attempted to bring together the disparate disciplines with an interest in the study of listening, ‘music psychologists and cognitive scientists on one side, and social and cultural historians on the other’.¹¹ However, the practical problem which had concerned many of those engaged in the debates of the 1990s largely remained – the difficulty of identifying primary sources and collating them in quantity, in order to provide a robust evidential basis which would underpin a field of historical study. LED was a direct response to that difficulty, and to date it remains the only substantial contribution of this type.¹²

The principal aims of the project are three-fold: to assemble a mass of annotated historical evidence of personal experiences of listening to music; to make this evidence widely available in an open access database with flexible search facilities that can contribute to analysis of the sources it contains; and to address questions of method using this type of evidence, thus demonstrating the unique quality and value of such evidence. The first two aims – the discovery and collection of source material, including material submitted by members of the public, which is then made accessible not only to the academic community but also to the general public – are further areas of common ground with history from below. This issue of the journal sets out particularly to exemplify the third aim, through the exploration of five topics in the history of music in the long nineteenth century.

¹¹ Nikolaus Bacht, ‘Introduction’ in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135/Special Issue 1 (2010): 2.

¹² On the evidence of the latest major publication on listening, *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Christian Thorau and Hansjakob Ziemer (Oxford University Press, published online in 2018 and in print in 2019), it seems that studies of historical listeners based on the kinds of sources that constitute the focus of LED are still relatively rare outside the LED project.

The Articles

Each of the articles in this issue arises out of empirical research into historical listeners and in particular those who have not typically been the subject of musicological enquiry. The issue is grounded in the data gathered in the course of the LED project, though clearly the mere collection of data is only a first step, and the articles each set out to apply close reading and interpretation to the sources, so as to illustrate the historical and musicological value of an approach which places the ordinary listener at its centre. There is a geographical coherence in the choice of British topics across the chronology of the long nineteenth century, and to a greater or lesser extent it is a feature of all the articles that they shed light on musical experience outside London. In particular, [XX] explicitly focuses on experiences of military music in the provinces, and the articles by both [XX] and [XX] have a similarly provincial emphasis, while [XX] specifically considers Wales. One of the benefits of an approach that sets out to explore the less well-known people and the less obvious sources is the possibility of rebalancing to some extent the predominance of London (together with a few other British towns and cities) and of metropolitan musical practices and venues in accounts of nineteenth-century British musical life.

[XX]'s article is based on the evidence of around 1,250 listening experiences recorded by 21 male and 23 female British listeners between c1780 and 1830. These sources reveal that audiences generally continued to be noisy throughout the period, and the majority of the individuals who wrote the correspondence and diaries on which this study is based paid limited, if knowledgeable attention to the music. Some, however, were clearly listening in a highly engaged way. For these listeners, music was an intense experience which moved them to tears, a behaviour that was not unusual at the time, though still somewhat controversial among the male population. The language of the sources is considered for what it reveals about listeners' experiences.

[XX] applies the evidence of listeners to music, along with other sources, in an argument that addresses the way the idea of Britishness was promoted to ‘the crowd’ in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In particular, [XX] brings attention to a relatively unexplored area of British music: the network of militia bands of music that were formed as part of the military expansion prompted by the fear of a French invasion, and the role of these bands in the provinces. [XX] focuses on the relatively new phenomenon of military display, its part in the strategy for promoting patriotic sentiments, and how that strategy impacted on the poor, especially in rural areas.

[XX] explores listening experiences from nineteenth-century Methodism, examining how believers belonging to a tradition renowned for its hymnody used references to hymns and hymn-singing to express deeply-felt religious beliefs and sentiments. Comparing and contrasting private letters with published descriptions in religious magazines, [XX] explores the ways in which the embeddedness of hymns in Methodist practice allowed writers to express their own religious convictions, or those of their subjects, in ways that would be mutually understood and authenticated by their readers. [XX] invokes and modifies Jeff Astley’s concept of ordinary theology¹³ as a framework for interpreting the potency of hymns in shaping and sustaining religious faith testified to in the various types of life-writing and private communications considered.

[XX] examines the evidence of listening experiences in a mental health context, through the formal reports of officers in lunatic asylums from the middle and end of the nineteenth century. Although second-hand in their nature, such documents offer an insight into listening experiences among a group for which little other evidence is available, illustrating the importance of third-party evidence in recovering something of the experience

¹³ A connection might be drawn between the concept of ‘ordinary theology’ and that of ‘ordinary listeners’, in so far as ‘ordinary’ Christians are those who do not have a professional or privileged engagement with theology, just as ordinary listeners do not have a professional or privileged engagement with music.

of those whose voices are otherwise lost. The reports suggest that listening to and participating in music had both a direct effect and an indirect role in the rehabilitation of patients. [XX] considers the range of ways in which musical listening was discussed, using a medical article from the 1890s to further explore formal consideration of and experimentation with music as a diagnostic and therapeutic tool. Taken together these sources build up a philosophy of musical listening, pointing to the power of music for both treatment and social control.

[XX] looks at listeners to religious singing in the context of nineteenth-century Wales with its mythic status as ‘the land of song’. [XX] considers the responses of listeners to the *plygain*, a Welsh Christmas carol service, and the *cymanfa ganu*, a hymn-singing assembly, asking how far the idea of Wales as a uniquely musical nation, which took root at precisely this time, penetrated into people’s perceptions of Welsh religious singing, and (if it did) why. At the same time, [XX] considers the challenges of researching the listening experiences of the nineteenth-century working classes, and asks what insights into working-class listening we might gain from the descriptions left by listeners to these practices, and how these differ from, or what they might add to, those written by historians and other commentators.

The Listening Experience as Evidence

Since each of the articles that follows subscribes to the central idea of focusing on the personal responses to music of the ordinary listener, it is worth explaining the types of sources on which we have drawn, both for the articles themselves and more broadly in our research. (The examples used in this introduction have deliberately *not* been drawn from the articles, but from the research project more widely.) The material is restricted to personal descriptions of the experience of listening to music, as well as third-party descriptions in which the effect of music on others is observed. The latter are especially necessary for voices

that would not otherwise be heard; this is most obviously the case where the listeners were illiterate, but there could be other preventive circumstances – as [XX] suggests, for example, the stigma of mental illness might make subjects reluctant to keep a record of their experiences. It is further restricted by type according to a set of ‘protocols’ that the project team developed by evaluating a wide range of genres of writing for the extent to which each genuinely reflects personal experiences of listening.¹⁴ Of perhaps the greatest value are documents such as diaries and personal correspondence recording personal experiences, including experiences of music. While it is certainly true, as [XX] points out in his article, that we should not assume that such documents are simple, unfiltered records of events, they do generally have considerable strengths as sources. The letters of Lieutenant J.K. Mackenzie with which [XX] opens his article paint a vivid and valuable picture of the place of music in the experience of an army officer in the late Georgian period, in terms of both its social and its military functions. They were a contemporary record, often written ‘in the moment’ – for example, as he was listening to the band ‘playing quite close to my window’ – with no other known intention than keeping his mother and sister up to date with his day-to-day life. Autobiographies, on the other hand, are generally reflections on experiences at a considerable temporal distance, intended for a wide readership, and for both these reasons particularly susceptible to greater or lesser degrees of fictionalisation¹⁵ – though they may nonetheless be significant sources. The autobiography of Robert Roberts, the ‘Wandering Scholar’ discussed in [XX’s] article, is a case in point, where known elements of fictionalisation sit side by side with important information about rural Welsh life (including musical life) in the mid-

¹⁴ These ‘protocols for inclusion’ can be found at <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/node/53/>

¹⁵ David Vincent makes the point, for example, that during the nineteenth century, ‘autobiography’ was a genre ‘susceptible to appropriation by practitioners in other fields... [and particularly] attractive to... inexperienced...novelists who found in its structure an acceptable solution to the considerable technical difficulty of constructing a novel.’ See *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981): 2.

nineteenth century that has made it an acknowledged ‘classic’ of working-class autobiography.

Certain types of evidence lie outside our remit. Professional criticism of the sort published as newspaper and magazine reviews is one such category. In making this exclusion we have set aside what is probably the greatest quantity of writing devoted to the appraisal of musical performance, but we did so on the basis that, since it is consciously fashioned to influence public opinion about music, it is typologically different from the evidence that we are interested in gathering. However, in excluding professional critique, we are not denying its inherent worth, and there is obvious potential for approaches which use the different types of sources in combination – one can imagine, for example, that a comparison of the language of professional criticism and that of personal writings about music might yield interesting results, perhaps in terms of how far listeners were influenced by their reading of published criticism.

Another excluded category is works of fiction. There is little doubt that many descriptions of musical life in fiction – Thomas Hardy’s depiction of rural church music in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, for example – can be accepted as true to their time. Equally, it must be acknowledged that the gap between ‘fictional’ and ‘non-fictional’ writing is often narrow, and that apparently factual writing is not necessarily a transparent representation of actual events (as illustrated by the autobiography of Robert Roberts). The scholarship of life writing has shown the extent to which writers of letters, diaries and other autobiographical works make authorial choices just as do writers of fiction, shaping and fashioning the self that they choose to portray, even in writing intended only for their closest friends and family.¹⁶

¹⁶ See, for instance, Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester University Press, 1994); James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Susan E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edn (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Taking these caveats into account, but ultimately because fictional texts, no matter how accurately they portray events contemporaneous with the writer's life and experience, are nonetheless products of the imagination, we have not included fiction in our core evidential set. As with professional criticism, there is, of course, no reason why musicologists should not use primary sources of the type we have prioritised together with fiction. In the interests of clarity and consistency, however, the following articles focus on personal testimony that falls outside the orbits of both professional criticism and fiction, and it is this type of material that is at the centre of the project and that defines it as unique.

An obvious challenge arises from the fact that, in most cases, the evidence is directly derived from written records. It follows that it comes from subjects who were both literate and engaged in the practice of writing, so that a bias in favour of subjects from the higher social classes is almost inevitable, certainly in earlier periods when literacy was less common. Leaving aside the fact that this is a condition of all modes of historical enquiry based on written evidence, we have sought to mitigate its effects through the use of three types of sources.¹⁷ The first are working-class autobiographical writings, which exist from the later eighteenth century onwards, and the project has targeted such writings with particular help from the Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies at Brunel University.¹⁸ Amongst the evidence thus acquired are autobiographical fragments written in the 1940s and 50s by Minnie Frisby (born in 1877), variously a domestic servant, a dressmaker and a barmaid. She offers us a sense of the richness of the everyday musical life of her Birmingham childhood. One particular musical memory, which must date from the 1880s, is

¹⁷ Given the affinities between the LED Project and history from below, it should be no surprise that many of the sources on which we have drawn, both in this issue and in the project more generally, are ones we owe to the work of history-from-below groups and scholars.

¹⁸ We are especially grateful to the Special Collections Librarian at Brunel, Katie Flanagan, for her interest in the project and her readiness to help us with accessing the collection. The content of the collection can be gauged from the three-volume annotated bibliography *The Autobiography of the Working Class*, (eds) John Burnett, David Vincent and David Mayall (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984, 1987 and 1989).

of her father Joseph Jones (a nail maker and watercress farmer), who clearly had a considerable repertoire of favourite songs, a number of which attest to British familiarity with American popular music and mid-nineteenth-century American songwriters such as Stephen Foster and Benjamin Hanby:

I know my father used to idolize and spoil me, and I remember how he used to stand me between his knees and sing to me, with one hand on his knee and his feet beating time; he would sing the Negro Spirituals, and all the old songs such as :- “Oh Susieanna, oh don’t you cry for me” and the one—“Oh my darling Nellie Gray, they have taken her away”, and also, “I have no wife to bother my life, as the world I go travelling through, and never sit down with a tear or a frown, but paddle my own canoe”, yes, he was always singing.¹⁹

The Burnett Archive also provides a rather more sceptical account of the impact of music in Methodist culture than the one from the *Methodist Magazine* quoted at the start of this Introduction. Written by Arthur Gill (born in 1887), the son of a Leeds cobbler, it describes the dubious effect of his devout parents’ attempts to instil in him an equal sense of piety:

Love feasts, too, were held from time to time,- many people seemed very fond of them, but to me - a hardboiled egg, I couldn’t see the point of them. What suited me better were the “Service of Songs” which were held once or twice a year. These were, as a rule Sentimental Stories set to music. There was a reader who read out to the congregation a portion of the story-- then some singing and so on to the bitter end. Some of these “Service of Songs” were super sentimental. Talk about floods of tears from the ladies-- we could have done with a “Second Ark”! The “reader” at these S.

¹⁹ Minnie Frisby, ‘Memories’, *Brunel Library The Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies*, number 1:250, page I.1. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1532093682349> accessed: 15 February, 2019. (By permission of Brunel University Library.) ‘Oh! Susanna’, by Foster, dates from 1847; ‘Darling Nelly Gray’, by Hanby, dates from 1856. ‘Paddle your own canoe’ is an English music-hall song from c.1865 by Harry Clifton and Charles Coote.

of Songs was a Mrs. Day, wife of Job Day, the founder of “Day’s dry soap works” whose works at that time was not far away from my dad’s shop.²⁰

Why Gill wrote his ‘Reminiscences’, we don’t know: they were unpublished in his lifetime²¹ and may never have been intended for anyone other than his family. Whatever his motivation, they form an instructive contrast with the *Methodist Magazine* piece, underlining the proselytising motivations of the latter, and echoing some of the more sceptical opinions expressed in private correspondence which [XX] discusses in [XX] article. Gill gives a number of detailed accounts of music in both religious and secular contexts in late-Victorian Leeds.

The second type of source is oral history recordings and transcriptions. While we have not conducted oral history interviews, we have drawn readily on existing oral history collections, both in this issue and in the project more generally.²² Oral history, with its emphasis on ‘the personal, the local, and unofficial’, and ‘the life experience of people of all kinds’,²³ has an obvious affinity with our interests. There was a great deal of oral history activity in the 1960s and 70s, when the approach was new and became the focus of attention from historians and broadcasters alike,²⁴ thus late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century listening experiences are well served by oral history recordings. [XX’s] article in this issue

²⁰ Arthur Gill, ‘I remember! Reminiscences of a Cobbler's Son’, *Brunel University Library, Special Collections*, number 1:268, pages 19-20. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1540298391057> accessed: 15 February, 2019 (By permission of Brunel University Library.)

²¹ Extracts were included by John Burnett in his collection *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820's to the 1920's* (London: Allen Lane, 1974).

²² The LED project has avoided the temptation to solicit material through questionnaires or interviews. There are a number of reasons for this decision, including practical ones to do with the ethics of gathering and storing data from living subjects, and the amount of resource that this type of research activity would absorb, but also out of sympathy with a concern voiced in digital humanities circles, where it has been increasingly felt that digital humanities research was in danger of exhibiting a naïve tendency to concentrate on social scientific analysis of ‘big data’ (the search for patterns and trends, for example), at the expense of the traditional strengths of humanities scholarship, particularly the close reading of texts. Our primary interest has always been in facilitating and enhancing the types of research that characterise the humanities.

²³ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (3rd edition), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 4-6.

²⁴ Raphael Samuel notes that the BBC was one of the ‘early conquests’ of the Oral History Society (founded in 1970-71), entering enthusiastically into broadcasting ‘the voice of the past’ from its sound archives. See Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London; New York: Verso, 2012): 191.

uses evidence from such a collection held by the National History Museum in Cardiff, which is an important source for many aspects of Welsh life – though as [XX] points out, and as is true of any oral history project, the interviews are shaped and directed by the priorities of the interviewer, and there is a rationale behind the formation of the collection which leads to the inclusion of some topics and the exclusion of others. Oral history is also susceptible to the same weakness as autobiography, in that it is generally recorded a considerable time after the remembered events, and accurate recall cannot be relied on. Many memories, however, remain strikingly and movingly powerful: almost by its very nature, oral history tends to be rich in memories of childhood, and many of the interviews in the National History Museum collection relate to the learning of hymns, ballads and nursery songs from parents and grandparents. A brief but vivid glimpse of such an experience occurs in an interview with Owen Morgan, born in 1887 on Anglesey, who remembered how his grandmother would sing an ‘action song’ to him, ‘*Gyrru, gyrru, gyrru i Gaer*’ (‘Drive, drive, drive to Chester’), bouncing him up and down to mimic the rhythm of the horse and cart: ‘and of course nana would lift me up and down while singing that one – “gyrru, gyrru, gyrru i Gaer”.’²⁵

The third type is sources that witness, apparently reliably, the responses of others to music. Indeed, [XX’s] study of the listening experiences of patients in asylums is almost entirely based on such sources. The writings of some war correspondents are another illustration, the work of the first great war journalist W.H. Russell being a case in point. Russell’s writing is at its most evocative when describing the impact of music on soldiers, as here in the aftermath of the battle of Alma where he writes as one of the many who shared an experience of music:

²⁵ ...*a wrth gwrs fydda nain ‘n nghodi fi i fyny ag i lawr wrth ganu honna’n te – ‘gyrru, gyrru, gyrru i Gaer’*. St Fagans National History Museum, oral history transcripts, Tape 69. [XX’s] translation.

Late last night orders were sent round the divisions to be prepared for marching at daybreak, and early this morning we left the blood-stained heights of the Alma – a name that will ever be memorable in our history. Soon after dawn the French assembled all their drums and trumpets on top of the highest of the hills they carried, and broken by peals of sound from the bugles of the infantry, celebrated their victory ere they departed. It was spirited, stirring, and thrilling music. And its effect, as it swelled through the darkness of early morning down over the valley, can never be forgotten.²⁶

Other sources refer directly or indirectly to ‘the crowd’, a term that is not without controversy among historians because its reporting has been so susceptible to a political agenda: as [XX] points out in [XX] article, ‘the crowd’ was an ambiguous and worrying phenomenon, and any behaviour or mood could be attributed to it that suited the observer’s motives.²⁷ As such the term has often been used to indicate the observer’s disapproval at rowdy and uncivilised behaviour such as occurred in 1829 at the Tower of London, when public performances by regimental bands were suspended because of ‘the very disorderly and improper conduct of the crowd of both sexes, who thronged the Tower during the time the band played on Sunday afternoon’.²⁸

At other times, observers comment (often paternalistically) on the virtuous crowd and the civilising effect of music upon it:

How many a factory hand or office clerk in the busy towns of Manchester and the North of England may have owed his only knowledge of what was beautiful to the

²⁶ William Howard Russell, Account of the aftermath of the battle of Alma. In *The Times* (20 October, 1854). <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1386596332083> accessed: 15 March, 2018

²⁷ See also, for example, Tony Hayter, *The Army and the Crowd in Mid-Georgian England* (London: Macmillan, 1978), and Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁸ Regimental Music at the Tower. In *United Services Journal and Naval and Military Magazine*, Part 2 (1829): 240. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1521472736511> accessed: 19 March, 2018

music he had an opportunity of hearing at my father's weekly concerts during the dreary winter months! It is impossible to believe that some element of refinement has not been developed in the large audiences of working men who, standing and packed together in great discomfort as I have often seen them, have yet listened for hours, and evidently with much appreciation, to most intricate and delicate music; or that the taste thus formed in one direction should not have had its effect in others, and possibly have coloured their whole lives.²⁹

Occasionally an observer such as Walter Freer, who spent his career as General Manager of Glasgow Corporation Halls and Musical Recitals, appears to harbour a degree of sympathy for the unruliness of the crowd in the face of behaviour such as that for which the tenor Sims Reeves was notorious:

On one occasion he sang "Come into the Garden Maud" to a Glasgow audience, and so enthusiastic were his listeners that, like Oliver Twist, they daringly asked for more. They shouted for "My Pretty Jane," as an encore, applauded incessantly, and would not resume their places. Meanwhile Sims Reeves had left the platform, and now stood in the ante-room with his coat on, ready for the road. He was quite unconcerned. The secretary of the meeting, anxious to placate the roaring patrons, hastily sought him out there and asked him what his terms would be for another song, say, "My Pretty Jane." Sims Reeves said five guineas, and the money was paid over forthwith. The crowded hall nearly collapsed with enthusiasm when the singer reappeared on the platform. But the unexpected was in store for them. After singing one verse only of his ballad, Sims Reeves walked off and left the hall unseen! In vain the audience clamoured for his return.... Presently, however, it leaked out that Sims Reeves had left the building,

²⁹ Marie Hallé and Charles E Hallé, eds, *Life and letters of Sir Charles Hallé; being an autobiography (1819-1860)* (London, 1896): 143. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1427797759197> accessed: 19 March, 2018

and in their fury at the manner in which they had been tricked, as they thought, they then set about smashing up the furniture.³⁰

All such sources must necessarily be read with an eye to the possible values and motivations of the observer and what their observations may unwittingly reveal, but nonetheless they hold great potential value, particularly in the absence of the direct testimony of those whose voices are otherwise absent. They may, for example, reveal something about access to and consumption of music by the lower classes, the responses of audiences to particular types of music, the circumstances in which they heard it, the experience of being part of an audience, or the attitudes of those higher up the social scale towards the musical life of the lower classes.

Often, it is what is conveyed implicitly and unwittingly that is the most valuable aspect of the evidence. Unlikely as it may seem, even official documents such as British parliamentary papers can be a source of information about the effects of music, particularly on groups and in social gatherings. The Eversley Commission of 1862 was tasked with enquiring ‘into the condition of the Volunteer force in Great Britain’, especially its strengths as a defence force and the financial probity of the widely distributed volunteer units. The result was an unintentionally entertaining source of information on the tenacity with which the Volunteer regiments clung to their bands as a vital necessity rather than a frivolous expense. The evidence given by Major Beresford of the 7th Surrey Volunteers attests to the effect of a band on the morale and camaraderie of the regiment, but also unwittingly betrays its more broadly social (and from the Commission’s point of view, questionable) functions:

³⁰ Walter Freer, *My Life and Memories* (Glasgow, 1929): 39-40
<https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1412783895988> accessed: 19 March, 2018

Nothing tends to bring the men so much together as a band, and when it plays on the parade ground, the members come there and bring their friends with them and they walk about there just as well as they could in a park.³¹

Inevitably, the quantity and quality of information found in individual sources varies: many are extremely rich, others offer very limited information. Ada Jackson (1863-1925), a twenty-year-old worker in a Leicester hat factory, kept a diary which regularly records listening experiences, such as attendance at ‘the Police Band Concert with Father and Mother’, which she ‘enjoyed very much indeed’ apart from having damp clothes because it had rained on the way;³² seeing *Patience* with her father and her fiancé George, who ‘thinks it a very lively piece’;³³ or going on Easter Sunday ‘with Lily to St. George’s Church, the singing was grand’.³⁴ She rarely gives much more detail than this, but the listening experiences add up to a rich musical life which was shared with her family and friends, and they further contribute to a broader picture of what music meant personally and socially to many working-class people, particularly those committed to ‘self-improvement’, in the later nineteenth century.

Methodologies and Approaches

Claims for the novelty of our approach might raise the expectation that it is accompanied by a discrete and essentially new methodology. In fact, our fundamental aim has always been to facilitate and enhance the types of research that characterise the

³¹ Evidence of Major Beresford of the 7th Surrey Volunteers. In Charles Shaw-Lefevre Viscount Eversley, *Report of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the condition of the Volunteer Force in Great Britain. Command Papers; Reports of Commissioners, 1862 [3053]* (1862): 655. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1366045009> accessed: 15 March, 2018

³² 24 Jan 1883. *The diary of Ada Jackson 1883* (Leicester, 1993): 18. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1422447812622> accessed: 24 April, 2018

³³ 7 Mar. 1883. *The diary of Ada Jackson 1883*: 30. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1422448762273> accessed: 24 April, 2018

³⁴ Easter Sunday, 25 Mar. 1883. *The diary of Ada Jackson 1883*: 35. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1422459956951> accessed: 24 April, 2018

humanities – close reading, interpretation and synthesis of sources, in order to construct new narratives. It does not, in any case, strictly follow that any body of evidence characterised by type calls out for a discrete method for using it: Nicholas Cook in his essay on a methodology for analysing recorded music makes the point that methodology is determined to a large extent by the type of person who uses the evidence and what he or she expects from it.³⁵ So, for example, the approach taken to a particular piece or set of evidence by a record producer or engineer would be different than the approach taken by a musicologist. Similarly, while our primary interests are in characteristic humanities approaches, we have never claimed that the type of evidence upon which we focus must be used exclusively in any given discourse – indeed, it is difficult to imagine that being the case: we have always seen the material in the database as having a wide utility for a range of disciplines and interdisciplinary projects. It is impossible to predict or anticipate every use to which the material will be put. It is distinctive because it satisfies the tests (the protocols) that determine the project, rather than because it is subjected to a standard methodology or discourse.³⁶

While our intention is that the raw source material should be open to the application of a variety of methodologies, we nevertheless apply a consistent approach to the evaluation of sources, and since these are historical documents, it follows that they need to be subjected to the normal historiographical rules, cautions and processes. Inevitably, use of language needs careful attention. As [XX] points out in [XX] article, some words and expressions may need to be understood in the terms of their usage in a particular period, while [XX]

³⁵ Nicholas Cook, 'Methods for Analysing Recordings', in Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2009): 221.

³⁶ Once entered in the database, the material is structured according to objective labels including the type of source (diary, letter and so on), the date and place of origin, the gender of the subject, and whether the experience of listening described in the source was in a private or public space. A different set of categorisations can summarise the music heard by type. While the database has basic and advanced search tools, these features can be captured individually and quantitatively. A further set of factual information can be discerned analytically. Most records provide one or more of the following: objective information about repertoire, instrumentation, and more detailed information about the circumstances in which the performance took place.

encounters the challenges of dealing with dialects. Furthermore, many people lacked skill as writers, and many were writing for no readers other than themselves, so wrote without particular thought for wider intelligibility. Often, people wrote with a perception of how one *should* write in that particular genre or form – [XX] refers, for example, to the principles that underpinned travel writing in the period, and to the function of letter writing as a literary training ground. [XX's] article points to the impact of editorial selection on published works – in this case, of spiritual autobiography and obituary. Thus there is always a need for the evidence to be probed beyond its face value.³⁷

It is important to emphasise that a database of personal listening experiences is more than a collection of anecdotes – it is a stepping-off point for research. Thus, even relatively elementary pieces of information offer the possibility that, particularly if collected *en masse*, they may shed light on the wider role of music in past societies. Many sources also reveal richer information about the impact of the experience of listening to music on the individual that points to possibilities for a wider-reaching study. In her reminiscences, Frances Bunsen (1791-1876), brought up in Monmouthshire, but whose life was subsequently spent as the wife of a Prussian diplomat in Rome, Bern, London and finally Heidelberg, gives an account of her first really memorable musical experience:

[A]n event very material to myself had taken place, in my being taken by my Parents to the triennial musical festival at Hereford: the first occasion of my becoming acquainted with any performance of music beyond a single song, or a wandering band or barrel-organ... The Oratorio of Sampson, on the first evening, & the Messiah on the last morning, are fixed in grateful remembrance. - Mrs. Billington was the Soprano singer, & Harrison & Bartleman were the Tenor & Bass: & did I but possess

³⁷ With that in mind, the type of source and the bibliographical or archival citation are captured in the database for every source, so that users may be alert to the possible wider implications – of the genre of the writing, for example – and may follow up the source so as to locate the extract in its broader context.

the musical power, coveted in vain all my life, I could now pour forth from the treasure of song then laid in faithful memory, the strains of the first named, in 'Let the bright Seraphim,' & in 'I know that my Redeemer liveth': & the deep and mellow tones of Bartleman in the Bass songs of the Messiah seem to be still reproduced when I think of them.³⁸

The description, written in old age, reveals the vagaries of memory – the Three Choirs Festival of 1805 was held at Gloucester Cathedral, so she must be at fault either in her recollection of the year or of the place. But she nonetheless conveys the profound impact that early musical experiences may have in establishing a love of music and shaping musical taste. A strikingly similar observation, in which a granddaughter's experience revived a Victorian grandmother's childhood memories, was sent in to the project by a member of the public:

You are indeed an enthusiast and to prove that you are not so singular in your inspirations, I will tell you the good effect music used to have on me when I attended as a young girl festivals in Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's church, notwithstanding the great pleasure I experienced it was attended with a sort of pain which brought tears in my eyes and for hours I could not descend from the clouds my mind and heart full of heavenly sounds I became so silent persons used to ask my mother if I had anything on my mind. I do consider music a religion it takes your thoughts from earth to heaven and tears caused by music partake of divine emotion. You are new my dear Janet to such inspiring sounds you will be a little toned down by the next festival.³⁹

³⁸ Frances von Bunsen, 'Reminiscences written by Baroness de Bunsen (nee Frances Waddington) in September 1874', Maxwell Fraser, ed.. In *National Library of Wales Journal*, volume 11/4 (1960): 327-8.

<http://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1373899870> accessed: 10 April, 2018

³⁹ Letter from Mrs Sarah Jane Reeve to her granddaughter, 11 May 1865. From a private collection (with kind permission of Vivienne Duncan). <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1395074191731> accessed: 24 April, 2018

Such descriptions might form the basis of a broader investigation of the function of music in memory, or the impact of music heard in childhood.

Some of the most interesting experiments have emerged from using clusters of evidence (defined by period, region or type) and applying them to prescribed topics or themes – topics that are often suggested by the observation of patterns of experience emerging from the data itself. Patterns of continuity and change, of the routine and the exceptional, public discourse and personal experience, often provide interesting perspectives when measured against other evidence domains. An examination of sources for listening at the front in World War I, for example, reveals a very different picture from the one promoted in contemporary public discourse on the purpose of music in wartime, as found, for instance, in the civilian press and in parliamentary debate. The latter emphasised morale, patriotism, the necessity of a stiff upper lip, and the efficacy of ‘martial music’ in achieving these ends. In contrast, the letters, diaries and memoirs of those serving at the front reveal rather the variety and vitality of musical life at the front, how different the kinds of music were from what one might have expected, and indeed how different the impact of music seemed to be from the impact that the public discourse implies. For those recording their personal experiences, music reminded them of home, of the people they loved and had left behind, and it gave them pleasure and relief. They describe their musical experiences in the language of sentimentality, of comedy, and using a quasi-medical vocabulary of sustenance and healing. So to Red Cross nurse Florence Farmborough, an evening of impromptu singing was ‘a vital necessity... a life-giving nourishment’ that counters her ‘abnormal, nomadic, wearying, ugly life’.⁴⁰ To Edmund Blunden and his men of the Royal Sussex Regiment, the Medical Officer’s hoarse and tuneless performance of ‘The Battle Cry of Freedom’ was ‘a cure’.⁴¹ And to Colonel

⁴⁰ Florence Farmborough, *War Recollections of 1915* (City of Alexandria, 2005):

11. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1375269268> accessed: 15 March, 2018

⁴¹ Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (Penguin, 1982):

146. <https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1395334157219> accessed: 15 March, 2018

Walter Nicholson, the performances of the divisional concert parties were ‘medicine’ which was ‘swallowed in great gulps.’⁴² It is not so much that the evidence wasn’t there to be read, but rather that its significance, the human impact of music in these circumstances, only becomes really compelling when one encounters it repeatedly and in quantity.⁴³

Thus, while listening experiences can provide evidence to substantiate extant historical views, they sometimes point to a different interpretation, and this is in large part because they reveal the experiences of ordinary people rather than those of influencers or opinion-formers. The articles in this issue emerge from a concerted attempt to give foreground to and elevate the voices of those, irrespective of their social class, who are less often heard. Such an attempt forces us into proximity with the reality of how lives were led in the past and the place of music in those lives. This reality, despite its importance, rarely presents itself in the literature of nineteenth-century music, and one wonders how many other histories remain hidden because their data has yet to be revealed.

⁴² Col. Walter N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines* (Jonathan Cape, 1939): 256.
<https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1532001364452> accessed: 19 July, 2018

⁴³ For a much fuller discussion of this topic, see [XX], “‘A Vital Necessity’: Musical Experiences in the Life Writing of British Military Personnel at the Western Front”, in Michelle Meinhart, ed., *A ‘Great Divide’ or a Longer Nineteenth Century?: Music, Britain, and the First World War* (Routledge: forthcoming).