

Friction, Fiction and Fashion: German Perceptions of Music Life in Britain in the 'Long Nineteenth Century'

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Pride and Prejudices: Perceiving the Music of Societies

For the best part of the 'long nineteenth Century' the Germans did not care much about Music in Britain. Confident in their own musical achievements most of them simply did not include Britain on the cultural map. To start with some disappointing news, therefore, almost every word of the title above is misleading. First of all, the term 'German perception' is delineated rather loosely. In the nineteenth century – the era before the Beatles and the Rolling Stones – only a few musicians, journalists, and artists in Germany took any interest in English music culture.¹ Secondly, the following does not deal with music in general, but with so-called serious music. The article will refer to the public perception of opera and symphonic music, not to the views of music halls or of popular music in general. Another, final restriction: The article cannot and will not deal with the music life of nineteenth century Britain. Much like today, Germans in earlier times used the terms 'Great Britain' and 'England' synonymously. On this issue, sensitive historians usually admonish us to differentiate between the terms and to content ourselves with dealing with England. I will go one step further in this modesty and will focus on London for the most part – instead of England or Great Britain.²

Having marked the limits of my topic it seems nevertheless important to emphasize why music matters: Looking at the perception of musical works, concepts, values and practices between Germany and Britain during the 'long nineteenth century' can help illuminate the creation of cultural knowledge and the patterns of cultural transfer. The article will

¹ Cf. for instance Charles E. McClelland, *The German Historians and England. A Study in Nineteenth-Century Views* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 3-11; Celia Applegate, Pamela Porter (eds.), *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Anna Pederson, "A.B. Marx, Berlin Concert Life, and German National Identity", *Nineteenth Century Music* 18 (1994), 87-107.

² Throughout this article the terms "English" and "British" are used synonymously because the Victorians and Edwards tended to do so, and actually preferred the expression "English" in cultural matters. Following the contemporary mutual perception I do not differentiate between the music of German and Austrian composers or between English and Irish artists.

attempt to define the direction, intensity and importance of cultural perception and interaction. My aim is to analyze the political and cultural function of so-called 'serious' music – e.g. the music performed at the opera and symphonic music – by looking at the perception and the assessment of this music by the public sphere, and not into the music itself. The historical dimension of musical culture has not been thoroughly researched, as most surveys from the musicologist perspective concentrated only on the works themselves or on the merits of the 'great' composers. Few publications actually consider music and its reception in the public sphere as an important historical and political phenomenon.³ This article will, therefore, draw attention to the political dimension of cultural practices and tries to show how and why apparently non-political mutual perceptions of music represent highly contested fields of political assessments between Germany and Britain.

First, I would like to describe the terms in which German musicians and journalists perceived the London musical scene. They assessed the music life of London and the status of music in English society against the background of their own ideas about art and society. These selective perceptions and ascriptions, which did not necessarily correspond to 'facts' at all times, reveal the values and images of the world shared by members of the German educated classes. Therefore, their patterns of interpretation cannot be considered particularly useful in the retroactive reconstruction of London's music life as such. Rather, they are tale-telling in nature, with regard to the aesthetic and nationalist ideals of their creators. According to which categories London's music was perceived? What features of London's culture were deliberately rejected by German observers?

In the second part of this essay I direct the glance towards an apparently supreme German music from a British perspective. For this purpose the role of the transfer of certain music and of certain cultural practices between the two countries is illuminated. Having this in mind, the techniques of absorption and denial of a cultural phenomenon may be

³ Cf. the pioneer studies by William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class. The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) and James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris. A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See also Ruth Bereson, *The Operatic State. Cultural Policy and the Opera House* (London: Routledge, 2002); Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera. Music Theatre in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); Ute Daniel, *Hoftheater. Zur Geschichte des Theaters und der Höfe im 18. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995); Michael P. Steinberg, *Listening to Reason. Culture, Subjectivity, and Nineteenth-Century Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Hans-Erich Bödeker (ed.), *Le concert et son public. Mutations de la vie musicale en Europa de 1780 à 1914 (France, Allemagne, Angleterre)* (Paris: Édition de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2002).

a relevant topic in the history of cultural transfers. How was knowledge about a different society created, perceived and transformed? By which media, sort of contacts and practices were music and its institutions, ideas and manners conferred? And finally: What were the causes for the shifting mutual perceptions of the music scene in Britain and Germany?

The Music of the Metropolis

'I have seen the most extraordinary thing this world has to offer to an bewildered mind, I have seen it and I am still amazed... – I talk of London.'⁴ These lines were written by Heinrich Heine in 1827. In terms of a music metropolis, London did not need to hide behind Paris, the 'capital of the nineteenth century' (Walter Benjamin). This was especially true with regard to the consumption of music: As Hector Berlioz noted in 1853, '[i]l n'y a pas de ville au monde, j'en suis convaincu, où l'on consomme autant de musique qu'à Londres'.⁵ Nowhere else the audience spent so much money on music and nowhere else music allowed for so much money made or lost. The two leading opera houses of London – Her Majesty's Theatre and the Royal Italian (sic!) Opera House Covent Garden – were involved in a bitter and ruinous struggle for the favour of the audience. The music life of the city was characterized by a singular surplus of performances and concerts of all kinds: opera, operetta, church music, symphonies, and chamber music.⁶

No city in the German states and the German Empire, respectively, could compete with these conditions. The astonished admiration of travelling Germans was correspondingly high. Eduard Hanslick, the much feared and very influential Viennese doyen music critic of his time, who was an intimate friend of Brahms and a likewise intimate foe of Wagner, is quite a case in point for the excitement about London shared by German musicians and journalists. After he had stayed in London for a couple of months in 1886 he showed himself impressed by the 'flood of music' available in this place: 'Der Wiener Concertsturm ist gering gegen den

⁴ Heinrich Heine, "Englische Fragmente", cit. in: Heinz Brüggemann, "Aber schickt keinen Poeten nach London!" *Großstadt und literarische Wahrnehmung im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Texte und Interpretationen* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1985), 254.

⁵ Hector Berlioz, *Les Soirées de l'Orchestre, VINGT-ET-UNIÈME SOIRÉE*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Levy, 1854).

⁶ Cf. Cyril Ehrlich, *Royal Philharmonic. A History of the Royal Philharmonic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Christina Bashford, Leanne Langley (eds.), *Music and British Culture, 1785-1914. Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Eric Walter White, *A History of English Opera* (London: faber and faber, 1983); George Rowell, *The Victorian theatre 1792-1914*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

Pariser und gar nichts gegen London, wo auf das Feldgeschrei: 'The season!' sich alles erhebt, was in England spielt, geigt und singt, und Alles hinzuströmt, was musikalisch berühmt ist auf dem Continent.'⁷

However, only superlatives sufficed when he went into raptures about the largest concert hall of the world, the Royal Albert Hall:

Die grandiose Albert Hall steht auf der Stelle des Weltausstellungsgebäudes von 1862 und wurde im März 1871 von der Königin persönlich eröffnet. [...] Zwölf-tausend Personen haben darin Platz, nicht etwa gedrängt, sondern auf bequemen, von allen Seiten amphitheatralisch aufsteigenden Sitzen, zu welchen 26 verschiedene Eingänge führen, nebst einem zu den obersten Plätzen emporragenden Ascenseur, der fortwährend funktioniert. Und dieser unabsehbare Raum soll hinreichend gefüllt, ja ausverkauft sein in einem Concert? Ich habe das Unglaubliche selbst gesehen und kann mir nichts Imposanteres ... denken.⁸

In 1877 Hanslick's archenemy Richard Wagner performed a series of concerts of his own works in the Royal Albert Hall to cover the deficit of his first festival at Bayreuth. Nowhere else was there a financially more potent audience and a comparable concert hall. Wagner himself was fascinated by the metropolis of the British Empire. After a visit of the vast docks of London, Wagner drew a parallel between the industrial world-power Britain and his vision of a reign of mammon in 'Rheingold'. His wife Cosima noted his exclamation: 'Der Traum Alberichs ist hier erfüllt, Nibelheim, Weltherrschaft, Tätigkeit, Arbeit, überall der Druck des Dampfes und Nebel. – Abends Tannhäuser italienisch! O! ... alles schrecklich!'⁹

Cosima Wagner wasn't the only one who felt that playing the Tannhäuser in Italian more or less equalled a sacrilege. As much as German travellers were amazed by the splendour and variety of London's music life, they just as harshly criticised the alleged commercialisation and superficiality of British art. According to the perception of many Germans, it was exactly that British fashion and luxury which jeopardized both the aura of art in general and especially that of the highest form of art, namely music. In 1914, the author and publisher Oscar Schmitz remarked:

'Was aber noch mehr auffällt, ist die ungenierte Offenheit, mit der sich das Theater als Geschäftsunternehmen zeigt. [...] So kommt es, dass auch in den besten Theatern wie in Variétés der Vorhang voll von Geschäftsankündigungen ist. ... Warum auch nicht, da das Theater ja nur dem Amusement dient, wie jedes Wirtshaus oder Tingeltangel.'¹⁰

⁷ Eduard Hanslick, *Musikalisches Skizzenbuch der "Modernen Oper" IV. Theil. Neue Kritiken und Schilderungen* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für deutsche Literatur, 1888), 269.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁹ Martin Gregor-Dellin, Dietrich Mack (eds.), *Cosima Wagner, Die Tagebücher II / 1873-1877*, 2nd ed. (München: Piper, 1982), 1052.

¹⁰ Oscar A.H. Schmitz, *Das Land ohne Musik. Englische Gesellschaftsprobleme* (München: Georg Müller Verlag, 1914), 102-03.

Correspondingly, Eduard Hanslick, too, criticized the London music theatres, claiming that commercially-oriented pressures went hand in hand with trendy shallowness.

Das ganze Theaterwesen Londons krankt an dieser unseligen Zufälligkeit und Zerfahrenheit, welche einheitliche, vollendete Gesamtleistungen verhindert, in den Mitwirkenden die Liebe zur Kunst tödeter und nur die Sucht nach Geld lebendig erhält. Die Directoren vollends haben gar nichts weiter im Auge, denn die Theater sind hier durchaus Privatunternehmungen und beziehen keine Staatssubvention. Die Folge von dem Allen ist, dass das Theater, insbesondere die Oper, als Kunstinstitution keine Achtung genießt in England, sondern lediglich als Sache der Mode oder leichten Zeitvertreibes angesehen wird.¹¹

Since series of operas and concerts were a matter of private enterprise in Britain and, in contrast to Germany, had to do without state subsidies, good seats for the Covent Garden Opera especially were expensive and only affordable for high society, i.e. for the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. In the first half of the nineteenth Century the prices for the best boxes in the leading London opera house, Her Majesty's Theatre, doubled from 150 to 300 £ during the season.¹² This was an enormous amount of money – equalling a typical servant's ten-years-salary. But than again, only lavishness fosters prestige. According to Thorstein Veblen's "Theory of the Leisure Class" going to the opera can be regarded as conspicuous consumption, as a public demonstration of wealth.¹³ Still, in 1908 the German specialist journal "Signale für die Musikalische Welt" wrote about the elitists conditions of London opera houses: 'Hat die Oper in Covent Garden während der letzten zehn Jahre also keine nennenswerten künstlerischen Fortschritte gemacht, so man das schon verschmerzen, weil derlei Luxusopern wegen ihrer sozialen Exklusivität ja doch nicht als Erziehungs- und Erbauungsmittel für das große Publikum in Betracht kommen.'¹⁴

It was the primarily social function of 'serious music' that struck many music-loving Germans in London so disagreeably. Time and again German critics lamented that musical performances merely served to entertain the fashionable society of the upper-middle classes and the nobility. The Italian opera especially, Eduard Hanslick continues, was favoured by 'Mode, ... und "Fashion" ... , diesen mächtigsten Tyrannen der Londoner Gesellschaft'.¹⁵ Indeed, public displays of one's social status were vital for the music life of those days. The clothing of the opera and concert audiences was highly formalized and participation took place in

¹¹ Hanslick, *Skizzenbuch*, 257.

¹² Cf. Jennifer Hall, *Re-Fashioning of a Fashionable Society. Opera-going and Sociability in Britain, 1821-1861* (PhD. University of Yale, 1996).

¹³ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class. An Economic Study of Institutions*, intro. John Kenneth Galbraith (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

¹⁴ *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 66 (1908), 749.

¹⁵ Hanslick, *Skizzenbuch*, 260.

the then ritualized boundaries of established conventions. Unlike any other genre of high culture, concerts and operas offered opportunities to publicly enjoy art according to one's own social self-perception. Therefore, up to the second part of the nineteenth century, the light was not dimmed in the auditorium during concerts, because that would have diminished the social function of mutual observation. By the way in which they celebrated the artistic event, both the bourgeois and the aristocratic audience paid meticulous attention to closing themselves off not only from each other but also from the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. The music was important, but only seen as part of the whole parcel – neck-and-neck with the procedure of seeing and being seen, establishing social contacts, carrying out sophisticated conversations, having a good dinner and last, but certainly not least, connecting with members of the opposite sex.

According to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, no social practice has a stronger classifying effect – i.e. expresses and shapes the patterns of behaviour of a social group more strongly – than the public consumption of music.¹⁶ It begins with the transition from the prosaic world of everyday life to the splendid festivity of the ostentatious concert halls. But even more so, knowledge of music, composers, styles, singer or conductors qualified as a kind of 'arcane knowledge' allowing the initiates to differentiate between those who belonged to the 'happy few' and those who didn't. Those who hadn't a sufficient command of the cultural rules were excluded. Thus, within the framework of social conventions, the public appropriation and evaluation of music had a twofold function in London society during the nineteenth century: On the one hand, it confirmed social identity by a standardized social practice; on the other hand, a taste of art practically displayed served as a means of distinction, in order to maintain and sustain borders and distances within society and in order to label oneself as an individual or a social group. To put the matter in a nutshell: The public listening of music both created and legitimized social and political inequality.

This socially creative quality of musical events can impressively be illustrated by looking at so-called state performances. The power brokers of the nineteenth century loved to attend nights at the opera and at a concert. The performances could provide the elites with an arena in which they could represent themselves successfully. Queen Victoria, for instance, frequently used opera performances for state representation and invited

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of the Taste* (London: Routledge, 1986). Cf. Ivo Supicic, *Music in Society. A Guide to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1987), esp. 141-68; Richard Sennet, *The Fall of the Public Man* (London: faber and faber, 1986); *ibid.*, *The Conscience of the Eye. The Design and Social Life of Cities* (London: faber and faber, 1993).

foreign heads of state for nights at the theatre. In 1855, the “*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*” from Leipzig complained about the desecration of Beethoven’s “*Fidelio*” in the course of a gala night for the French Emperor Napoleon III.:

Die Majestäten erschienen erst nach dem ersten Act. Sofort wurde ‘Partant pour la Syrie’ und ‘God save the Queen’ gespielt und gesungen, und dann ging die Oper wieder weiter. Die Beethoven’sche Musik ist wohl nie selbst in England mit größerer Gleichgültigkeit angehört worden als an jenem Abend. Im ersten Act erwartete das Publikum die Herrschaften, im zweiten betrachtete es sie. – Daß man hierzu Beethoven’s Genius Musik machen ließ, ist ächt englisch!¹⁷

Marking the Differences

From the viewpoint of educated Germans, it was exactly this social function of music that became a lamentable mistake. Especially to music, German elites attached no immanent and functional but rather a transcendental quality. Music contained the promise of new horizons, new orientation and individual experience that could lend sense to life.

At this point the influence of the new bourgeois ‘religion of art’ (Thomas Nipperdey)¹⁸ made itself felt, which increasingly regarded a piece of music as a valuable ‘opus’, as opposed to an entertaining ornament. Music should not simply be enjoyed – it had to be comprehended and it was supposed to have an edifying effect. Therefore, concert halls were regarded as semi-sacral shrines by many Germans. From their point of view, music in general and symphonies – i.e. “absolute music” – in particular represented the highest level of cultural perfection, which had to be protected from commercial or conventional desecration.¹⁹ Eduard Hanslick, therefore, complained about the fashionable and elitist distinction of London audiences:

Im Theater- und Concertleben existirt hier ... eine seltsame Beschränkung der persönlichen Freiheit: die ausdrückliche Vorschrift der Abend-Toilette. Sei noch der Italienischen Oper,

¹⁷ *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 42 (1855), 211.

¹⁸ Thomas Nipperdey, “‘Bürgerlich’ als Kultur”, in: Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987) 143-48.

¹⁹ Cf. Bernd Sponheuer, *Musik als Kunst und Nicht-Kunst. Untersuchungen zur Dichotomie von “hoher” und “niederer” Kunst im musikästhetischen Denken zwischen Kant und Hanslick* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1987); David Gramit, *Cultivating Music. The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770-1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Celia Applegate, *Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn’s Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 45-79; Leon Botstein, “Listening through Reading. Musical Literacy and the Concert Audiences”, *Nineteenth Century Music* 16 (1992), 129-45; *ibid.*, *Music and its Public. Habits of Listening and the Crisis of Musical Modernism in Vienna 1870-1914* (PhD Harvard University, 1985).

diesem Mode-Rendezvous der Reichen und Vornehmen, das kindische Gebot: ‚Evening dress indispensable!‘ vergönnt. Aber mit welchem Rechte kann man einem Musikfreunde, der für sein Geld ein philharmonisches Concert besuchen will, vorschreiben, er müsse unbedingt in Frack und weißer Cravatte erscheinen? Fast drängt sich uns die impertinente Frage auf die Lippen: Kann das in Wahrheit eine musikalische Nation sein, welche uns den Genuß einer Beethovenschen Symphonie durch lächerliche Kleider-Ordnung erschwert und verleidet?²⁰

Another unfortunate example of British ‘superficiality’ and ‘lack of appreciation’ of art was noted by Oscar Schmitz and dealt with the Londoners’ admiration for the performances of top-notch musicians. Unlike in Germany, he reckoned, it was not the sincerity of feeling, but the admiration for circus-like accomplishments which made people flock to the concert halls in London: ‘Die Engländer finden den Zugang zur Musik nicht durch das Herz, sondern vom Sport und von der Kirche aus. Sie erkennen an, dass etwas dazu gehört, ein schwieriges Konzert zu spielen und sie laufen hin, wenn diejenigen auftreten, welche augenblicklich für die “champions” dieses Sports gelten.’²¹

Thus, from a German perspective, English people seemed to lack a true (i.e. educated) understanding of music. In an idealistic manner, the medium of art music in Germany closely corresponded to the cosmos of values of the aspiring middle classes; the harmony of music was a manifestation of the ideal of societal concord. In the structure of a repetitious music the German middle classes could recognize their principles of order. According to these ideas, which gained general acceptance around the middle of the century, art music had to be enjoyed silently and it was exactly this principle of bourgeois listening behaviour which was grievously missed in London. Britons often appeared to be incapable of behaving themselves during a concert; in fact, they even seemed to be unable to listen to music ‘correctly’.

Time and again German journalists and musicians contrasted adequate listening behaviour (i.e. their own silent and concentrated listening) with the garrulous and hedonistic conducts of British audiences during the concert. According to their impressions, the art of music was only a triviality for the London elites, the audience followed the music in an unconcentrated manner and was even asleep at times. As early as in 1836, the Austrian writer Franz Grillparzer complained about the conduct of London audiences, which he considered to be absolutely inadequate: ‘Wem’s einfällt, der behält den Hut auf dem Kopfe. Kommen nun gar die half-price Leute, so setzt sich jeder wo sein Platz ist. Die später kommenden stürmen nun in die Logen, steigen hinter dem Rücken der Sitzenden auf die Bänke, drängen sich ein. Die Logenthüren bleiben offen.’

²⁰ Hanslick, *Skizzenbuch*, 303.

²¹ Schmitz, *Land*, 98. As early as in 1851 the *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 9 (1851), 313-14, mocked the “funny English moodiness” and the “bad English taste”. Because of that quite a few French musical charlatans had enjoyed a stunning success in London.

Especially outrageous, he felt, was 'die Frechheit der Weiber in den Corridors'.²²

However, things can always get worse. In March 1886, the "Vossische Zeitung", a leading Berlin newspaper, commented somewhat irritably on the fact, that in one of the most renowned music theatres of London the performance was disrupted by a strike – and the temple of music profaned by labour conflicts:

In Her Majestys Theater konnte Gounods 'Faust' nicht weitergespielt werden, weil die Choristen und Bühnenarbeiter, die ihre Löhnung nicht erhalten konnten, Strike machten. Sie traten, als die Vorstellung im wilden Tumult unterging, bettelnd vor die Rampe und baten das Publikum um Almosen, um ihren Hunger zu stillen. Mit diesem unerhörten Skandal wählten Viele die italienische Oper in London für immer begraben.²³

To some extent these German evaluations were correct. Well into the second half of the nineteenth century, the audiences' behaviour of listening was more reminiscent of attendance at a soccer match than of the reserved consumption of higher education. This was true for London, but to some extent also for Berlin and other European capitals (though German critics of British music life tended not to mention that). People talked with each other both quietly and loudly while the music was playing. They ate and drank, called upon the loges of other concert visitors and promenaded down the hall. Businessmen discussed their commercial matters, ladies presented their newest couture and courtesans tried to gain the attention of potential customers. The visitors were not exactly inattentive, they simply concentrated – and rather selectively, for that matter – on certain brilliant achievements of the artists and the particularly 'beautiful' passages of a music score. In these segments, however, the audience was usually quite participatory and extremely lively - applauding or booing each piece of music and each aria. Often the performances dragged on considerably, because single arias or scenes had to be repeated once or even several times according to the wishes of the audience. Therefore, from a certain point of view, the difference between the artists and the observers with regard to the arrangement of a performance was quite marginal. Both parties shaped the character of an evening, so that it often seemed quite unclear if the more interesting spectacle took place on the stage or in the audience.

However, German descriptions of the fashionable London music life did not necessarily correspond to the facts at all times. Their view on musical performances in London was shaped by a nationalist perspective, which tells us more about German perceptions than about the actual character of music in Britain. To put it more succinctly: It was neither

²² Carl Glossy, August Sauer (ed.), *Franz Grillparzer, Briefe und Tagebücher*, Vol. 1: Briefe (Hildesheim: Olms, 2003), 89. Quoted in Hanslick, *Skizzenbuch*, 262.

²³ *Vossische Zeitung*, 9 March 1886.

habitual nor aesthetic criteria which represented the decisive foundation on which German musicians and journalists assessed the music life of London but rather their belief in 'national' differences. Thus, German critics did not give an unfiltered account of their musical impressions, but one that was founded on their ideological perspective. Many German observers of British conditions were convinced that there existed naturally given differences between both cultures and firmly believed in the national dimension of music.²⁴ And these differences were mirrored in their evaluation of London's music life. According to their ideas German music represented the highest form of art, while British could be regarded as an insubstantial entertainment. At this point nationalist and aesthetic categories merged. As already demonstrated, the most important nationalist contrasts were formed by British triviality and 'outwardness' vs. German 'inwardness', commerce vs. art, fashion vs. culture, entertainment vs. feeling. The critical stand against British music was not only represented by nationalist language, it was in fact also caused by it. Those collective symbols used by German intellectuals in their discourse on Britain specified the national character of Britons while at the same time determined the boundaries of the German national identity by contrasting it to their British/English counterpart. The probability of interpreting both cultures as incompatible was increased by the fact that the British musical life was generally described in terms completely different from those used for the description of German music life.

Music marked the difference between Germany and Britain, and art music, thus, became an exclusively German accomplishment. On the eve of the First World War, Oscar Schmitz coined the famous phrase of England as 'Das Land ohne Musik' and observed in this book:

Ich habe lange gesucht, was es eigentlich für ein Mangel ist, der immer wieder hinter so vielen englischen Vorzügen fühlbar wird und so erstarrend wirkt. [...] Und schließlich habe ich etwas gefunden, was die Engländer von allen anderen Kulturvölkern in geradezu erstaunlichem Maß unterscheidet, einen Mangel den jeder zugibt ... dessen Tragweite aber wohl noch nicht betont worden ist: Die Engländer sind das einzige Kulturvolk ohne eigene Musik (Gassenhauer ausgenommen). Das heißt nicht bloß, dass sie weniger feine Ohren haben, sondern dass ihr ganzes Leben ärmer ist. [...] Musik gibt Flügel und lässt alles Wunderbare begreiflich erscheinen. Ein Lied ... erhebt *uns* für Augenblicke in eine Klangwelt, wo alle Widersprüche sich versöhnen und alles vollkommen ist, wo alle Rätsel gelöst sind. Wir verstehen durch die Musik die Natur und die Seelen der Menschen.²⁵

In Germany, music was held to be a higher 'counter-world' or – according to Schopenhauer – a matrix of the real world, a key to the soul and to happiness. Germans thus became better human beings, whereas Britons

²⁴ "Vom Nationalen in der Musik", *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 66 (1908), 1501-1503.

²⁵ Schmitz, *Land*, 28-29. (my emphasis). Cf. Robert Schumann, "Englischer Komponist – kein Komponist", *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 24 (1837).

did not. As early as 1824 the “*Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*” stated:

England, dessen Söhne nie bedeutendes für die Tonkunst geleistet haben, das in dieser Sphäre stets von Ausländern lieb und kaufte, erscheint deswegen nicht so bemerkenswert, als Frankreich, das zu begreifen anfängt, es könne auch vom Auslande und namentlich von Deutschland lernen und empfangen. [...] So bildet sich im ganzen höher gebildeten Europa eine Verbindung im Fache der Tonkunst, wie früher von Italien, jetzt von Deutschland, als dem Mittelpunkte, ausgehend.²⁶

Music formed the centre of the world and Germany the centre of music affairs. Therefore, to truly comprehend and understand music was an exclusively German privilege. ‘Wohin noch keine Nation gekommen ist, dahin sind die Deutschen gedrungen’, the “*Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*” wrote in 1829.²⁷ In other words the aesthetic evaluation of British music life was a highly political affair that established the superiority of ‘the’ Germans. Little did it matter if Britain ruled over an empire and Germany achieved its national union as late as 1871. The idea of the cultural nation which was founded on an appreciation of ‘German music’ elevated Germans to a level beyond all the cultural accomplishments of the British. In this way, the German educated classes used their allegedly superior aesthetics as a political weapon. In the course of this, the borderline between art and politics was re-defined by modelling the ‘correct’ evaluation and ‘correct’ listening to music as an expression of German self-perception. The re-evaluation of the taste of music and the reverent behaviour of listening thus contained a xenophobic dig. Apparently harmless and non-political, music reviews in both music journals and the press in general were used to attack the behaviour of listening and the taste of not only Britons, but also of Frenchmen and Italians. Concert reviews could thus assume the form of a political assertion with musical means and Germany could advance to become a Great Power – music-wise, that is.

The Empire Strikes Back: The Rise of Musical Nationalism in Britain

The question is raised of how the Britons reacted to this cultural debasement of their music by many Germans. At first the findings are striking – Britons shared many of the German assessments. Until the 1870’s the German perception and the British self-perception were largely congruent. The artistic rank of British composers was evaluated quite similarly in Germany and Britain – as rather mediocre. In contrast to

²⁶ *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 1 (1824), 447-48. Cf. Hanslick, *Skizzenbuch*, 266-67, 283.

²⁷ *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 6 (1829), 15.

literature, the British press hardly regarded music as a pillar of British culture. Rather the production and reproduction of serious music was considered to be a foreign and, for the most part, German accomplishment. Rev. Hugh R. Haweis's treatise on "Music and Morals" of 1871 may serve as a case in point here: 'The English lacked true art feeling ... and musical taste; however improving and improvable, the English are not, as a nation, an artistic people, and the English are not a Musical People.'²⁸ The leading English specialist journal, the "Musical Times" came to a similar conclusion in 1887. According to its thinking, the musical malady of Great Britain was the price she had to pay for her economic and political expansion:

The cause of the eclipse under which music has been so long in this country is not, no doubt, that the thoughts of the nation were too exclusively directed to commercial pursuits, that a kind of narrow utilitarianism was to an undue degree predominant. Thus music came to be looked upon as a frivolous pastime, unworthy of the serious attention of grave men, unworthy, too, of the support of the state. It became a mere fancy article, which was only valued in so far as it was exotic and costly.²⁹

Beginning at the end of the 1860s, however, the call for building up a specific British music culture could be heard in Britain. By the end of the nineteenth century the quest for a 'musical renaissance' in Britain had become a combined effort of composers, critics, impresarios, publishers and the general public. German music and German musicians explicitly served as examples. With the help of comprehensive public and private measures of promotion, a genuinely English music was to become a source of national pride. But the attempts to establish a national opera tradition remained for quite a long time equally as unsuccessful as the quest for a great English symphony. The most energetic search for native talents did not produce any decisive results before the end of the century, when Arthur Sullivan was rediscovered as a 'serious' musician, and Edward Elgar became finally elected as the bard of the British Empire. The massive support he received throughout his career from the media revealed not only the power of public attribution but first of all the common desire for a native musical genius.³⁰ Quite a few successful performances of his choral works took place even in some German towns and in 1910 Arthur Nikisch performed the first symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic.³¹

Although the "Musical Times" was able to state in the same year that 'contemporary British composers are making their foothold in Germany

²⁸ Hugh R. Haweis, *Music and Morals* (London: Isbister, 1871), 124-25. Cf. *The Musical World* 15 (1841), 155, discussing the notion that: "the English cannot be a musical people".

²⁹ *The Musical Times*, January 1887, 15.

³⁰ Cf. Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 115-37, 161-84.

³¹ Cf. Richard Powell, *Edward Elgar. Memories of a Variation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1994).

ever surer',³² it is remarkable that probably the most successful British composer in Germany before the First World War was Arthur Sullivan. In 1886 and 1887 D'Oyley Carte's company toured on the continent and performed several of Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy Operas in Berlin and Vienna before a large audience. The "Vossische Zeitung" reported from Berlin:

Arthur Sullivan, the composer of the 'Mikado', is among the leading contemporary English musicians. [...] However, only a few of his works have been known in Germany so far. [...] He has no unique national style like the modern English music in general, ... but he created many singular effects. [...] The distinguished audience was highly delighted and vigorously applauded the music and the production. Many encores completed the success of the work.³³

The Berlin press was full of praises for the originality, the beauty and the wit of Sullivan's "Mikado". Even the German crown prince, the future Emperor Wilhelm II., himself a devoted fan of Sullivan's music, attended a performance of the "Mikado" in the Wallner-Theatre in Berlin.³⁴

The gradual recognition of English music among German audiences and German critics was noticed in Britain and accompanied with great satisfaction. The London "Times", for instance, sent its German correspondent to the first performance of "The Mikado" in the German capital because, after all, the Berlin audience was 'the most critical public in Europe.'³⁵ Obviously the "Times" was highly pleased to report the great success of the comic opera, which was received with 'hearty and sometimes quite enthusiastic applause which the piece elicited from a large and crowded house, that included the cream of Berlin society. ... And between the acts one overheard such remarks as "Very original", "Unique", and even "Grossartig" – which may be rendered "Magnificent"'.³⁶ Even the infamous critic Eduard Hanslick noted the international successes of "The Mikado": 'Mehrere Schauspielertruppen durchziehen mit diesem einen Stücke Amerika; eine derselben drang bereits nach Australien, eine andere – was noch wunderbarer ist – nach Hamburg und Berlin.'³⁷

Thus at the turn of the twentieth century a reversal of the German consensus on music from Britain and of British self-perception could be observed. The German Feuilletons and specialist journals now were full of articles praising English music and especially the music scene of London. 'Das zwanzigste Jahrhundert bedeutet für England und insbesondere für

³² *The Musical Times*, August 1910, 513.

³³ *Vossische Zeitung*, 5 June 1886. Cf. *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, 6 June 1886; *National Zeitung* (Morning Edition), 6 June 1886.

³⁴ Cf. Arthur Jacobs, *Arthur Sullivan. A Victorian Musician* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1992).

³⁵ *The Times*, 3 June 1886.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Hanslick, *Skizzenbuch*, 288

die tonangebende Millionen-Metropole London einen gar gewaltige musikalischen Aufschwung.³⁸ With regard to the quality of symphonic concerts, opera performances, chamber music, musical education and native compositions a decisive ‘musical progress in England’³⁹ was observed. The German Professor Theodor Müller-Reuter from Crefeld, for instance, visited the British metropolis and expressed in an article for the “Musical Times”:

A careful observer cannot fail to notice that for many years there has existed in England and Germany a musical reciprocity which has been made possible largely through an increased musical activity in England. [...] That the *quantity* of music given in a city of seven millions – the Mecca of artists of every civilised nation – is greater than in Berlin, is natural, but to me the *quality* also appeared higher. [...] A German musician can to-day learn a great deal in London.⁴⁰

Both German and English observers of the London scene strongly believed that this musical progress in Edwardian England was to a large extent due to the successful transfer of music and manners from Germany. The new convention required to fully appreciate the deeper values of music, was firstly the silent listening. From this educated perspective, the English audience had to be taught German manners and had to replace enjoyment by understanding. The reception of the musical dramas of Richard Wagner in Britain played apparently a central role in the development of this new behaviour. English critics not only urged native composers to look to his music for inspiration, but his operas themselves seemed to have a lasting effect on the behaviour of English audiences. Apart from the outstanding dramatic quality of Wagner’s operas and the absorbing storylines, the constant flow of music does not leave any space for the inappropriate expression of noisy enthusiasm, which is not the case with the much shorter arias in former operas. The darkening of the lights in the auditorium during the performances aided the general concentration of audiences. Therefore, performing Wagner helped transform behaviour and educate the public according to middle-class values. The “Signale für die Musikalische Welt” happily reported about the staging of “Der Ring des Nibelungen” at Covent Garden Opera in 1905 and noted that the audience appeared not only on time but observed also a solemn silence in the darkened auditorium.⁴¹ And the “Musical Times” too, was absolutely convinced about the breeding effect of Wagner’s music dramas:

The necessity of educating audiences – of making good listeners – has often been the subject of comment. [...] If only the people who go to concerts went to hear the music, I make little doubt but that the methods of Bayreuth would, by common consent, be largely imitated in our concert-rooms, for they are all devised with a view to concentrating attention upon the

³⁸ *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 99 (1903), 340-42, quotation 340.

³⁹ *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 66 (1908), 745-51.

⁴⁰ *The Musical Times*, August 1910, 513-14. (emphasis in original).

⁴¹ *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 63 (1905), 678-81.

performance. Perfect quite so long as a composition is in progress, and an auditorium sufficiently darkened to prevent one's being distracted by the appearance and movements of one's neighbours; these are attained at Bayreuth, and in many others theatres where Bayreuth is being more or less sincerely flattered by imitation.⁴²

However, the intense cultural transfer between the two countries did not only produce harmonious results. Along with these aesthetic changes, the transfer of German art, values and manners to Britain triggered reactions of a political nature. During the rising tide of national pride and prejudices during the later decades of the nineteenth century, many British intellectuals felt that copying foreign cultures was not proper for the leading civilization of the period. To compete with the musical super-power Germany, a so-called 'English' music had to be promoted and protected. This initiative spurred a new social assessment of serious music. A formerly unproblematic and subordinated issue gradually turned into a decisive political question. Music was no longer regarded to be an unimportant or private matter, but increasingly regarded as an integral expression of British nationhood.⁴³ The real and the imagined German cultural predominance was indispensable for defining the 'English' culture, as well as legitimising an internal union of all music lovers of the British society against the threat from abroad. It is perhaps the dichotomous structure of differentiation which represents best the central feature of nationalism: perceiving and describing one characteristic as belonging to one's own national community, other ones are completely ruled out. Nationalist perceptions of the world operate by determining a binary difference, a strict differentiation between 'ins' and 'outs'.⁴⁴

The national perspective on art music in England went hand in hand with its politicisation and the rise of cultural hostilities. The appraisal of German music as a cultural ordeal was to some extent the result of the new belief in the power of 'English' music and the new cultural evaluation of native talents. While positive receptions of music from the British Islands became more common in Germany towards the beginning of the twentieth century, quite the contrary was the case on the other side of the channel. As economic, political and finally military conflicts increased at the turn of the century, so did the British view of German music

⁴² *The Musical Times*, August 1902, 523. Cf. *ibid.*, July 1892, 406.

⁴³ Cf. Meirion Hughes / Robert A. Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

⁴⁴ Cf. Dirk Richter, *Nation als Form* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 86-87, as well as Geoff Eley / Ronald Grigor Suny, "Introduction: From the Moment of Social History to the Work of Cultural Representation", in: *idem.* (ed.), *Becoming National* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3-37; Sven Oliver Müller, "Die umstrittene Gemeinschaft. Nationalismus als Konfliktphänomen in Deutschland", in: Ulrike Jureit (ed.), *Politische Kollektive. Die Konstruktion nationaler, rassistischer und ethnischer Gemeinschaften* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2001), 124-45.

fundamentally change. Germans were no longer perceived as a people of cultivated music lovers, but rather as a potential threat. On the eve of the First World War the German Empire did not only seem to jeopardize British naval supremacy but also British musical culture. The book "Music and Nationalism" of the critic and composer Cecil Forsyth, which was published in 1911, is a good example of this new xenophobic perspective on the German musical influence in Britain. According to Forsyth, suppressed Britain had to liberate itself from German musical dominance by rigorously removing all Germans from its soil – composers and musicians alike. He regarded the struggle against the German supremacy in the field of music and against the Imperial German Fleet as two sides of the same coin: 'The English audience ... will view the idea of German opera in possession at Covent Garden in much the same light as [it] now views the idea of the "Nassau" or the "Westphalen" in dry dock at Portsmouth.' And because London, the capital of a vast wealthy Empire, was at the centre of a culture, that loved to purchase artefacts, including music, from abroad, Forsyth excessively agitated against the financial profit of foreign musicians: 'Every lover of English Opera should, therefore, fix firmly in his mind the hope that the pernicious cult of the foreigner, which makes London the (very profitable) laughing-stock of Europe, should be ended.'⁴⁵

Cultural Transfer as Demarcation and Exchange

For the best part of the nineteenth century London's music life definitely did not serve as a cultural model of modern society for most of its German observers. However, after weighing the mutual evaluation and influence of the German and British music cultures, the conclusions are somewhat contradictory. On one hand, an increasing nationalisation and politicisation of art music can be observed in both countries. It was a nationalist, and not an aesthetic perspective, that determined the mutual perceptions in both Britain and Germany. Both Germans and Britons thought they could reach the core of their own collective by inventing and referring to a 'national' music. During this process certain differences between the cultures were mapped out and defined, and these later proved hard to modify. It was especially the fact that music was assumed to exist, as it

⁴⁵ Cecil Forsyth, *Music and Nationalism, A Study of English Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 285, 119. Cf. the review in *The Musical Times*, February 1912, 83-85. *The Times*, 27 October 1905, firmly believed in 'the great superiority of the average English composer of the day over the average German composer'. According to the expertise of this paper the mediocre fourth symphony of Gustav Mahler paled in comparison with the orchestral variations, called 'Helena', by Granville Bantock.

were, in a transcendental, arcane sphere, way beyond the boundaries of political order, which lent additional credibility to these processes of demarcation. Talking about music in Britain and Germany, therefore, reveals the political dimension of a seemingly apolitical entertainment. The enormous increase of a mutual transfer of culture did not produce the harmonious results one might expect, but had, in fact, quite the opposite effect. Knowing each other's culture often meant discovering differences, as opposed balancing each other out.

On the other hand, however, the nationalisation of art music corresponded with the emergence of an international style of music. In both countries, the productions of the opera houses and the repertoires of concert halls became increasingly similar. Even the decoration and the staging followed common aesthetic values and customs. Singers, directors, conductors and composers travelled frequently at the turn of the twentieth century between the two countries and exchanged concepts and tastes. The importance of traditional centres of musical culture in France and Italy were gradually challenged by the rising metropolises of London and Berlin. Especially the mutual appreciation of the so-called 'absolute music' in Berlin and London reflects the importance of the German-British cultural transfer. Even if German and British musicians stubbornly clung to their nationalist differences – the nationalist elevation of art music in Great Britain can already be comprehended as a successful transfer. By 1900, serious music was no longer considered to be a foreign import commodity in London. Moreover, with the help of their contacts in Berlin and Leipzig, many London musicians had transferred certain musical examples and styles developed in Germany to their own art scene. It was by no means a natural phenomenon that a German bourgeois and an English aristocrat of the beginning twentieth century behaved similarly during a concert and cultivated similar aesthetic preferences. The transfer of cultural norms between Germany and Britain – such as, first and foremost, the habit of silent listening and the elevation of 'absolute music' – was the impetus for the emergence of a common European culture of music.⁴⁶ The German-English communication about music, therefore, can be understood as an integral part of an emerging European elite culture, which referred to common cultural institutions, ideals and practices.

The intercultural transfer between the two societies reveals that every 'national' culture came into existence by means of exchange and demarcation. What counts is that there are no fixed cultural relations or political issues until the collective actors construct them by means of

⁴⁶ Helga de la Motte-Haber (ed.), *Nationaler Stil und Europäische Dimension in der Musik der Jahrhundertwende* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991); Philipp Ther, *In der Mitte der Gesellschaft. Operntheater in Zentraleuropa 1815-1914* (München: Oldenbourg, 2006), 395-421.

communication. It is necessary that people create differences in order to be influenced by them. Any cultural phenomenon, and especially the highly regarded 'serious' music, can become a political issue if the actors consciously decide to make it one. Former historical concepts, stressing the cultural gap between different societies, or even the idea of single track transfer between the 'advanced' and the 'backward' state are nothing but highly normative parameters which only illustrate certain perceptions and misperceptions, instead of rendering an actual inequality of knowledge and skills. In reality, it is this process of acquirement and delineation which continuously shapes the culture of each society. From a methodological point of view it is therefore quite unsatisfactory to concentrate on a historical comparison only. There is no fruitful confrontation of different entities without regard for the interaction between them. It is precisely this tension and interrelation that give a specific shape as well as an historical importance to the analysis of intercultural transfers.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Cf. Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002), 607-636; Michel Espagne, "Sur les limites du comparatisme en histoire culturelle", *Genèses* 17 (1994), 112-21; Johannes Paulmann, "Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts", *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998), 649-85; Philipp Ther, "Beyond the Nation: The Relational Basis of a Comparative History of Germany and Europe", *Central European History* 36 (2003), 45-74.