

# LISTENING TO MUSIC: PEOPLE, PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES

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## ‘Human voices are alone themselves sufficient’: Protestant and Catholic currents in the listening experiences of an Anglo-Prussian marriage

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## Abstract

Listening experiences can be an illuminating biographical tool – a source of insight into a life and personality, and of vivid illustrations of an entire framework of values and beliefs. In the case of one Anglo-Prussian couple, Charles and Frances Bunsen, listening experiences cast light on the personalities and spiritual lives of two devout Protestants whose professional life in the Prussian diplomatic service brought them into close contact with the early nineteenth-century Papal Court. The Bunsens lived in Rome for 21 years, frequently attending services in St Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel. Here they encountered the music of the Roman Catholic tradition and fell under the particular spell of Palestrina. These listening experiences would have a lasting impact on their ideas about sacred music, not least on Charles's project of writing a German Protestant liturgy. Subsequently, they also lived in London and in Germany; their experiences of sacred music in Catholic and Protestant traditions were

thus many and varied. Drawing on the Bunsens' published letters and on archival sources, this chapter considers the Protestant spirituality that underpinned their listening and the Catholic influences that overlaid it.

## Introduction

Christian suspicion of music is a familiar theme from as far back as the early church, and it became particularly – though not exclusively – associated with Protestant thought, its use in worship rationalised in terms of a distinction between music sung by the human voice (and thus a vehicle for the Word of God) and instrumental music (a vehicle for sensuality and frivolity). It was a current that ran deeply through the thinking of many nineteenth-century German Protestants (as well as some Catholic reformers), and the tension between vocal and instrumental music in sacred contexts – the former always to be given primacy, the latter held in check – was a frequent cause of anxiety.<sup>1</sup> But some German Protestants – particularly those who spent time in Rome and experienced the music of the Vatican choirs – encountered a conflict between what they believed about the corrupting potential of music and their immediate listening experiences of the Catholic choral tradition.

This was certainly true of Charles Bunsen (1791–1860), a German Lutheran, who found his responses to sacred music further influenced by his marriage to an English woman, Frances Waddington (1791–1876). She had been brought up an Anglican, and they shared similar Protestant sensibilities: Lutheran ideas had been closely woven into the theological foundations of the Church of England in the sixteenth century, and when nineteenth-century worshippers of both denominations went to church, they still experienced traditional liturgies or forms of service inherited from Catholicism (particularly the Eucharist or Mass). Frances's early listening experiences of the Anglican choral tradition were particularly significant in her spiritual life, and they seem to have established an intensely emotional response to music, which was modified to some extent by her subsequent immersion in Lutheranism, but remained fundamentally intact throughout her life. This chapter examines the couple's listening experiences in terms of their shared beliefs about sacred music, the fundamental divergence of their instinctive responses to music more broadly, and what this divergence suggests about their different personalities and the differing nature of their spiritual experience.

## Charles and Frances Bunsen

Charles was born in Korbach in the German principality of Waldeck, the son of a minor military officer. He went to university at Marburg, then at Göttingen, to study theology and philology, and it was the pursuit of his continuing studies into ‘universal history’ that brought him to Italy. His name was properly Christian Karl Josias Bunsen (later von Bunsen when he was made a Baron), but his English family always called him Charles. He made the acquaintance of the Waddingtons, who were tourists in Rome, shortly after his arrival there in the autumn of 1816, and by the end of April 1817 writes to his sister Christiana that he has met an English girl with whom he is ‘almost ... a little in love’, commenting approvingly that she is ‘a very earnest Christian of the Church of England’.<sup>2</sup> He and Frances were married just over two months later, the wedding hastened by the imminent departure for home of Frances’s family.

Frances was born in Berkshire on one of the Waddington family properties, and brought up on another, at Llanofer in Monmouthshire, the eldest child of Benjamin and Georgina Mary Ann Waddington. Like other girls of her class, she was educated at home; her education followed her mother’s idiosyncratic approach, based on the way Mrs Waddington had herself been educated by her great aunt, Mary Delany.<sup>3</sup> Unusually, there was no governess; Frances and her sisters Emilia and Augusta were taught largely by their mother, studying a broad curriculum that included mathematics, history, geography, classical and modern languages, and drawing.<sup>4</sup> Mrs Waddington shaped her daughters’ religion, moral values, aesthetic tastes and sensibilities to a very pronounced degree, and there are many proofs of their devotion to each other, not least in the correspondence between her and Frances, where their emotional bond is expressed with particular intensity through their response to music.

Both Charles and Frances were the subjects of posthumous volumes of ‘lives and letters’ – a sub-genre of life writing that flourished in the nineteenth century. After her husband’s death, Frances edited and published a memoir of him, based on his letters and her own commentary.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, after Frances’s death, her ‘life and letters’ were similarly edited and published by a family friend, Augustus Hare.<sup>6</sup> While such enterprises inevitably involve editorial decisions that shape and may distort the picture of the subject,<sup>7</sup> these volumes nonetheless provide striking evidence of their ideas about music and how they experienced it. In the process, they shed light on two markedly different personalities and one, at least, of the ways in which each influenced and shaped the other.

## Rome

Charles and Frances were married on 1 July 1817, at the Palazzo Savelli in Rome. The setting could hardly have been more impressive – sitting at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, Palazzo Savelli is a renaissance palazzo built on top of a medieval fortification built on top of a Roman theatre, the Theatre of Marcellus.<sup>8</sup> One of its apartments was occupied by Barthold Niebuhr, the Prussian Legate to the Vatican Court and a historian of considerable historiographical significance.<sup>9</sup> Niebuhr was by all accounts a charismatic figure, and his historical methodology, which was founded on the systematic interrogation of evidence and a philological approach, was profoundly influential on a generation of younger scholars, particularly in Germany and Britain. It was the force of Niebuhr's personality, as well as an affinity for his new approach to historical scholarship, that persuaded Charles Bunsen to put on hold the 'grand plan of intellectual labour' which he had formed (nothing less than an enquiry into 'the history... of the human race' through philological, historical and philosophical study of the major civilizations),<sup>10</sup> in order to work for Niebuhr at the embassy in Rome, where he quickly became Secretary of the Legation. Charles would remain in Rome for more than twenty years, taking over from Niebuhr as Prussian Minister when Niebuhr left the post in 1823.

The Bunsens' wedding was conducted by an Anglican clergyman according to the Anglican marriage service. The ceremony – possibly Charles's first participation in an Anglican rite – deeply impressed him ('The English ritual for the celebration of marriage ... is the finest, the most simple and elevating that I have ever known');<sup>11</sup> it seems likely that here was sown the seed of a project which would soon come to be of enormous significance to him – his efforts to produce a German Protestant liturgy. The circumstances of the wedding should immediately alert us to the Protestant/Catholic interplay that underpins the Bunsens' experience of sacred music. The marriage ceremony was conducted in Niebuhr's private chapel at the palazzo, not out of choice but because there was no Protestant church in Rome. Protestants met for religious services in private rooms, and even for that they were required to get papal permission. Subsequently, in 1819, Niebuhr and Bunsen succeeded in gaining permission for the appointment of an official Lutheran Chaplain for the Prussian Legation.<sup>12</sup> This was pioneering, and some years ahead of the Anglicans, who had no official permanent chaplain until 1828 (though by then the Pope had turned a blind eye to a series of unofficial Anglican chaplains for more than a decade).<sup>13</sup>

Not long after their marriage, Charles and Frances moved into apartments just a few hundred yards up the Capitoline Hill from Palazzo Savelli at Palazzo Caffarelli, which housed the Prussian Embassy. It occupied one of the most archaeologically and architecturally significant sites, and one of the most spectacular viewing points, in

Rome. Built on the top of the Capitoline, it sat squarely on the site of the ancient Temple of Capitoline Jupiter, and just behind the grand and imposing renaissance piazza of the Campidoglio. After intermittent archaeological excavations, little of Palazzo Caffarelli is left; but the tourist who walks out onto the terrace of the café at the Capitoline Museums to photograph the views is standing on the Terrazzo Caffarelli, which occupies what would have been the upper floors of the palazzo. More than enough remains in the panoramas across the city to give a powerful sense of why these two young, devout, Northern European Protestants fell so thoroughly under the spell of Catholic Rome. Thomas Arnold<sup>14</sup> certainly succumbed when he came to visit them in 1827:

*After dinner Bunsen called for us in his carriage and took us to his house first on the Capitol, the different windows of which command the different views of ancient and modern Rome. Never shall I forget the view of the former; we looked down on the Forum, and just opposite were the Palatine and the Aventine, with the ruins of the palace of the Caesars on the one, and houses intermixed with gardens on the other. The mass of the Colosseum rose beyond the Forum, and beyond all, the wide plain of the Campagna to the sea .... Then we descended into the Forum, the light fast fading away and throwing a kindred soberness over the scene of ruin... What the fragments of pillars belonged to, perhaps we can never know; but that I think matters little. I care not whether it was a temple of Jupiter Stator, or the Basilica Julia, but one knows that one is on the ground of the Forum, under the Capitol, the place where the tribes assembled, and the orators spoke; the scene, in short, of all the internal struggles of the Roman people ... Such was my first day in Rome; and if I were to leave it to-morrow, I should think that one day was well worth the journey.<sup>15</sup>*

Arnold emphasises the view of ancient Rome to one side of the palazzo; what he only hints at is the view of 'modern Rome' (renaissance and baroque Rome) to the other side, dominated by the domes of Rome's great churches, and presided over by St Peter's. Even today, it is still easy to see that to live at Palazzo Caffarelli was to live with the constant, breath-taking presence of the two great loci of Roman power – the ancient and pagan, and the contemporary and Catholic.

The spell was not only a visual one. The diplomatic community, Catholic or not, was expected to be represented at St Peter's at major festivals and ceremonies. Frances

described one such experience in a letter to her mother – a requiem mass for Pius VII, who died in 1823. Along with their colleagues from the various embassies, Frances and Charles attended the service, Frances sitting in the gallery designated for the diplomatic wives:

*On Monday, the 1st September, I attended in St. Peter's the last and most solemn requiem-service for the deceased Pope ... After the conclusion of the mass, in which the exquisite requiem of Pittoni was sung in even greater perfection than usual, the ceremony of absolution was performed five times, by five several cardinals; for Pius the Seventh as Pope, as Cardinal, as Archbishop, as Priest, and as Deacon; the five cardinals went in procession into the body of the church, followed by the papal singers, who performed a passage of a psalm or an anthem, after each absolution. These exquisite pieces of music were heard in perfection where we sate ...<sup>16</sup>*

The music they listened to in St Peter's was what they termed 'ancient' music – the music of the renaissance and baroque periods, a tradition in which they felt they were hearing the 'original fountain' of sacred music in all its 'purity'.<sup>17</sup> This meant composers such as Pittoni, Marcello, Allegri and – above all – Palestrina, who had been *maestro di cappella* of the Cappella Giulia<sup>18</sup> during the mid-sixteenth century, and who remained the touchstone of the style preserved by the Vatican choirs. Giuseppe Baini, Director of the College of Papal Singers from 1819 to 1844, and a Palestrina scholar, explicitly saw himself and his singers as maintaining Palestrina's spirit and influence, and Baini's own compositions consciously perpetuated the 'ancient style' and in particular a Palestrina tradition.<sup>19</sup> Equally, however, Protestant musicians claimed Palestrina as their own, seeing him as the apex of a golden age from which sacred music had subsequently declined. James Garratt suggests that the popular German Protestant understanding of Palestrina's music was a partial one, defined not by his contrapuntal works but 'by the simple homophonic works in the Papal Choir's Holy Week repertory', on which the limited Palestrina repertory published in Germany in the early nineteenth century was based.<sup>20</sup> This rings true in so far as the Bunsens regarded '*canto fermo*, or plain chant ... [as] the basis of the music of Palestrina, Allegri, and the ancient school'.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the broader picture, Palestrina was significant to numerous early nineteenth-century German composers, among them Mendelssohn, Spohr and the lesser known Otto Nicolai, a friend and colleague of the Bunsens, who studied under Baini while occupying the position of organist at the chapel of the Prussian Legation.<sup>22</sup>

# Childhood influences

Frances's most detailed musical memory from childhood was of the Three Choirs Festival at Hereford Cathedral around the year 1805,<sup>23</sup> where she heard performances of *Samson* and *Messiah*. Mrs Waddington had inherited a love of Handel from Mary Delany (who had known him personally), and she passed it down to Frances. In her 'Reminiscences', written in old age in 1874, Frances recalled that first encounter:

*[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 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.<sup>24</sup>*

This is one of the earliest documented experiences in which she makes a connection between music and spirituality, but the Anglican choral tradition had also made a profound impact on her as a child. In fact, she was fortunate to have been taken to two places of worship where the choral tradition was apparently strong<sup>25</sup> – this was by no means the case in all Anglican cathedrals or abbeys, let alone at parish level.<sup>26</sup> Living for a time in Clifton, she was regularly taken by a favourite aunt to choral services at Bristol Cathedral:

*As long as Aunt Louisa staid, I used to walk with her to the Bristol Cathedral on Sundays, & it was an event in my life to hear & feel the choral service—which remains enshrined without rival in memory, the impression having been strengthened occasionally when at Bath I could attend the Abbey Church:—& thus I retained a store of love & veneration through long years ...<sup>27</sup>*

The word 'feel' indicates the depth of her emotional response, and the episode suggests the start of a pattern of connecting her most profound musical experiences not only with religion, but also with a deep attachment to specific people.

Early musical experiences such as Hereford imprinted themselves strongly on Frances's memory, the opportunities for hearing music in rural Monmouthshire being otherwise quite limited. Music formed part of the Waddington sisters' education, but only, it would seem, to a fairly rudimentary level – though a great lover of music, Mrs Waddington was apparently not a great performer of it, and really first-rate music teachers may well have been in short supply in the environs of Llanofer. As a result, Frances always felt deficient in musical training and real musicianship. Nonetheless, she exhibited a deep and instinctive feeling for music. Her comparative lack of early contact with music, she suggests:

*... explains perhaps the tender feeling I retain towards [street musicians] ... – out of gratitude for the rare pleasure they gave me, when at Clifton they were accidentally called upon to stop before the windows: I never could comprehend the customary fury expressed against them, as 'disturbers of the peace of the neighbourhood' ...<sup>28</sup>*

Charles's early musical education was singularly unsuccessful:

*An attempt to teach him to sing, as all others were taught in the earliest school-years, was given up as fruitless. He had, however, great pleasure in hearing music, and an extremely keen perception of correct tune; but he could not accomplish the notes of the scale, and would himself relate that he could go up, but always failed in coming down again. His father had made a point of his attending a dancing class for a short time, but all endeavours proved vain to drill and discipline the movement of his limbs.<sup>29</sup>*

More revealingly, Frances goes on later in the memoir to say that, in adulthood, he exhibited what we can recognise as a deeply Protestant suspicion of any music that was not both vocal and in the service of a religious text:

*In music he ever sought anything but the charm of sound to dwell upon; and in early days could tolerate that music only which spoke its meaning by its combination with the human voice. But*



*later, in the friendship and society of such musical composers as could meet his difficulties of comprehension, he learnt to believe, and in degree to feel, that music merely instrumental possesses the high privilege of demonstrating how much there is intensely affecting the human soul, which thought cannot grasp, nor language utter.<sup>[30]</sup>*

The word 'charm' is revealing, pointing to the belief in which Bunsen had been brought up, that there was something superfluous, frivolous or worryingly sensual about instrumental music. He came from a religious tradition where unaccompanied singing was widely felt to be the ideal for sacred music, since instrumental music could never be the absolutely direct carrier of sacred text like the human voice. As E. T. A. Hoffmann put it in his essay 'Alte und neue Kirchenmusik' (1814), 'Praise of the highest and holiest should flow straight from the human breast without any foreign admixture or intermediary.'<sup>[31]</sup>

Frances quickly came to understand and (apparently) accept this view as she absorbed Charles's Lutheran ideas, but her fondness for the Clifton street musicians hints at a musical instinct that was broad and generous, and that did not naturally categorise music into 'high' and 'low' genres. She retained a passionate, emotional response to music that Charles – whether he experienced it or not – does not articulate. Accordingly, responses to music from either of them are mostly recounted by Frances. Charles's letters mention music quite rarely, and any reference he makes to its emotional or spiritual power is restrained – not for him his wife's ecstatic apostrophes and rhetorical flourishes. As she indicates, however, he did come to enjoy friendships with a number of composers (including Mendelssohn and especially Sigismund Ritter von Neukomm (1778–1858)), whose influence supported her own in arguing for the intrinsic value of music.

## A German Protestant liturgy

Charles's admiration for the Anglican liturgy is a recurrent theme during his early years in the Prussian legation. Writing in 1818 to his friend Friedrich Lücke (a theologian and former fellow student at Göttingen), he makes clear the considerable significance he attaches to it:

*Now I maintain that the English liturgy was constructed from a grand point of view, and adapted, with much wisdom, to the*

*wants and the people of that time, and that it represents Christian worship far more thoroughly than anything that I have seen in Germany, Holland, or Denmark.*<sup>32</sup>

The deeper he looked into the Anglican liturgy, set out in the *Book of Common Prayer*, the more prayers and liturgical structures he discovered that had been preserved there from the Catholic liturgy, but lost from the Lutheran tradition – prayers and structures which he felt would remedy ‘the nakedness, scantiness, and fragmentary nature of the other Protestant Liturgies’.<sup>33</sup>

This crystallised into an intention to provide a similarly cogent form of worship for German Protestantism. He did not, as he wrote to Lücke, envisage adopting the *Book of Common Prayer* wholesale,<sup>34</sup> but he perceived in it the answers to a number of things that troubled him. One was the fragmentary and divisive nature of religion in Germany, split not only between Catholicism and Protestantism, but also between the Lutheran and Calvinist<sup>35</sup> Protestant traditions. He considered the Anglican liturgy to have proved itself capable of drawing together different religious views and denominations into a single church:

*... as in the 16th and 17th centuries it successfully brought forth the union between Lutherans and Calvinists and to a certain extent the union of Catholics and Puritans as well, likewise this truly blessed book is still the living tie of millions of people...*<sup>36</sup>

He was concerned too, by what he saw as a somewhat ad hoc Lutheran attitude to the liturgy, which Frances explains in a letter to her mother:

*It has always been allowed to the clergymen in Germany to make what selections they pleased from a vast quantity of materials for forming a Liturgy – a liberty which has been to a fatal degree abused...*<sup>37</sup>

For Charles, it was an approach that lacked dignity, continuity and coherence, and he was determined to change it.

He also admired the intention of the *Book of Common Prayer* to be just that – ‘common’ – that is, to make the liturgy the ‘property’ of both clergy and laity. In the Lutheran tradition (he felt), the official liturgy ‘belonged’ to the clergy: it was delivered to, rather than owned by, the laity, while a separate strand of popular hymnals and prayer books for individual use at home provided for a more personal spiritual

engagement.<sup>38</sup> In the *Book of Common Prayer*, Charles saw the model of a single prayer book appropriate for use both in church and at home. Furthermore, he sought to amalgamate two genres, the prayer book and the hymnal, aligning the *Book of Common Prayer* with the German context by bringing together the liturgical structures of Anglicanism and the Lutheran hymn tradition. There is plenty of evidence in their letters that the Lutheran practice of domestic hymn-singing was an important element of Bunsen family life.

Music was a strong feature of Bunsen's attraction to Anglicanism. Writing to Lücke, he acknowledges its musical tradition as fundamental to the spiritual experience it offers, and ascribes this to a direct descent from the 'ancient style':

*Singing is not excluded [from the Anglican liturgy], on the contrary, in addition to that of the congregation, the ancient style of choral song has been retained... the simple grandeur of which mode of composition, from Palestrina to Marcello, exceeds all else that I know.*<sup>39</sup>

He is, however, writing in 1818, and it seems unlikely that he had actually heard any Anglican choirs at this point, so he is probably reflecting what he has been told, presumably by Frances, about the Anglican choral tradition – a somewhat idealised picture, given the history of neglect of music in the Anglican Church.

He worked on his German Protestant liturgy for more than a decade from the early 1820s, and in 1833 published a volume of hymns and prayers which he regarded as, and indeed entitled, an 'attempt' (*Versuch*) at his aim.<sup>40</sup> This was followed in 1844 by a much revised and evidently more satisfactory version – no longer a '*Versuch*' but the *Allgemeines Evangelisches Gesang- und Gebetbuch zum Kirchen- und Hausgebrauch* (*General Evangelical Hymn and Prayer Book for Church and Household*). Underpinning this were two strands of painstaking research. One of these was an investigation into every liturgy he could lay his hands on.<sup>41</sup> The other was into sacred music, and in particular the music of Palestrina and other 'ancient' Catholic composers:

*In the winter of 1820–21, Bunsen may be described as having much at heart, and following up in the intervals of all other occupations, however engrossing, the study of ... the music of Palestrina, Allegri, and the ancient school ... The object of Bunsen was, as ever, to bring about a reformation in his own country: being fully conscious of the deteriorated condition, almost, if not quite, universal, of that choral harmony which yet is the pride of*

*the Germans, and believing that a renewal of the spirit of other times could only be possible by reverting to the original fountain in its purity. As with the hymns, the outpouring of ancestral piety, so also with the tunes; their appropriate medium of communication; he hoped to succeed in removing all corrupt incrustations, so that... they could not fail to be accepted, and caused to supersede the unedifying collections... imposed by force upon congregations in the latter part of the eighteenth century...*<sup>42</sup>

His research involved consultation with Baini and scrutiny of the manuscripts in Baini's charge. He was aided in this by a number of German composers during their visits to Rome – the memoir refers specifically to Conrad Kocher and Carl Reisiger. From Frances's description of the process, it appears that Bunsen asked them to 'select or reform versions of many of the finest Chorales', removing 'corrupt incrustations', and applying 'the true genuine style of harmony' of Palestrina and the ancient school.<sup>43</sup>

## Palestrina beyond the Vatican

Through Baini, Charles persuaded the Pope to take the apparently unprecedented step of allowing the Papal choir to perform outside the Vatican and in secular contexts. Frances tells us that the first such performance was at a 'fête' given by Niebuhr at Palazzo Savelli for the Prussian statesman Baron vom und zum Stein. She wrote to her mother describing the occasion:

*[L]ast Friday Mr. Niebuhr gave a great fête... in honour of Baron Stein...: a selection of the music of Palestrina, consisting of the celebrated 'Missa di Papa Marcello,' and the Motett – 'Tu es Petrus,' – and afterwards the 'Dies Irae' of Pittoni, were performed by the singers of the Papal Chapel, who were stationed at the further end of the long gallery. The effect of the music is not to be described, – often as I have been in the Papal Chapel, I have never heard anything equal to it, – for the singers not having any reason for hurrying, were induced to give every note its due value; and the complication of sound was of that subduing nature, as to make you draw your breath, or lift up your eyes, lest some other object or sensation should divide your*

*attention, and cause you to lose a particle. Oh thus, thus only can the angels sing! Had my Mother but heard it too!*<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, Frances's account suggests that outside the ritual and temporal constraints of a liturgical context, the singers had licence for greater freedom of purely musical expression – an irony that was apparently lost on the Bunsens.

The concert gave rise to another, and then to a subscription series presented in Niebuhr's name but organised by Charles:

*Mr. and Mrs. Niebuhr's two concerts, one in honour of Baron Stein, the other in honour of Prince Hardenberg, have excited a prodigious sensation (in all people of surprise, in many of pleasure), and an opening was made for proposing a continuance of the same performances, the expenses to be defrayed by a subscription. All the princes in Rome, and all the ambassadors, immediately subscribed, and, of course, such names as theirs secured at once a more than sufficient number of other names ... Two concerts have taken place, and have been a most exquisite indulgence. At the third it has been settled that the society of Sirleti shall together with the singers of the Papal Chapel perform the Miserere of Marcello. I have only yet heard the rehearsal – but alas! my Mother, I am spoilt by Palestrina. I am at a loss to conceive how I ever could listen with pleasure to Marcello – it seems to me now so empty, so unconnected, so unmeaning, so unmelodious! But it is nevertheless a great happiness to have heard the best of the best, even though I may never hear it more after I have left Rome, for the recollection of it is better than the sensation produced by what is inferior. Oh, if my Mother did but know Palestrina, having only heard the Miserere of the Papal Chapel, I fear she can scarcely imagine, however she may believe, of what infinite variety of effect and conception that style of composition is susceptible.*<sup>45</sup>

Frances's passionate – even ecstatic – reaction indicates just how central Palestrina became during this period of her life, not only to her response to music but to how she employed this in her closest emotional relationships. Writing about music helped her to sustain and shape her relationships in a family which was separated geographically by her marriage. It became the emotional 'keynote' and bound her and her mother far more intensely than any of the other topics they corresponded about. By insisting that

her mother would share her experience if she could only hear Palestrina, she was able to iterate and reiterate the bonds between herself and a mother to whom she was extremely close but whom she barely saw for more than 20 years following her marriage, and simultaneously to claim an emotional, intellectual and indeed spiritual bond between her mother and her husband.

Charles's response to Palestrina was more restrained, more cerebral and less impassioned than his wife's – though not necessarily less intense. For him, Palestrina represented, as he said, 'the ancient style of choral song', the 'simple grandeur' of which supported the dignity of the liturgy. Ever the disciple of Niebuhr, Charles viewed religion in the context of history, and he was able to accept so-called 'ancient' sacred art as the naïve, 'pure' expression of devotion, untroubled by the fact that it had been inspired by and addressed to Catholicism.

With the precedent of performance in secular contexts now established, he came to an arrangement by which the papal singers would give regular private performances at Palazzo Caffarelli. The Bunsens had for some time been inviting sometimes amateur, sometimes professional singers to perform sacred music for them privately in their home. Here, Frances writes to her mother in 1819, describing these evenings:

*On Monday evening we hope soon to contrive at least once a fortnight to enjoy again a treat which we had once a week five weeks last summer – of hearing some of the Motetts of Palestrina executed in the right manner, without instruments, at home. We had long tried to get together some dilettanti acquaintances, who knew how to sing other music, to execute them, with the help of a simple accompaniment; but at length finding that no dependence could be placed on dilettanti, we committed the extravagance of calling in professional aid.... I am sure if anything on earth can give an idea of the angelic choir, it must be the music of Palestrina! and yet I do not forget the glorious effect of Händel – but all music to which instruments contribute, must be a degree more earthly, than that in which human voices are alone themselves sufficient, where nothing mechanical is needed.<sup>46</sup>*

Her choice of words reveals both the extent to which she had absorbed her husband's views about sacred music and unaccompanied singing, and the limitations of her willingness or capacity to follow him down that path; for her, the music is not immediately a route to reflection on the Word of God, but a stimulus to the emotions

and the imagination – she is first struck by its ‘glorious effect’ and the ‘idea of the angelic choir’ that it summons up.

When Charles gained permission to invite the papal singers to Palazzo Caffarelli, by Frances’s account their freedom of expression moved onto a yet higher level; again, she notes their release from the temporal constraints of the liturgical performance context:

*... he and his family and their chosen friends enjoyed these works of ancient genius in a degree of perfection nowhere else attainable: while the singers, undisturbed, and not compelled to confine their performance within restricted limits of time, and pleased, moreover, at being sole objects of attention, gave full effect to every piece: and the few who were assembled to hear this performance will scarcely have heard the like again.*<sup>47</sup>

The Palazzo Caffarelli performances continued for ‘many years’.<sup>48</sup> Charles remained at the Prussian legation until 1838, but after the failure of negotiations with the Pope over so-called ‘mixed marriages’ between Protestants and Catholics – allowed under Prussian law, but which the Vatican wanted abolished – he felt his position to have become untenable and resigned. With enormous sorrow, the Bunsens left Rome.

## England and the Anglican tradition

His resignation did not leave Charles out in the professional cold. Despite his wish to devote his time to scholarship, the favour of both Friedrich Wilhelm III (who died in 1840) and his son Friedrich Wilhelm IV ensured a swift succession of appointments, firstly as Prussian Ambassador to Switzerland, and then as head of an initiative to establish a joint Anglo-Prussian bishopric in Jerusalem, which would take spiritual charge of the Protestant community living there. Then, in 1842 he found himself more highly elevated in his diplomatic career than ever, when he was appointed Prussian Ambassador to the Court of St James. The family moved to London, and their regular experiences of sacred music thus became Anglican ones.

Frances’s memories of Bristol Cathedral and Bath Abbey led her back to the cathedral service,<sup>49</sup> but a visit to St Paul’s proved an unhappy experience, St Paul’s having become a by-word for the parlous state of Anglican music.<sup>50</sup> She ‘came out with the consciousness that ... were there indeed nothing more edifying & devotional to be

found in the Church of England, I should be driven to seek domiciliation elsewhere.<sup>[51]</sup> Not only was the state of church music less satisfactory than she remembered it from her childhood, but the theological context of mid-nineteenth-century Anglicanism had become rather more complex. Thomas Arnold was not the only sympathetic Anglican with whom Bunsen had been in contact over the years. In Rome, he had established friendships with, among others, Connop Thirlwall (later Bishop of St David's) and Julius Hare (later Archdeacon of Lewes, and involved in the creation of the Jerusalem bishopric).<sup>[52]</sup> The new German historical and theological scholarship had caught the imagination of liberal Anglican thinkers, who believed that the Church must accommodate itself to modern currents of thought, to historical investigation of the Bible and to religious toleration.<sup>[53]</sup>

These figures came together in what became known (somewhat against their will) as the Broad Church (in opposition to the evangelical Low Church and the Catholic sympathies of the High Church).<sup>[54]</sup> The antipathy between the Broad Church and the High Church is not without irony, since Broad Church devotees of sacred music had much for which to thank the Oxford Movement, as it was largely responsible for an Anglican 'choral revival' over the course of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>[55]</sup>

Frances heard this revival in progress at what was arguably its source, when she was taken in 1846, by the educational reformer Thomas Dyke Acland, to a service at St Mark's College, Chelsea. St Mark's was a Church of England foundation, and one of the first teacher-training colleges in England.<sup>[56]</sup> Through its 'systematic musical training' and the diaspora of its graduates as they moved on into schools and parishes, 'S. Mark's College was to be responsible for the consistent growth of the Choral Revival throughout the whole country'.<sup>[57]</sup> Frances recounts the experience in a letter to a close friend, Heinrich Abeken, a Protestant theologian and former colleague at the Prussian legation in Rome, though her account shows no evidence that she recognised the wider significance of the musical training and practices at St Mark's, while providing plenty of evidence of her mistrust of High Church ritual and aesthetics:

*The boys are taught to sing, and the whole service of the Church is gone through by them in a fine style, musically considered: the chanting of the Psalms being only by them performed quite as it ought. That chanting is to me very satisfactory, and I would wish it everywhere: but to have the Venite, the Te Deum, the Jubilate, all in canto figurato, though ever so good, and a long anthem besides—converts the whole into a performance little to be distinguished but by localities from that of the Sistine Chapel:*



*well suited to the aesthetical system of religion—(a compound of music and painting and architecture and embroidery, and decent solemnities, and regular attendances, and high professions, and strict exclusions) — now in fashion, but which the very name of the Gospel — of good tidings of great joy, preached, that is addressed to the heart, of the poor and needy, the spiritually destitute — dissipates into air and nothingness. I am, and ever have been, much attached to those external decencies, now become the very idols of worship; but if they are to become all in all... I shall end with following the ‘Ultra-Protestants’ to field-preaching.<sup>[58]</sup>*

It is the florid character of the music that incurs her disapproval, prompting the comparison with what she clearly remembered as one of the less admirable practices of the papal choir (‘canto figurato’,<sup>[59]</sup> contrasting with the simplicity of ‘canto fermo’).<sup>[60]</sup>

Her experiences of Anglican choral services from this period suggest that, for all her love of ancient Catholic music, her long participation in Lutheran worship had made her sensitive to inappropriate uses of music in a Protestant liturgy. In May 1839, she visited Cambridge, probably in her husband’s company; it is unclear exactly to whom the ‘we’ of her letter refers, but it seems likely that it was Charles, given the eagerness of their hosts at King’s College Chapel to treat them to ‘an anthem such as we should admire’. His reputation as a man with a keen and sophisticated interest in sacred music would have been well known through his prominent Anglican friends.<sup>[61]</sup> Moreover, it was not without precedent for his intention to attend a service to have an impact on the selection of the music. On a visit to Devon in 1838, to stay with his friends the Aclands of Killerton, it became known that he would be attending Sunday morning service at Exeter Cathedral. Accordingly, ‘[t]he most ancient piece of music has been selected for the Anthem, for me to hear’,<sup>[62]</sup> and ‘the Bishop preached: people said it was done for my sake, as he preaches but four or five times a year, and had lately done so .... The service was beautiful, and moved me deeply.’<sup>[63]</sup> (Tellingly, it is the service as a whole, and not the music per se, that he identifies as ‘moving’.)

It is entirely possible that the same attention was being shown at King’s. In this instance, however, the choice of music was unfortunate:

*... Mr. Townley had offered to bespeak an anthem such as we should admire, and the choice fell upon Haydn’s ‘Let there be Light,’ with the succeeding air and chorus – a singular and most unsuitable selection as a part of church-service, though in itself*

*beautiful, and sung by very fine voices, accompanied by an exquisite organ.*<sup>[64]</sup>

Haydn was, of course, a Catholic composer – not in itself a problem to the Bunsens. However, he was a *modern* (classical), not an *ancient*, Catholic composer, and a musical style that did not employ ‘the true genuine style of harmony’ of Palestrina and his fellow ancient composers could not belong for the Bunsens within a Protestant liturgical context. Moreover, the anthem was taken from *The Creation*, an oratorio – a genre commonly thought, from a sacred point of view, too close to opera for comfort.<sup>[65]</sup> Frances does not spell it out, but we can infer that they considered an extract from an oratorio written for classical orchestral forces (though played on the chapel organ in this instance) too dramatic, too florid and too ready to foreground instrumental music per se.

That she was aware of the impact of increasing and increasingly powerful orchestral forces<sup>[66]</sup> is clear from a complaint she makes about the direction taken by modern performances of Handel’s oratorios:

*In the natural process of deterioration in things human, it may be observed and lamented that the English style of execution has the ever increasing defect of allowing the instrumental accompaniment to exceed the original, just proportion, which existed between it and the vocal part. The materials have been increased, and the science of instrumentation has progressed, since the time of Händel, and unlimited advantage has been taken of the magical means offered by it for enhancing the effect of the whole.*<sup>[67]</sup>

Her observation is prompted by a performance of *Messiah* in June 1839 by the Sacred Harmonic Society, an amateur London choral society established from a number of smaller, non-conformist choirs, and aimed at the lower classes, from whom its membership was largely drawn.<sup>[68]</sup> At various times, it numbered anything from several hundred voices to the best part of three thousand, with instrumental forces to match. Reviewing their performance of *Joshua* later the same month, the *Morning Chronicle* critic comments approvingly on ‘the immense mass of voices and instruments ... their gigantic march was awful and even overwhelming’.<sup>[69]</sup> Frances takes a somewhat more complicated view; unwilling to do anything but admire the worthy aims of such a choir, she praises the quality of their singing, but laments the fact that such enormous vocal forces are necessary in the context of greater and more powerful instrumental forces, in order that ‘the vocal power may still rise uncrushed and intelligible, by the

proportionate increase in the number of choral vocalists of such force and precision as the Society, so justly admired at Exeter Hall, can give'.<sup>70</sup>

## Germany and the Lutheran tradition

Charles again felt his professional position becoming uncomfortable as he tried to mediate tensions between Britain and Prussia over the Crimea. Friedrich Wilhelm IV refused his advice to join the alliance of France and Britain against Russia, and Charles resigned. He left his post in London in 1854, and he and Frances now settled near Heidelberg. It was the final chapter of their married life, and it would not be a long one: Charles's health failed, and he died in 1860. It had nonetheless been a period of considerable spiritual contentment. Heidelberg was in a Protestant area of Germany, and it was Lutheranism that came to the fore in their experiences of sacred music, with its emphasis on hymns and congregational singing. Soon after their move, Frances wrote to her daughter Emilia, describing her delight at finding their local church a sympathetic one:

*We feel more and more at home and delighted to be at home, in Charlottenberg. How we did enjoy our quiet, luxurious Sunday yesterday! We breakfasted a little before eight, had a delightful and easy walk to the Heiligen Geist Kirche, heard a very satisfactory sermon ... and were much pleased with the hymns and singing, and the prayers – in short, rejoiced to find a parish church to go to regularly.*<sup>71</sup>

A visit to the Lorenz-Kirche in Nuremberg, one of the most important Lutheran churches of Bavaria, provided an equally satisfactory spiritual and musical experience, as Frances related in a letter to her son George:

*The Sunday morning service in the unequalled Lorenz-Kirche was one of my great gratifications—a sermon worth hearing and well heard, and at the close, the Benediction pronounced in cadence from the communion-table, and distinctly audible, great as was the distance. The chorus of voices from the entire and numerous congregation had a heart-strengthening effect.*<sup>72</sup>

In Heidelberg, they also experienced a particularly distinctive Lutheran musical tradition – the use of the trombone or trombone choir as an accompaniment to

congregational singing:

*We have all been attending the celebration of the anniversary of the legal establishment of Protestant worship in Heidelberg two hundred years ago... which took place amid the circumstances which mark and assist simple earnestness of feeling—a hymn sung forth from the church-tower, accompanied by the Posanne [sic] (trombone) at sunset on Saturday and at daybreak on Sunday—as is done on all great festivals ...<sup>73</sup>*

On one level, the association of trombones with sacred music takes us right back into the ‘ancient’ Catholic tradition, where, because of their dynamic range and timbral affinity with the human voice, trombones were often used to double or replace vocal lines.<sup>[74]</sup> This has obvious relevance for the Protestant view of the primacy of the voice as carrier of sacred text and the consequent need for instrumental accompaniment to be subtle and unobtrusive. However, the use of trombones in Lutheran worship developed into a much greater range of functions than simply doubling voices, and gave rise to a rich body of repertoire.<sup>[75]</sup> Charlotte Leonard makes the point that, in marked contrast to the common use of the trombone by classical and romantic composers to evoke death and the underworld, its use in Lutheran sacred music is generally joyful and celebratory,<sup>[76]</sup> and that is clearly the case in the instance that Frances describes.

## Conclusion

When Charles and Frances listened to sacred music, they would have agreed that they were listening to the voice of God – but I think we have to conclude that they detected it through different media. Charles was unequivocal: he was literally listening to the Word – the music was there to support the delivery of sacred text, and he could not take seriously any music that seemed to demand attention in its own right. Frances encapsulates this in her account of the first time he heard *Messiah* sung in full, concluding:

*Bunsen not only admired, but exulted in, the composition of the ‘Messiah,’ looking upon the man who selected the Biblical texts for Händel’s great purpose under Händel’s superintendence, as an epic poet. He was not the originator of the words any more than of their high meaning, but from the treasure left by ‘holy*

*men of God, who spake as the Spirit gave them utterance,' he compiled the passages which could best combine to show forth the divine scheme.... In this work of Händel Bunsen found the full satisfaction of his own demands upon the fine arts that their fascination to the eye and ear should not be that of the senses alone, but rest upon the eternal foundation of Truth, upon that which alone is entitled to be considered reality, as being independent of change and decay.<sup>77</sup>*

She, on the other hand, for all her loyal protestations about the superfluity of instrumental music, clearly reacted primarily and instinctively to music per se, and for her it summoned intense associations not only with God, but with the human beings dearest to her, through whom her sense of duty and devotion was channeled. That this is so is powerfully demonstrated in the episode that most closely draws together the spiritual, the musical and the personal – her mother's funeral. Mrs Waddington died in January 1850, at her home on the Llanofer estate. The funeral was organised by her youngest daughter Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover.<sup>78</sup> Frances wrote to her daughter Theodora, describing Augusta's arrangements:

*[L]ast night between six and seven I walked down to the other house with Lady Hall, for the purpose of hearing some of the men who will belong to the funeral sing the Welsh dirges, which they are in the habit of performing when they follow a funeral procession among themselves.... Noiselessly the door opened and we found the enchanted palace as it used to be, fire and lights prepared by unseen hands. We sat down, and presently voices sounded from the gallery above.... This, the first music I have heard, since she has been taken away, whose delight in music I never failed to remember every time I heard any, with the desire that she should hear it, indescribably upset me: and yet what folly!—for she is conscious now of the everlasting harmonies! She needs no longer so poor an echo of them. I hailed with satisfaction Lady Hall's proposal to let the people sing upon the way, as they are accustomed to do at funerals amongst themselves.<sup>79</sup>*

Augusta was a committed enthusiast for Welsh culture and had learned to speak the language, but Frances could not have conducted the most basic conversation in Welsh, much less followed the words of a Welsh-language hymn. For her, it was ultimately the music that was the all-important communicator – understanding the words was a

secondary consideration. The contrast with her husband is telling. Charles's listening experiences reveal a personality shaped by his religion – though perhaps not by his instincts – to resist not simply the sensuality of music, but also the possibility that spirituality might be experienced as a *primarily* and instinctively emotional or (worse) sensual response. For him, spiritual experience was something to be attained through reflection on biblical and liturgical texts. Frances's influence went a long way to reconcile him to his own instinctive response to music, and his influence went a long way to convince her of the most appropriate uses of music in sacred contexts, but neither ever truly converted the other.

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### LISTENING AND SPIRITUALITY

### # ANGLICAN, CATHOLIC, CHORAL, LITURGY, LUTHERAN, PROTESTANT, SACRED MUSIC

