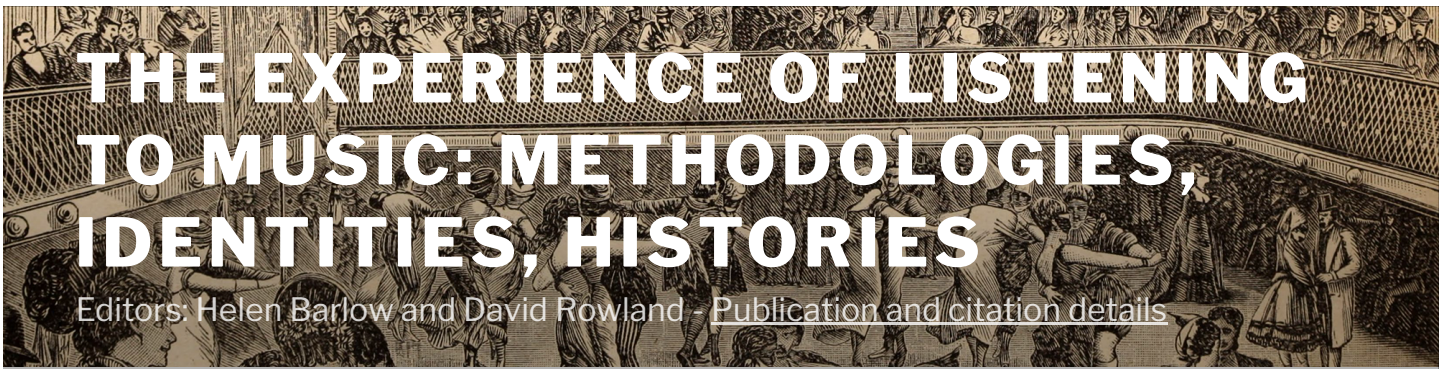

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Introduction: understanding listening experiences

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Introduction

The essays in this peer-reviewed collection started life as papers at a conference organised in 2018 by the Listening Experience Database (LED) project team, hosted by the Music Department and Knowledge Media Institute (KMI) at The Open University, and run in collaboration with members of staff at the Royal College of Music and Glasgow University. The approach of the LED project team is both novel and distinctive, concentrating on historical listening experiences as evidenced in personal documents such as diaries and letters. As such, LED's approach is to write listening history 'from below', as distinct from the way in which most conventional musicology is conceived. At the core of the LED team's enquiry is the study of the listeners themselves, many of whom had little status in society, not the opinion formers whose professional role is to critique or teach music. No previous studies of listening have focused to this degree on individuals and the evidence they create. The emphasis of the LED project is reflected in this collection and the challenges it creates form a large part of this Introduction.

Nevertheless, this collection also reflects some of the wider interests and methodologies that have emerged in listening studies in the last few decades (scholars from all branches of listening studies were invited to contribute to the conference and some of their research is included here). For example, while the LED project focuses on the unsolicited evidence of personal documents, some of the chapters here are based on material gathered from interviews, both recently (see Stephanie E. Pitts) and in the past (see Lorenzo Vanelli). Craig Hamilton and Simon Brown use computer analysis of digital evidence from the internet. Studies of audiences (as opposed to individual listeners) also feature – a particularly important strand of listening studies since James Johnson's *Listening in Paris*.

[footnote] [1] James Johnson, Listening in Paris: A Cultural History (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, c.1995). [/footnote]

But this collection does not pretend to be comprehensive. In such a relatively small space it could not possibly cover all of the ground outlined, for example, in the Introduction to the latest major work on listening, *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries*.

[footnote] [2] Christian Thorau and Hansjakob Ziemer (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, published online in 2018 and in print in 2019). [/footnote]

It does, however, make an important contribution to the understanding of how individuals, many of them from modest social backgrounds, listened to music, and how the experience of those listeners compare with their modern counterparts.

Audiences

While the majority of essays in this collection focus in one way or another on the listening of one or more individuals, the first two contributions concern the collective listening behaviours of audiences. In the opening chapter Dave Russell focuses on listeners who seldom feature in conventional histories of music – those of modest social status in the long nineteenth century who listened to music in 'popular' venues such as music halls, variety theatres, pubs, working men's clubs and brass band contests, as well as in concert halls. Along with others who seek to understand the views and behaviours of lower-class audiences, he acknowledges a problem inherent in the source material: the evidence for such studies, which often does not originate with the listeners themselves and is largely found in newspapers, periodicals and published histories of music, is both scattered and fragmentary, offering only occasional glimpses of the ways in which a significant proportion of the population engaged with music. The

role played by social class is now a major theme in listening research. A number of recent studies highlight the part played by it, especially as it relates to audience behaviours.

[footnote] [3] See most recently, for example, Charles Edward McGuire, 'Amateurs and auditors: listening to the British music festival, 1810–1835', in Thorau and Ziemer, 2018/19. [/footnote]

Russell's conclusions have some parallels with Johnson's

[footnote] [4] Johnson, c1995. [/footnote]

in so far as both describe an increasing tendency towards attentive listening in the nineteenth century. However, rather than identifying a simple behavioural trend away from inattention towards engaged listening, Russell presents a more nuanced picture in which a variety of listening practices, including participatory listening, gradually gave way to generally quieter listening by the mid-twentieth century.

[footnote] [5] Other refined studies of audience behaviours are now appearing: see Katherine Ellis, 'Researching audience behaviours in nineteenth-century Paris: who cares if you listen', in Thorau and Ziemer, 2018/19. [/footnote]

That a nuanced view of audience behaviours is needed is amply demonstrated in Stephanie E. Pitts' chapter. In particular, by surveying modern concert attenders she demonstrates a fundamental truth that writers on historical audiences would do well to note: silent listening does not necessarily equate to attentive, or engaged listening. Using evidence gathered by survey, by asking people to draw pictures, and by recording interviews, her case studies examine how audiences react with both the familiar and the unfamiliar. What is perhaps most striking about Pitts' findings is the conclusion that 'the answer to "what are concert-goers doing when they listen"? is perhaps no closer as a result of this provocation, but it is fairly certain not to be what is going on in the head of an academic music researcher'. This comment neatly summarises one of the major issues in listening research: despite the existence of listening orthodoxies that often have their roots in published educational materials, listeners in the present and past – we don't know the proportion – listen, or have listened, in very different ways that we are only just beginning to understand.

'Personal' documents and their readers

The majority of chapters in this collection focus on the written evidence of individuals, whether in the form of diaries and correspondence, oral history, or some form of social media. On the face of it, these documents appear to contain unvarnished accounts of

listeners' reactions to music, providing us with precisely the sort of evidence of authentic listening experiences that might help to answer the questions posed by Stephanie E. Pitts. Yet the sources pose multiple challenges of interpretation. In order to understand the documents it is important to evaluate the factors that shaped them, for example, prevailing philosophies, social and cultural contexts, writing conventions, and so on. This introduction briefly examines these factors, beginning with an evaluation of the sources' readers. (It should be added at the outset that 'readers' in this context includes those who actually read the sources, as well as those to whom the sources were read.)

The letters and diaries which are so crucial to the study of historical listeners could be supposed, naively, to contain the private outpourings of individuals as they wrote exclusively for themselves (diaries), or for one or two other readers (letters). Indeed, sometimes this was the case, but more often than not the circumstances were different, a factor that crucially affects the nature of the accounts. The following examples demonstrate the range of readers for whom these sorts of documents were written and hence some of the factors that influenced the way they were written.

When a sixteenth-century aristocrat wrote a letter the text was most likely shaped in some way by the knowledge that its contents would also be known by the scribe to whom the letter was dictated, and the messenger who delivered it.

[footnote] [6] Jonathan Gibson, 'Letters', in Michael Hattaway (ed.), A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2010), p. 456. [/footnote]

In the eighteenth century, as letter writing became ever more fashionable, the medium sometimes served as a training exercise for entry into the literary world and it is clear that some letters were written with the clear intention of later publication.

[footnote] [7] Susan E. Whyman, The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660–1800 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 191–192. [/footnote]

Commenting on letters written by poorer members of society towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Martyn Lyons writes that 'letters had multiple recipients and sometimes several authors. They were intended for reading aloud to a family group and sometimes became a kind of general newsletter for an entire village'.

[footnote] [8] Martyn Lyons, The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, 1860–1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 250. [/footnote]

Lyons' comments refer to particular sorts of writers at a certain time in history, but letters were written with similar intentions in many eras; for example, Clare Brant comments with respect to the eighteenth century:

> *The varied and often unpredictable circulation of letters confounds simple distinctions between public and private … In the context of letter writing, 'personal' is useful in that it recognises the significance of letters to individuals and to relationships. It is preferable to 'private', a term that is simply inaccurate for many eighteenth-century familiar letters, which were composed in company, voluntarily circulated beyond the addressee and frequently found their way into print.*
>
> *[footnote] [9] Brant, Clare. Eighteenth-century Letters and British Culture (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), p. 5. [/footnote]*

Diaries or journals (whichever term is used probably matters little)

[footnote] [10] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 193, 196. [/footnote]

were frequently written for a readership other than the author. Prominent members of society throughout history have known that their diaries might be of interest to a wider circle of people and would be published either in their lifetime, or after their death. But it was not just the influential in society whose diaries were written for a wider readership. The diary of John Yeoman, for example, an eighteenth-century farmer and pottery owner from Somerset, was not just written for himself: the frequent addresses to 'the reader' and other equivalent designations shows that it was written with his family and friends in mind.

Earlier authors of spiritual diaries knew that extracts may be published posthumously, and wrote accordingly:

> *specially selected entries were sometimes published after a diarist's death alongside a sermon written for her funeral. In their diaries, believers monitored and constructed themselves in a culturally acceptable fashion, so as to avoid posthumous social embarrassment, not to mention God's wrath.*
>
> *[footnote] [11] Dan Doll and Jessica Munns, Recording and Reordering: Essays on the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century Diary and Journal (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), p. 65. [/footnote]*

In the nineteenth century it was not so much the wrath of God that some diary-writers feared, but rather the opprobrium of a governess, who oversaw the writing of young

women's diaries as they wrote 'under duress'.

[footnote] [12] Philippe Lejeune, 'The practice of the private journal: chronicle of an investigation', in Rachael Langford and Russell West, Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 1999), pp. 196–197. [/footnote]

Clearly, documents such as diaries and letters were often intended for a wider readership than their author or recipient and although we may still refer to them as 'personal', we do so in the knowledge that many of them were anything but 'private'. It is not difficult to imagine, therefore, that in many of these documents the writers were carefully constructing images of themselves for portrayal to others. Indeed, even in the case of diaries written only for the author a certain amount of construction may be apparent, as the diarist's thoughts are written down according to certain conventions – a theme we will come to.

Understanding authors of 'personal' documents

Notwithstanding these caveats, as personal documents diaries and letters undoubtedly reflect the particular concerns, characters and world-views of their authors, and if we are to interpret and understand the listening experiences they contain, we must also acquaint ourselves as well as we can with the people who wrote them. This means studying the entire documents, wherever possible, and referring to whatever other sources about the authors may be available, not just focusing on the sections relevant to our enquiries, and not just exploiting the sources 'as quarries for the telling quotation or support for a preconceived view'.

[footnote] [13] Philip Woodfine, '"Nothing but dust & the most minute particles": historians and the evidence of journals and diaries', Doll and Munns, 2006, p. 189. [/footnote]

The need to study documents in their entirety is a common theme in the secondary literature of diaries and journals, and the current collection contains some intriguing examples. Elaine Moohan's chapter examines the recorded listening experiences of the siblings William and Hannah Ann Stirling, who grew up in Scotland in the early nineteenth century. Hannah Ann was a very active musician whereas William was a self-confessed ignoramus in musical matters. Yet in their correspondence it was William who wrote most about music, for the benefit of his sister whom he thought would welcome this sort of news. In order to understand why Hannah Ann was so reticent in musical matters, and why William was so voluble, it was important to

construct a detailed profile of their characters through a careful reading of numerous letters and other documents.

Knowing the authors of personal documents means understanding their views of 'self', especially how those ideas differ from equivalents in other generations. Peter Heehs has studied the way in which changing notions of 'self' have affected the contents of personal documents (primarily, in his study, diaries and memoirs), beginning with the earliest writings of self-expression prior to the age of printing, and moving forwards in time to the present. He concludes:

> *we see that over the last two millennia, the prevailing idea of the self has changed from a ghostly spirit [deriving identity from an external being] to a substantial soul to an autonomous individual to a centre of expression to a fiction constructed by social and biological forces.*
>
> *[footnote] [14] Peter Heehs, Writing the Self: Diaries, Memoirs, and the History of the Self (New York, London, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 230. [/footnote]*

An understanding of the author of a letter or diary in relation to prevailing attitudes to self goes some way to explaining the literary style of their documents.

Knowing the authors of personal documents means understanding the ways in which they perceived and experienced the world around them. A growing area of importance to the study of listening experiences, as this collection demonstrates, is research drawn from cultural history into historical perspectives of the sensorium – how the senses feature in people's understanding of their worlds. Ina Knoth's chapter examines eighteenth-century accounts of listening against the background of what she describes as an acknowledged 'shift from the dominance of the hearing sense to the visual sense in the Age of Enlightenment'. Rebecca Rinsema takes these ideas forward into modern times, discussing the significance of the 'sensory turn' on the study of listening.

Other crucially important contexts that affect individuals include the social and political environment in which they lived. Helen Barlow's chapter is telling in this regard, as she studies an environment in which individual listeners and opinion formers endeavoured to understand Welshness and the important place held by music in defining the phenomenon.

Knowing the authors of personal documents means understanding the way in which they were likely to express themselves according to contemporary social conventions. For those of us who study listening accounts it has often been surprising that so many sources make no reference whatsoever to any emotional response to music: we might even ask if many individuals did actually react to music emotionally prior to modern times. But in earlier times virtues such as self-control and propriety held sway, as they continue to in some contexts today, so we should not expect to read of intensely personal reactions to music in sources of every era.

A particularly significant period in which expressions of emotion came to the fore as never before was the age of sensibility.

[footnote] [15] See John Arthur Mullan, Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) and Janet Todd, Sensibility: An Introduction (London: Methuen, 1986). [/footnote]

In the late eighteenth century the expression of emotion became something of a hallmark of authentic human experience, which was expressed both in people's behaviour and in their personal documents. For example, Whyman identifies a period of 'the heightened language of sensibility in letters written by Robert [Johnson] and his friends from the 1770s – 90s',

[footnote] [16] Whyman, 2009, p. 210. [/footnote]

the period when the culture of sensibility was at its height. During these decades it was acceptable for both men and women to display emotion, before the floodgates were shut with the coming of the Victorian era, when men in particular needed once again to demonstrate behavioural restraint.

[footnote] [17] See Philip Carter, 'Tears and the man' in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (eds), Women, Gender and Enlightenment (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005); Henry French and Mark Rothery, Man's Estate Landed Gentry Masculinities c.1660–c.1900 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); John Tosh, Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain (London: Routledge, 2004). [/footnote]

However, even during the age of sensibility, expressing oneself emotionally was not without social risk, since not everyone shared the view that it was to be encouraged. It is against this background that Thomas Twining expressed his emotions somewhat hesitantly, albeit tearfully, as recorded in a letter dated 24 February 1780 to his friend and university tutor, John Hey:

> *we dined with Bates one day, & heard Miss [Sarah] Harrop sing from tea-time till ten o'clock; snug & comfortable; no audience but the two Bates's, Mrs. Bates, & ourselves. One of the greatest*

> *musical treats I ever had. I had, as Sir Hugh Evans says, 'great dispositions to cry"; nay, the tears actually came out, and Elmsall said he should have cried if he had not seen how foolish I looked. She sung Pergolesi, Leo, Hasse — things I know, & that nobody sings. It gave me some faint idea of meeting one's departed friends in Heaven.*
>
> *[footnote] [18] Ralph S. Walker (ed.), A Selection of Thomas Twining's Letters 1734–1804, vol. 1 (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1991), pp. 177–xx. [/footnote]*

Did men and women experience music, or write about their experiences of music, in a similar way? Comments in the previous paragraph suggest that an answer to the question is likely to be complex.

[footnote] [19] See also David Rowland, 'Listening in England c.1780–1820', forthcoming in Nineteenth-Century Music Review. [/footnote]

It seems that in the age of sensibility all could express themselves and express their emotions in writing, but at other times it is less likely to have been so.

As well as acquainting ourselves with the writers of personal documents and the environment in which they lived, we must also understand the literary conventions and constraints that shaped the texts they wrote. So, for example, during the seventeenth century in particular, manuals for the writing of spiritual diaries were used and model diaries were published.

[footnote] [20] Avra Kaoffman, 'Women's diaries of late Stuart England: an overview', Doll and Munns, 2006, p. 65. [/footnote]

In the long eighteenth-century manuals provided blueprints for the growing number of letter-writers.

[footnote] [21] See Eve Tavor Bannet, Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688–1820 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). [/footnote]

The nature of travel literature was initially highly influenced by the Royal Society, whose publications affected the way that travel journals were written. Shortly after the foundation of the Society in 1660 a document was drawn up detailing the kind of data required from the experiments to be carried out and the observations to be made by Edward Montague as he led a naval squadron towards the Mediterranean. 'There were six topics of enquiry: the depth of the sea, variations in the salinity of the seawater, the pressure of the seawater, tides and currents in the Straits of Gibraltar, and the nature of phosphorescence'.

[footnote] [22] 'Bordering on fact in early eighteenth-century sea journals', Doll and Munns, 2006, p. 164. [/footnote]

This sort of approach, which was governed by close observation and accurate, factual reporting, and little expression of emotional engagement, characterises many travel diaries written during the century or so that followed. Whatever their experience of music, one would not expect to find accounts of the personal impact of music on its listeners in these documents, whereas one might in later travel writing: later manifestations of the genre were marked by an increasing concentration on the individual and a tendency towards personal reflection and sensationalism.

[footnote] [23] See Tim Youngs, The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). [/footnote]

The textual style of personal documents is to some degree dictated by the media in which they were created. For example, in the modern era, everyone knows that tweets can only contain a certain number of characters, but without that knowledge we would probably find them baffling. Another example from modern times addresses the sort of quick and easy editing that has been become possible by means of computing technology; not editing undertaken in order to prepare text for publication, but changes made in order to produce a polished text for the sake of personal satisfaction. In his account of writing, first a teenage diary and then an adult one, Philppe Lejeune describes the stylistic differences of the two texts and some of the reasons for those differences:

> *As an adolescent writer, I adopted the rule of total spontaneity. I refused to rewrite my diary, which was of course why it was rubbish. I was even reluctant to correct its spelling. Since 1991, I have been working on a word-processor. While writing the journal of Le Moi des demoiselles on my Macintosh, I realised that it was possible to work over a diary in the present, 'crafting' an entry while remaining close to the truthfulness of the momentary emotion. I realised that the journal form was not incompatible with the process of composition: a dramatic and argumentative line of prose could be constructed in such a way as to meet the future.*
>
> *[footnote] [24] Lejeune, 1999, p. 201. [/footnote]*

Given the polished nature of their prose, some of the more elegantly-written diaries from earlier centuries read as if they underwent a parallel process of editing.

A new (or not now so new) type of 'personal' document currently exists on the internet. Users of social media, to some extent at least, now live out their personal lives in the online presence of a selected or entirely public readership. Exactly how different social media texts are from the letter-writing of earlier centuries is a matter for discussion, but there can be no doubt that the online text which appears is a construct, as Heehs observes:

> *By creating a profile and uploading text and pictures, users define who they are or rather create an online identity that they offer to others as themselves … The result has been the blurring of the line between the user's 'actual' identity and his or her online persona.*
> *[footnote] [25] Heehs, 2013, p. 235. [/footnote]*

Not only is there potential conflict here between an actual and online persona, but the possibility of rapid changes of online identity.

Studying online and oral evidence

For anyone studying online texts perhaps the biggest challenge is the sheer quantity of online data. Craig Hamilton's research is based on people's accounts of listening that 'provide detail and reflection on their experiences with music across the course of a single day'. The accounts have been gathered from posts to online platforms, emails, and online forms. It is the challenge of making sense of large amounts of data from diverse sources with which the chapter is mostly engaged. In this respect, the chapter is similar to Simon Brown's, which sets out to find ways of analysing pre-existing online data on Twitter and Facebook. What meaningful conclusions can be reached by analysing the short snippets of information provided by this data?

Martin Clarke's chapter deals with a different kind of online interaction – a section of BBC Radio 3's Forum relating to its regular broadcasts of Choral Evensong. The online interaction is distinctive in so far as elements of it form a conversation, carried out in the full gaze of a wider public. Quoting an individual's reaction to the performance in Durham Cathedral of a piece by William Byrd, Clarke goes on to highlight a relatively 'intimate' discussion of the piece between nine individuals, writing between them a total of 23 posts, and his chapter points to the importance of this sort of activity in forming a unique kind of listening community.

So far we have considered some of the issues that arise when listening testimony in the form of written words is used, but some chapters in this collection use oral history and ethnographic recordings respectively – sources which, by their nature, could be thought to lie in a category between the 'personal' documents we have considered and the questionnaire approach used in Stephanie E. Pitts' chapter. Oral history may be structured according to a specific series of questions asked by a second party, or they may be formed more loosely. Whatever the circumstances they may generally be regarded as 'solicited' sources in so far as one individual has usually asked another to provide information on a particular subject. As Barlow points out, we may therefore question to what extent their content has been influenced by the project that underpins the recording – yet another example of 'personal' evidence that is shaped by factors beyond the individual.

[footnote] [26] For a discussion of the nature of oral history see the Introduction to Donald A. Ritchie (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Oral History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially the sections 'Milestones in sound recording', 'The digital revolution' and 'The intellectual evolution of oral history'. [/footnote]

Lorenzo Vanelli tackles head-on the problems of using ethnographic sources as evidence. His chapter on African American Hollers analyses the way in which flawed methods of gathering evidence have led to a false narrative as a direct result of the way in which information was solicited on the basis of false assumptions, as well as the way in which the material has been poorly archived.

Language

Historians of listening are frequently disappointed by the brevity and apparent superficiality of listening accounts. In many historical periods it is rare to find expressions of real engagement with music, and more often than not only the barest of details of performances are provided. This has much to do with the issues raised above. However, even though an account may not appear to say much about a listener's experience, the language it contains may nevertheless contain clues as to the intensity of an experience, because individuals whose listening was highly engaged often tended to use a richer vocabulary than those whose listening was more casual. The difference in language is especially, but not exclusively, evident in the choice of adjectives. A comparison of two listeners' experiences, just 20 years apart, makes the point.

Mary Berry (1763–1852) was an author. Many of her listening experiences are recorded in the *Extracts of the Journal and Correspondence of Miss Berry from the Year 1783 to 1852*, which was published in 1865. A typical example is her account of a performance in Hanover Square on 18 May 1810:

> *Went to Barthelemon's concert with Lady Ellenborough. The party. Lord and Lady Ellenborough, Lord and Lady Dunmore, Lord Sidmouth, sat together very comfortably. The Handel part of the concert fine. The Hanover Square Rooms quite full of persons, not one of whose faces I had ever seen before. At the end of the first act I went away, and walked down the whole length of the room with Mr. Rogers, through rows of people, all well or expensively dressed, who had paid half a guinea for their tickets, such a place is London!*

Like many other accounts of the period, Berry's is mostly given over to what we might consider to be incidental descriptions of the people who accompanied her, the rest of the audience and the price of tickets. Her comments about the music are very brief and, crucially, she chose a very weak adjective to describe the performance: the word 'fine' is a very frequently-used, but vague word, similar in strength to other adjectives of the time such as 'admirable', 'agreeable', 'charming', 'delightful', 'pleasing', and so on. Weak adjectives such as these are a common feature of Berry's listening accounts. The amount of space she gives to descriptions of other aspects of performances suggests that music was for her just one element of a nice evening out.

Anna Seward (1742–1809), too, was an author, but her correspondence shows her to be a much more engaged listener than Mary Berry. In a brief extract from a letter to a Mrs Martin dated 27 October 1790 she reported that:

> *I ventured to one of the morning music festivals at Shrewsbury, and heard Mr Saville open the Messiah with a pathos, an energy, and a grace that none ever excelled, and which I never heard equalled.*
> *[footnote] [27] Archibald Constable, ed. Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co., and London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, William Miller, and John Murray, 1811), vol. 3, p. 37. [/footnote]*

Tellingly, in this extract three words ('pathos', 'energy', 'grace') are used to describe Saville's performance, each of them chosen carefully to convey a particular sense of an element of his singing style. A comparison is also made between Saville and other performers. This sort of specific comment is characteristic of her other descriptions of performances: the care with which she expresses herself in passages such as this are symptomatic of her high level of engagement with music.

When studying listeners' language care must obviously be taken to understand the contemporary meaning of words, and the interpretation of one passage should be made in the context of other similar descriptions by the same author. Adjectives such as 'pretty' have changed their meaning over time and terms such as 'sensibility' and 'sublime' need to be understood in the context of the wider picture of philosophical history and each writer's experience of the concepts.

Language also offers a way in to an important question in the LED project's research: how does the experience of 'ordinary' listeners compare with the orthodox pronouncements of those who promote ideas in society? It can reveal a gap between the experience of 'ordinary' listeners and public discourse about the supposed purpose of music in a given period. This is vividly illustrated, for example, in the language of public pronouncements on music in wartime that emerged during the First World War, in the press and in parliamentary debate, compared with the way that serving military personnel wrote about the effect of music. Unsurprisingly, public discourse focused on the function of music in promoting moral strength and martial spirit, particularly at the front. It frequently featured the adjective 'good' (as in 'good rousing march tunes',

[footnote] [28] Sir Frederick Bridge, quoted in The Times, 28 January 1915, 5. [/footnote]

and 'good music by good musicians for good soldiers'

[footnote] [29] 'The Music in War-Time Committee: Report of the Leeds Section', Musical Times, 1 September 1917, 410. [/footnote]

– the blandness of that term conveying rather effectively the triteness and superficiality of the assumptions underlying such public utterances.

A close reading of the language in which musical experiences are described by military personnel in their letters, diaries and memoirs, reveals a very different tone. While such accounts certainly bear witness to the positive effect of music, their language rarely expresses patriotic fervour, but rather speaks of music as a means of reassurance, comfort, connection with home, and even sustenance and healing. While descriptions are not necessarily lengthy, the intensity of the experience is revealed in strong, vivid adjectives and other language patterns – such as the notably frequent use of an almost medical vocabulary: 'a vital necessity… it was a life-giving nourishment';

[footnote] [30] Florence Farmborough, Diary of Florence Farmborough, 1915, in War Recollections of 1915 (City of Alexandria, 2005), p. 11, https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1375269268, accessed 5 February 2019. [/footnote]

'If it was medicine, as I believed it to be, then it was swallowed in great gulps'.

[footnote] [31] Colonel W. N. Nicholson, Behind the Lines (London: Johnathan Cape, 1939), p. 256, https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/entity/lexp/1532001364452, accessed 5 February 2019. [/footnote]

This is one historical context where the perspectives of listeners suggest experiences of music that were very different from the 'official line'.

[footnote] [32] For a fuller treatment of listening in the context of the First World War, see Helen Barlow's forthcoming chapter '"A vital necessity": musical experiences in the life writing of British military personnel at the Western Front', in Michelle Meinhart (ed.), A 'Great Divide' or a Longer Nineteenth Century?: Music, Britain, and the First World War (London: Routledge, 2020). [/footnote]

Helen Barlow's chapter offers another instance, using late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century oral testimony alongside the evidence of newspapers, periodicals and speeches to explore how Welsh singing, especially the performance of Welsh traditional song, was interpreted as evidence of cultural progressiveness. She compares the written and spoken rhetoric of opinion formers with the testimony of individuals who remembered from childhood the songs they experienced in everyday life.

Conclusion

Understanding historical accounts of listening is a complex and challenging task. We are only just beginning to unravel the issues, but at least one thing is clear; a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach is necessary in order to be able to grasp how individuals have interacted with music and what it has meant to them. The nature of the source material is often perplexing and often superficially disappointing, yet with care and imagination it offers up insights into the past which would otherwise be lost. Listening history is a fascinating sub-discipline that is at last beginning to gain some traction and it is our hope that this collection will play its part in developing the discourse and encouraging others to engage.

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