




RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Concert Hall Music Drama: From London to Bayreuth and Back Again

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## Abstract

A year after the premiere of the complete *Ring* cycle in Bayreuth in 1876, a concert-form 'London Wagner Festival' took place at the Royal Albert Hall, newly opened in South Kensington near the site of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Comprising lengthy excerpts from Wagner's operas performed by a vast orchestra and star singers, this event was partly born out of financial necessity in the aftermath of the costly and extravagant staging of the *Ring* in Bayreuth. But Wagner's London connections also reveal the significance of Victorian industry and the built environment in disseminating his music dramas and shaping listening practices beyond Bayreuth. This article situates the London Wagner Festival in relation to the early history of the Royal Albert Hall, foregrounding the contributions and responses of Victorian architects, engineers, concert reformers and musical critics to the peculiarly modern phenomenon of the massive concert. By approaching the Albert Hall as a medium for the early dissemination of Wagner's music dramas, I seek to make a broader case for the relevance of the nineteenth-century concert hall to histories of operatic performance and technological mediation.

**Keywords:** Richard Wagner; Gottfried Semper; Royal Albert Hall; Concert hall architecture; Operatic remediation

In his 2007 book *The Total Work of Art: from Bayreuth to Cyberspace*, Matthew Wilson Smith compares two sites of nineteenth-century performance: Wagner's timber-framed theatre in Bayreuth, which opened in 1876 for the premiere of the complete *Ring* cycle, and Joseph Paxton's glass-and-iron Crystal Palace, erected in London's Hyde Park to welcome over six million visitors to the Great Exhibition of 1851.<sup>1</sup> These competing festive spaces – one in a neglected German town and the other in a global hub of empire – point to what Smith calls the 'divided form' of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art).<sup>2</sup> If the Great Exhibition projected a vision of totality through the outward celebration of technology and industry, Wagner's Bayreuth theatre amounted to 'a pseudo-organic form' characterised by a concealment of the means of production in the service of an immersive theatre of illusion.<sup>3</sup> Smith uses these two competing sites to tell a story about the enduring legacy of the total

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York, 2007), 22–47.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art*, 3.

work of art for modern and postmodern performance and mass media.<sup>4</sup> However, and as this article will demonstrate, the opposition between the Bayreuth Festspielhaus and the Crystal Palace also points to an alternative history of Wagnerian performance in the mid-nineteenth century, one in which the Romantic ideal of artistic integration in a provincial theatre was entangled with the rise of monumental buildings for orchestral music in an industrial city.

A year after the premiere of the *Ring* cycle, Wagner resumed his career as a touring composer-conductor and refashioned his *Bühnenfestspiel* (stage festival play) for Victorian concert life, preparing six programmes to be performed by a vast orchestra and guest singers at the Royal Albert Hall, newly opened in South Kensington near the original site of the Great Exhibition. Having previously appeared in the capital as guest conductor of the Philharmonic Society at the Hanover Square Rooms over two decades earlier, Wagner this time joined a troupe of celebrated Bayreuth musicians and singers, including conductor Hans Richter, violinist August Wilhelmj (concertmaster of the Bayreuth orchestra) and the star singers Amalie Materna, Carl Hill, Georg Unger and Friederike Sadler-Grün. Whereas the more modestly sized Hanover Square Rooms (constructed in 1776 with a capacity of five hundred) still reflected an economic model of elite subscription concerts, the Albert Hall boasted a volume of three million cubic feet and an initial capacity of at least 7,000, making it the largest auditorium in Europe at the time of its completion in 1871.

The transfer of the *Ring* from the specific conditions of the festival theatre to the resonant amphitheatre of the Albert Hall was an initiative born out of financial necessity in the aftermath of the long-awaited staging of the complete cycle. My intention here, however, is not to perpetuate a familiar image of Wagner's London appearance as an unfortunate detour on the path towards realising his complete works on the Bayreuth stage.<sup>5</sup> Instead, I seek to re-evaluate the Victorian mass concert as a format for the remediation of music drama, emphasising the dependence of Wagnerism – and concomitant aesthetics of musical idealism – on industrial infrastructures and acoustic environments. While I return to Wagner's London concerts in the final section of this article, I begin by tracing the origins of the Albert Hall in counterpoint with the evolution of the Festspielhaus. The focal point in the first section is the architect Gottfried Semper, a friend and collaborator of the composer from his Dresden days in the 1840s. Best known at that time as the architect behind the Dresden Hoftheater (1841), Semper played a leading role in the revolutionary uprising of 1849 (he designed the republican barricades), before escaping to London as a political exile.<sup>6</sup> Semper went on to work as part of the team of designers and architects behind the Great Exhibition and the subsequent South Kensington development, before joining Wagner once again in Zurich and producing plans for a proposed festival theatre in the Munich *Glaspalast*. Although Semper's large-scale architectural plans of the 1850s and 1860s remained

<sup>4</sup> As the title of Wilson Smith's book makes clear, his overarching argument is representative of wider interdisciplinary interest in Wagner's aesthetics as anticipating twentieth- and twenty-first-century multimedia. See for example, Friedrich Kittler, 'World-Breath: On Wagner's Media Technology', in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford, 1994), 215–35; Randall Packer and Ken Jordan, *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality* (New York, 2001). For more on Kittlerian interpretations of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in connection with nineteenth-century operatic practice, see Gundula Kreuzer, 'Kittler's Wagner and Beyond', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 70/1 (2017), 228–32; Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley, 2018), 14–15.

<sup>5</sup> Biographers have recounted Wagner's London journey of 1877 within his career (which was notoriously plagued by financial distress), seeing it as an ill-judged attempt to make up for the financial losses of the Bayreuth festival. Ernest Newman provides a detailed account of Wagner's 'unlucky London adventure' in *The Life of Richard Wagner*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1946, reprinted 1976), 555–9, at 555.

<sup>6</sup> Known today as the Dresden *Semperoper*, the original Hoftheater was destroyed by fire in 1869 and rebuilt in 1878 according to Semper's new designs, which were overseen by his son Manfred.

unrealised, his journey provides a prism through which to trace the shared genealogy of two very different musical buildings.<sup>7</sup>

The second and third sections of the present article turn in more detail to the Albert Hall, focusing on the years surrounding its opening in 1871. In a quest to construct a civic space for public concerts and exhibitions on an unprecedented scale, Victorian engineers sought to recuperate an idealised vision of the classical amphitheatre for the imperial metropolis. Yet the opening ceremony was famously disturbed by loud echo effects, leading many writers to speculate about the need for a rigorous application of acoustic science to musical buildings. A significant voice in these discussions was Henry Heathcote Statham, a professional architect who also worked as music critic for the *Edinburgh Review*. In an 1872 address to the Royal Institute of British Architects – entitled ‘Buildings Practically Considered in Reference to Music’ – Statham criticised the multi-functional purpose of the Albert Hall and advocated a new kind of concert venue that would facilitate intimate listening to the intricacies of oratorio and symphonic music. Statham went on to intervene in the Wagner debate then dominating periodical discourse on music, countering contemporary writers who sought to promote the composer within the symphonic tradition as the natural heir to Beethoven.<sup>8</sup> The final section of this article hones in on these Victorian mediators of Wagner’s music and aesthetics, especially the music critic Francis Hueffer (born Franz Hüffer) and the conductor, pianist and writer Edward Dannreuther. During the 1870s these men combined the intellectual diffusion of German musical metaphysics with the practical work of concertising and fundraising, preparing the way for Wagner’s celebrity appearance at the Albert Hall with his Bayreuth entourage.<sup>9</sup> Much of the critical reception of this event (which was branded the London Wagner Festival) centred around the viability of experiencing the total work of art in concert form: for Wagner’s supporters the pared-back format facilitated an authentic appreciation of the musical drama free of visual accoutrements, while for detractors the concerts amounted to a miscellany of snippets that degraded aesthetic unity. Clearly the London Wagner Festival marked a pragmatic departure from the composer’s ideals about the exemplary performance of the *Ring* cycle; yet these concerts were also indicative of the emergent mobility of the work in the aftermath of the premiere. As I discuss in the coda, the London Wagner Festival anticipated later, more ambitious attempts to reproduce the *Ring* for audiences beyond Bayreuth, while the Albert Hall itself functioned as a medium of mass dissemination at the dawn of the recording era.

### Wagner, Semper and legacies of the Great Exhibition

In January 1852, three years after fleeing to Zurich in the aftermath of his involvement in the Dresden uprising, Wagner wrote to Franz Liszt in despair at the bleak prospects of mounting a performance of his *Siegfried* drama. While he dispelled hopes of ever bringing the work to fruition if exiled from his native country, he also made some stipulations about conditions

<sup>7</sup> Wilson Smith also discusses the partnership between Wagner and Semper in his reading of the Crystal Palace and the Festspielhaus: see *The Total Work of Art*, 23–4. Building on this comparison, my discussion is directed towards the aftermath of the Great Exhibition and the history of the Albert Hall.

<sup>8</sup> On ‘symphonic opera’ as a foundational myth of Wagnerism, see Carolyn Abbate, ‘Opera as Symphony, a Wagnerian Myth’, in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (Berkeley, 1989), 92–124.

<sup>9</sup> During his five-week London sojourn, Wagner stayed with Dannreuther and his wife Chariclea at 12 Orme Square. The couple had incorporated a large music studio (designed by the architect Philip Webb), from which they hosted regular musical gatherings during the period 1873–94. See Jeremy Dibble, ‘Edward Dannreuther and the Orme Square Phenomenon’, in *Music and British Culture, 1785–1914: Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich*, ed. Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley (Oxford, 2001), 275–98.

for its potential performance. Above all, he could no longer reconcile his latest work with the public culture of Europe's industrial cities:

I do not expect its performance, at least not during my lifetime, and least of all in Berlin or Dresden. These and similar large towns, with their public, do not exist for me at all. As an audience I can only imagine an assembly of friends who have come together for the purpose of knowing my works somewhere or other, best of all in some beautiful solitude, far from the thick smoke and disgusting industrial stench of our urban civilization.<sup>10</sup>

In imagining a performance of *Siegfried* in a secluded location, Wagner was alluding to a prospect already set out in letters to the conductor Theodor Uhlig. If only he could raise '10,000 thalers', he wrote to Uhlig, he would perform *Siegfried* where he happened to be in Zurich, constructing a temporary theatre made of planks. He would engage the best singers and invite a dedicated audience to join him for this fleeting special occasion.<sup>11</sup>

At the same moment Wagner was denouncing smoke-filled cities as antithetical to his festival concept, his future collaborator – Gottfried Semper – was rebuilding his career in London as a proponent of monumental public architecture.<sup>12</sup> Exiled in the British capital for five years, Semper published seminal texts in architectural theory and coordinated interior displays for the Great Exhibition. Alongside his practical involvement in the Exhibition, he emerged as a significant commentator on the event, contributing to debates about the legacy of the Crystal Palace with a report entitled *Wissenschaft, Industrie und Kunst: Vorschläge zur Anregung nationalen Kunstgefühles bei dem Schlusse der Londoner Industrie-Ausstellung* (Science, Industry and Art: Proposals for the Development of a National Taste in Art at the Closing the London Industrial Exhibition). Central to his outlook was the concept of permanent museum collections as a means of educating consumers. Adjoining the idea of the collection with lectures, workshops and awards, Semper envisaged Paxton's temporary 'glass-covered vacuum' transformed into a permanent monument to artistic education in the capital.<sup>13</sup>

Despite calls for the Crystal Palace to remain in Hyde Park, Paxton's pre-fabricated glass-and-iron structure was dismantled soon after the exhibition ended, and resurrected in Sydenham as an enlarged complex for recreation, entertainment and concerts, opening in 1854. Semper designed the Woollen and Mixed Fabric Court for the Sydenham site and drew up plans for an unrealised Roman-style amphitheatre – originally intended to stand within the central transept as a complement to Matthew Digby Wyatt's Pompeii court.<sup>14</sup> In 1853 he was appointed Professor of Metal Manufactures at the School of Design, a position that cemented his professional allegiance with the influential designer and civil reformer Henry Cole. Cole had been instrumental in organising and promoting the Great Exhibition as

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Franz Liszt, 30 January 1852, *Sämtliche Briefe*, ed. Gertrud Strobel, Werner Wolf et al. (Wiesbaden, 1999–), vol. 4, 270 (hereafter *SB* followed by volume and page reference); *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, trans. Francis Hueffer (New York, 1889), vol. 1, 188–9 (translation modified).

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Theodor Uhlig, 20 September 1850, *SB*, vol. 3, 426; *Richard Wagner's Letters to his Dresden Friends*, trans. J.S. Shedlock (New York, 1890), 68.

<sup>12</sup> See Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1996), 165–228.

<sup>13</sup> Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann (Cambridge, 1989), 130–67, at 164. For further discussion of Semper's intellectual response to the Great Exhibition see Mari Hvattum, "'A Complete and Universal Collection': Gottfried Semper and the Great Exhibition', in *Tracing Modernity: Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City*, ed. Mari Hvattum and Christian Hermansen (London, 2004), 124–36.

<sup>14</sup> Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper*, 215; J.R. Piggott, *Palace of the People: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham 1854–1936* (London, 2004), 101.

part of a long-standing paternalistic effort on behalf of the Society of Arts to boost the quality of British manufacturing and reform public taste. In his role as public spokesperson for the Exhibition, he attributed the origins and success of the event to what he saw as Britain's unique cosmopolitan character, and its new commercial conditions of international free trade. In so doing, he helped to craft an image of the Exhibition as a triumphant display of British exceptionalism on the world stage, an image sustained through much of the official and popular commentary surrounding the event.<sup>15</sup>

The official promotion of the Great Exhibition as a historical watershed on the way to peaceful relations and productive competition has of course given way to divergent contemporary narratives of the event as a political display of British imperialism and globalisation; as a catalyst for Victorian commodity culture; and a glistening allegory for the experience of modernity at large.<sup>16</sup> Looking beyond the meanings of the Crystal Palace itself, meanwhile, the Exhibition and its contents were instrumental in the development of state-sponsored museums, galleries and expositions as open and public spaces of regulated spectatorship.<sup>17</sup> Despite the transient nature of the event, it led to a drive among government reformers to build civilising public arenas, collections and institutions within the South Kensington cultural quarter that later came to be known popularly as 'Albertopolis'. Shortly after the closing ceremony, Cole oversaw the building of a new museum of practical arts, which later became the South Kensington Museum.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, Prince Albert (in his capacity as president of the Royal Commission) proposed investing the approximately £186,000 profit from admission tickets in twenty-two acres on Kensington Gore for the purpose of developing his vision of a complex of cultural institutions dedicated to the public cultivation of the arts and sciences. His concept of such a complex later included a central hall suitable for musical performances and exhibitions, surrounded by shops and flats with museums and art galleries. Initially, Albert's favoured architect for implementing this grand scheme was Semper. In June 1855, the architect met Cole and the Prince Consort to present elaborate plans and a cardboard model for the proposed School of Design, the South Kensington Museum and a Hall of Arts and Sciences. However, the Board of Trade rejected Semper's designs as too extravagant, and the concept was set aside in favour of concentrating on the School of Design and the first wing of the South Kensington Museum, designed by the Royal engineer Francis Fowke and opened in 1857.<sup>19</sup>

Following the rejection of both his theatre for the Crystal Palace and his plans for the South Kensington complex, Semper departed London to accept a position as professor

<sup>15</sup> See Cole's preface to the *Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851*, vol. 1 (London, 1851), 1. For more on Cole's involvement in the Great Exhibition, see Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London, 1977), 96–137; Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven, 1999), 9–31; and Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order* (Basingstoke, 2009), 17–18.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Louise Purbrick, ed., *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester, 2001); Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford, 1990), 17–72; James Buzard, Joseph W. Childer and Eileen Gillooly, eds., *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace* (Charlottesville, 2007); Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830–1880* (Oxford, 2008), chapter 8; Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982), 235–48.

<sup>17</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London, 1995), 59–88.

<sup>18</sup> See Tim Barringer, 'The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project', in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (1998), 11–27; and Louise Purbrick, 'The South Kensington Museum: The Building of the House of Henry Cole', in *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America*, ed. Marcia R. Pointon (Manchester, 1994), 69–86.

<sup>19</sup> Ronald W. Clark's history of The Royal Albert Hall refers to Semper as the first designer; see *The Royal Albert Hall* (London, 1958), 5. See also Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper*, 226; Alan S. Cole and Henrietta Cole, *Fifty Years of Public Work of Sir Henry Cole, K.C.B., Accounted for in his Deeds, Speeches and Writings* (London, 1884), vol. I, 322.

at the new Polytechnic Institute in Zurich, from where he began working with Wagner on designs for his festival theatre.<sup>20</sup> If Wagner had initially conceived of a rudimentary festival site away from encroaching urbanisation, the patronage of Ludwig II in the 1860s resulted in a very different scheme to build a monumental public theatre dedicated to his operas in Munich.<sup>21</sup> Initially, Ludwig engaged Semper to design a vast permanent theatre in stone. At the same time, a compromise was reached with plans for an amphitheatre to be erected temporarily within the Munich Glass Palace (*Glaspalast*), an exhibition hall modelled on the Crystal Palace and opened for the First General German Industrial Exhibition in 1854.<sup>22</sup> But with spiralling costs and growing government controversy over the scale of Ludwig's investment, the Munich designs never materialised, and Wagner was forced to return to Switzerland. Despite Semper's extensive efforts to meet the conflicting demands of both composer and patron, his contribution went largely unacknowledged; the project was eventually taken up and reimagined by Otto Brückwald.<sup>23</sup> By finally settling in Bayreuth, Wagner sought to renew his protest against metropolitan concert life and opera houses as products of bourgeois leisure time, projecting an image of a neglected German town as a renewed site of national heritage and artistic devotion. But while he clung to a Romantic vision of his *Ring* cycle as recuperating a lost state of nature, the realisation of this experience was conditioned by modern infrastructures and technologies of staging, instrumentation, print media and tourism.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the premiere of the *Ring* in Bayreuth would attract substantial interest from English visitors, prompting press coverage and critical commentary from both sides of the channel about the inaugural festival as a site of cultural consumption for metropolitan tourists.

In London, meanwhile, the prospect of a monumental exhibition hall on the South Kensington estate eventually progressed first under the auspices of the second international exhibition of 1862 and then as a memorial to Prince Albert. Initially, Cole and Fowke imagined a vast, multi-purpose auditorium and exhibition space to accommodate 30,000 people, inspired by Cole's tours of Roman amphitheatres at Arles and Nîmes in Southern France. After the death of Albert at the end of 1861, plans resurfaced in the somewhat more economical form of a commemorative Hall of Arts and Science.<sup>25</sup> While the commissioners had put forward a grant of £50,000 towards the building, the absence of parliamentary funds led Cole to initiate a private investor scheme intended to canvass funding from wealthy

<sup>20</sup> Wagner had been influential in convincing Semper to leave London, and in securing his professional appointment in Zurich. The two had met again in London when Wagner was based in the city as guest conductor of the Philharmonic.

<sup>21</sup> As Andreas Huyssen has suggested, the history of Wagner's festival theatre was characterised by a persistent tension between the transitory and the monumental, a tension that points to the wider conflict in Wagner's art between avant-gardism and its incorporation into an emergent culture industry; 'Monumental Seduction', *New German Critique* 69 (1996), 181–200.

<sup>22</sup> Semper's unrealised design for a Pompeian structure contained within the Crystal Palace at Sydenham informed his scheme for the Wagner theatre in the *Glaspalast*. Whereas the provisional theatre in the *Glaspalast* was to provide an experimental space in which to test the acoustic and visual innovations proposed for the interior, Ludwig's preference for a permanent stone theatre on the banks of the River Isar would have entailed opulent arches, a grand terrace, extravagant entrance and foyer, reception areas, an additional civic hall, and studio space for Wagner's proposed German music school.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed architectural history of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, including the collaboration between Wagner and Semper, see Juliet Koss, 'Building Bayreuth', in her *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis, 2009), 25–66.

<sup>24</sup> The thwarted idealism of Wagner's festival concept has been exposed particularly against the background of his long-standing opposition to Parisian opera; see for example Nicholas Vazsonyi, 'Bayreuth: Capital and Anti-Capital', in *Other Capitals of the Nineteenth Century: An Alternative Mapping of Literary and Cultural Space*, ed. Richard Hibbitt (New York, 2017), 205–22; Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (Cambridge, 2010), 169–89.

<sup>25</sup> See Cole and Cole, *Fifty Years of Public Work*, 242–3.



patrons interested in furthering the arts and sciences, with the added incentive of making a substantial return on their investment. By 1865, having secured the backing of the Prince of Wales, the committee had sold 1,300 advance seats at £100 each to individual patrons for the duration of the 999-year lease. When Fowke died suddenly the same year, the commissioners discussed appointing an architect to take over the design of the building and Cole suggested inviting Semper, whose Dresden theatre had been a source of inspiration.<sup>26</sup> But once again the commissioners rejected the prospect of a foreign architect, preferring a team of Royal engineers led by Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Scott. On 20 May 1867, a crowd of 6,000 assembled for the laying of the foundation in the presence of Queen Victoria; she announced her wish that the hall should be renamed ‘The Royal Albert Hall of Arts and Sciences’.<sup>27</sup>

Although the Albert Hall originated in proceeds from the Great Exhibition, its elliptical shape and brick-and-terracotta heaviness were far removed from the ethereal fragility and transparent airiness invoked by the original Crystal Palace. And whereas the image of Paxton’s precarious yet imposing glass structure has been lauded as an exceptional anticipation of modernist industrial architecture, the Italianate façade of the Albert Hall is clearly more in keeping with the familiar historicism of Victorian public monuments. According to Marshall Bermann, who interprets the Crystal Palace as an exhilarating symbol of progressive modernity, ‘the bourgeoisie enjoyed the Exhibition, but rejected the building, and went back to building Arthurian railroad stations and Hellenistic banks; in fact, no more genuinely modern buildings would be built in England for another fifty years.’<sup>28</sup>

### ‘An engineer’s rather than an architect’s building’

Though the differences between the Albert Hall and the Crystal Palace were obvious on the surface, contemporary critics immediately drew parallels between the two buildings in terms of the multiple aims and uses of these glass-covered public arenas of rational recreation and improvement. Several newspapers expressed political concerns about the vested interests involved in erecting another monumental hall with a vague and miscellaneous purpose to rival the palace on Sydenham Hill. The *Pall Mall Gazette* took aim at the commissioner’s reinvestment of public money from the 1851 Exhibition in the acquisition of private land and property essentially of long-term gain to the aristocracy. That the construction of the Albert Hall had been enabled by a corporate investor scheme – one explicitly promoted by the commissioners on the promise of a handsome return – was a clear indication that the whole design was ‘a little more fit for the Stock Exchange than for the patronage of the heir apparent’.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, a letter to the *Daily News* voiced scepticism about the epithet ‘Hall of Sciences’, suggesting that the building would more likely amount to a hall of entertainment, ‘nothing more than a Chartered Crystal Palace’. The author of a similar letter to *The Times* (reprinted in the *Musical World*) made a further swipe at the aristocratic and corporate interests behind the projected Hall, claiming that ‘one of the 1,000l. purchasers of boxes assured me that he made the investment in the expectation that the Hall would become a fashionable West-end opera, and would ultimately turn out a good speculation’.<sup>30</sup>

The proposed Hall was further reminiscent of Paxton’s structure in as much as it was, in the words of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, an ‘engineer’s rather than an architect’s building’, reflecting

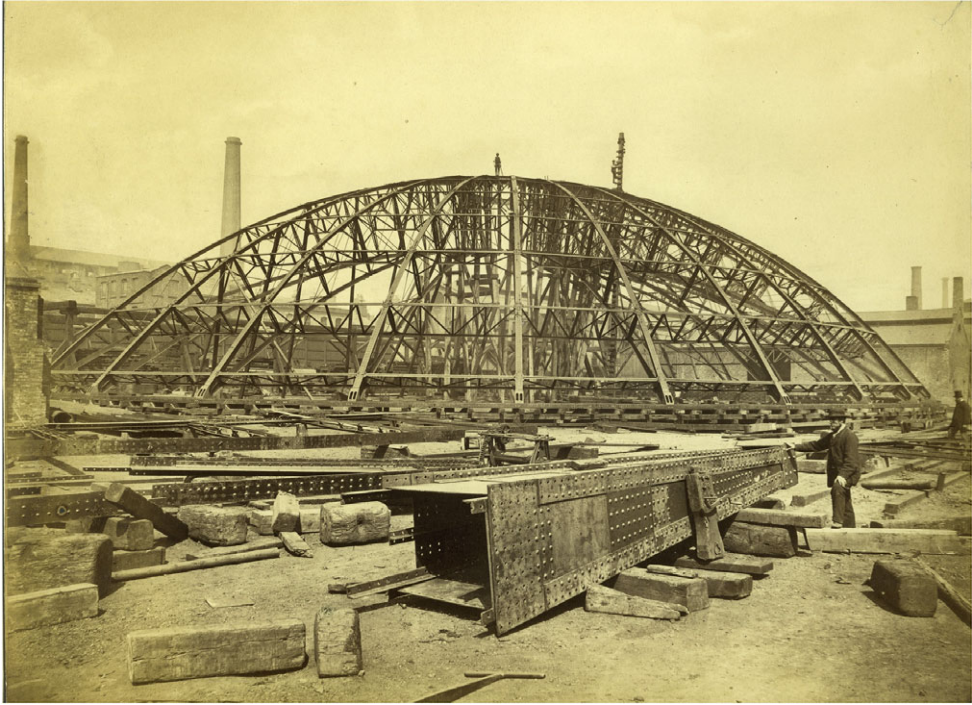
<sup>26</sup> ‘Royal Albert Hall’, in *Survey of London*, vol. 38, *South Kensington Museums Area*, ed. F. H. W. Sheppard (London, 1975), pp. 177–95. *British History Online* [www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol38/pp177-195](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol38/pp177-195) (accessed 9 June 2020).

<sup>27</sup> *Illustrated London News* (20 May 1867), 17.

<sup>28</sup> Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 238.

<sup>29</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 February 1866), 5. See also *Pall Mall Gazette* (24 May 1867).

<sup>30</sup> *The Musical World* (15 June 1867), 398.



**Figure 1.** Test construction of the Royal Albert Hall roof in Ardwick near Manchester, 1870. Courtesy of the Royal Albert Hall Archives.

the new means of construction of the industrial age.<sup>31</sup> The bold vaulted roof (the largest unsupported dome at the time of construction) consisted of two layers of glazing held together by wrought iron arched trusses and supported by girders, enabling both structural stability and a ventilation and heating system. Modelled on the immense single-supported glazed roofs of the recently completed Charing Cross and St Pancras railway terminals, the wrought iron structure of the dome was prefabricated and tested by the Fairbairn Engineering Company near Manchester before being dismantled and transported to London for its dramatic installation (Figure 1).<sup>32</sup> Seen in this context, the building not only mirrored the aesthetics of the Crystal Palace and other expansive glass-covered public enclosures in mid-Victorian London, but epitomised the acceleration of iron construction and the dominance of engineering over architecture that Walter Benjamin memorably associated with the capitalist modernity of the Paris Arcades. In short, the Albert Hall combined a recuperation of the imperial amphitheatre with the urban transience of the exhibition hall and railway station.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette* (5 July 1872), 10. Contemporary critics of the Albert Hall were sceptical of the commissioners' preference for engineers over professional architects in the design and construction of the building. *The Builder*, for instance, specifically lamented that the commissioners had not employed a professional architect to take over the design on the death of Fowke in 1867: 'What we desire and what we urge most earnestly is that a properly educated and professional architect be at once associated with Lt.-Col. Scott in the erection of the building.' *The Builder* (25 May 1867).

<sup>32</sup> 'Royal Albert Hall', in *Survey of London*, Volume 38, 177–95. *British History Online* [www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol38/pp177-195](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol38/pp177-195) (accessed 9 June 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin writes that 'the rail becomes the first prefabricated iron component, the precursor of the girder. Iron is avoided in home construction but used in arcades exhibition halls, train stations – buildings that serve





**Figure 2.** Imagined interior of the Royal Albert Hall prior to construction, *Illustrated London News*, 25 May 1867. Courtesy of the Mary Evans Picture Library.

The aspiration to connect an idealised classical past with urban cultural improvement in the present was captured in a full-page engraving of the projected interior of the Hall in the *Illustrated London News* on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone (Figure 2).<sup>34</sup> Viewed from the perspective of the orchestra looking out from the top of the choir stalls, the engraving gives a panoramic view of the interior as a whole, an exaggerated simulacrum of civilised order as perceived from the kind of detached perspective that Michel de Certeau would define as the ‘celestial eye’ of the space planner.<sup>35</sup> The image encompasses an airy interior illuminated by natural light from above, leading the eye upwards to the glazed roof as the centrepiece of an extravagant and ornate dome. Within this panoramic ideal the well-dressed figures below are not seated or standing still in attendance but are comfortably crossing through the space. In imagining the interior of the Hall prior to the completion of the building, the artist is preoccupied with the ordered movement of spectators as integral to the architecture. In a similar way, the accompanying report is less concerned with acoustic or scenic features than with a quantifiable capacity to traffic large moving crowds while adapting to a range of functions:

The centre of the building is occupied by a spacious arena, 102 ft. by 68 ft., capable of accommodating 1000 people ... The southern extremity of the hall is occupied by a spacious orchestra, with places for 1000 performers, the seats of which are so arranged that the lower rows for instrumentalists take up the same lines as the amphitheatre seats. Thus, when the hall is not in use for musical purposes, by removing the inclosing

transitory purposes’; Walter Benjamin, ‘Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century’, trans. Howard Eiland, in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Illustrated London News* (25 May 1867).

<sup>35</sup> Michel de Certeau, ‘Practices of Space’, in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore, 1985), 122–45, at 124.

rails of the orchestra a perfect amphitheatrical form is obtained ... Each box will have a retiring-room at the back, which will communicate with a corridor running round the building at the level of each tier ... The whole of these passages and approaches combine every facility for the ready ingress and egress of crowds of visitors to all parts of the building.<sup>36</sup>

Here the ideal of the classical amphitheatre – with its elliptical shape and open-air atmosphere – merges with the rhetoric of circulation and hygiene central to urban improvement.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, if the *Illustrated London News* was especially taken with the efficiency of the building's symmetrical lines, curved corridors, passageways and multiple staircases, its emphasis on the 'ingress and egress of crowds' found a parallel in accounts of the building's innovative ventilation and heating system. In the architectural journal *The Builder*, the engineer Gilbert Redgrave described an intricate network of steam-powered boilers, coiled pipes, fans, inlets and exits, all carefully designed to regulate the circulation of fresh air and facilitate a sanitised environment.<sup>38</sup>

The opening ceremony on 29 March 1871 was an occasion of state pageantry intended to evoke memories of the Great Exhibition twenty years earlier, while replicating the scale of massed orchestral concerts and choral festivals that had since come to define the musical afterlife of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. Following a formal address by the Prince of Wales and prayers led by the Bishop of London, Michael Costa conducted an orchestra of 500 instrumentalists and 1,200 singers from the Sacred Harmonic Society, the Handel Festival and Crystal Palace chorus (Figure 3). Yet the speeches and singing were notoriously marred by echo. If Henry Cole and his committee had intended to construct a perfectly controlled civic space for seeing on a grand scale, responses in the London press were dominated by debates over the building's problematic acoustics. While some reports were more favourable than others, there was general agreement that the Hall would be suitable primarily for large-scale orchestral and choral forces, and that its future musical success would depend at the very least on judicious programming.<sup>39</sup>

Even before the official opening, concerns had emerged about problems of projection in such an enormous auditorium; the acclaimed actor and theatre manager Dion Boucicault, for instance, argued in a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* that the vast proportions of the Hall would not accommodate the human voice and would be unfit even for a large chorus.<sup>40</sup> As the building neared completion, Queen Victoria visited in December 1870 and listened to sound tests from various points in the Hall with the wooden scaffolding still in place.<sup>41</sup> By the time

<sup>36</sup> *Illustrated London News* (25 May 1867), 17.

<sup>37</sup> On tropes of movement and circulation in the planning and reform of mid-Victorian London see Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, 2000), 13–62.

<sup>38</sup> Gilbert R. Redgrave, 'The Ventilation and Warming of the Royal Albert Hall', *The Builder* (4 February 1871). When it came to the opening ceremony, the commercial perfumer Eugène Rimmel even provided fragrance to be diffused throughout the acclaimed ventilation system, seizing an opportunity for direct advertising among a crowd of 8,000 spectators.

<sup>39</sup> *The Times* (30 March 1871), 9, gave a balanced view of the occasion while reporting on the unfortunate resonance; *Daily News* (30 March 1871) offered a more positive appraisal; *The Engineer* (31 March 1871) declared the acoustic properties overall a success, before going on to acknowledge that some of the solo voices were inaudible and that 'there is too a prevailing tendency to harshness and resonance in the building'.

<sup>40</sup> Dion Boucicault, 'The Royal Albert Hall', *Pall Mall Gazette* (3 July 1867), 3; reprinted in *The Times* (4 July 1867), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Victoria remarked in her diary that 'a lady sang and a violinist played to test the effect of sound, which was extremely good. We walked a little way round the galleries and upstairs'; RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ (W) 3 December 1870 (Princess Beatrice's Copies) (retrieved 9 June 2020). The musicians included a violinist son of one of the workmen, and the soprano Anna Williams; see Clark, *The Royal Albert Hall*, 50.



Figure 3. Opening of the Royal Albert Hall on 29 March 1871, *Illustrated Times*, 8 April 1871. The image shows the glazed roof, which was in reality shielded by the calico velarium designed to prevent glare and dampen resonance. Newspaper image © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive ([www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)).

of opening, the scaffolding was removed and interior furnishings were installed, including a large calico velarium designed to prevent glare from the glass roof and reduce excessive resonance. Yet adjustments to the interior did not prevent damning criticism of the design from within the architectural community: *Building News* concluded that ‘in acoustic qualities the hall is undoubtedly deficient’ and that ‘compositions which depend for their effect on elaborate detail had better be left unattempted’.<sup>42</sup> Even the building’s chief engineer, Henry Scott, was prompted to justify his errors in a letter to *The Times*, remarking that ‘the principles of acoustics, like the principles of strategy and tactics, are in themselves not difficult to understand, but their application in practice is quite another affair’.<sup>43</sup>

### Acoustic failure and the concert hall of the future

There is clearly an irony embedded here: the acoustic deficiencies of a building explicitly intended to symbolise progress in science and technology emerged at a time when modes of knowing and quantifying sound, as well as attitudes to musical listening, were becoming increasingly important to the Victorians. While the origins of acoustics as a field of specialist mathematical enquiry can be traced to the publication of Lord Rayleigh’s magisterial academic treatise *The Theory of Sound* (1877), a longer tradition of popular science writing on experimental acoustics in Britain dates back to publications such as John Herschel’s article on ‘Sound’ for the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* (1830) and Mary Somerville’s *On the*

<sup>42</sup> *The Building News* (31 March 1871).

<sup>43</sup> Henry Y.D. Scott and John Tyndall, ‘The Acoustics of the Royal Albert Hall’, *The Times* (1 April 1871), 11.



*Connexion of the Physical Sciences* (1834).<sup>44</sup> In 1867, the same year as the release of the architectural plans for the Albert Hall, John Tyndall delivered his series of lectures on sound at the Royal Institution in Mayfair, gaining recognition as an authority in experimental acoustics grounded in Helmholtz's physiological approach to hearing.<sup>45</sup>

If the drive to visualise and decipher the properties of sound acquired a tangible presence within London's scientific culture, efforts to control sound as an audible experience within particular spaces and environments proved altogether more elusive.<sup>46</sup> The well-documented sensory overload experienced by visitors to the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851 is a case in point. Here musical performers competed with the din of mechanisation and crowds, while sounds made by the mass orchestral forces on show for the opening ceremony disappeared into the vast crystalline transept.<sup>47</sup> Even after relocation to Sydenham and the establishment of more formal music making at the Crystal Palace, the problem of acoustics persisted. The famous mass Handel Festivals, often seen as quintessential symbols of Victorian nationalism and middle-class cultivation, were also a testing ground for pragmatic experiments in sound projection, raising concerns about the need for a more systematic convergence of science and performance.<sup>48</sup> In a piece aptly headed 'The Power of Sound', published soon after the Handel Commemoration Festival of 1859, an anonymous writer to the *Musical Times* lamented the inconsistent acoustic effects of such a large orchestra. That the combined forces of 2,765 voices and 456 instruments should have failed to match up to the grandeur of the Crystal Palace in volume and precision was not just a matter for musical judgment, but an impetus for scientific progress: 'there have been very few buildings ever constructed that appear to fulfil all the requisites for the proper conveyance of sound, and it would be very desirable if the knowledge of acoustics were better understood'.<sup>49</sup>

While Victorian commentators acknowledged the limitations of architectural acoustics as an emerging field, they also attempted to address the relationship between listening and building design based on empirical observation and experiment. As the historian of science Graeme Gooday has argued, nineteenth-century approaches to architectural acoustics emphasised the value of instinctive or experiential approaches, even while they lacked the exacting science of successive generations.<sup>50</sup> In 1839 the engineer John Scott Russell had proposed a theory of 'isoacoustics', a democratic principle of angles for seating design

<sup>44</sup> Somerville's text – which included a central section devoted to developments in sound science – helped to disseminate the experiments of Ernst Chladni, Félix Savart and Charles Wheatstone on resonance, while establishing a market for public interest in acoustics and hearing, one that became more pronounced in the 1860s and 1870s with the publication of Hermann von Helmholtz's *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen* (On the Sensations of Tone, 1863, trans. 1875).

<sup>45</sup> John Tyndall, *Sound: A Course of Eight Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (London, 1867). See also Benjamin Steege, *Helmholtz and the Modern Listener* (Cambridge, 2012), 16–42.

<sup>46</sup> See Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 2004). Thompson has argued that the nineteenth century witnessed a divergence between architecture and acoustics; if the scientific study of sound revolved around quests to inscribe speech, to visualise vibrations and frequencies, and to interpret the mechanisms of hearing, the practical application of acoustics to architectural design remained underdeveloped until the turn of the twentieth century in America.

<sup>47</sup> Flora Willson, 'Hearing Things: Musical Objects at the 1851 Great Exhibition', in *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789–1851*, ed. James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart (Chicago, 2017), 227–45.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge, 1995), 27–57; and Michael Forsyth, *Buildings for Music: The Architect, the Musician and the Listener from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), 149–55.

<sup>49</sup> *Musical Times* (1 August 1859), 99; cited in Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace*, 40–1.

<sup>50</sup> Graeme Gooday, 'Architectural Acoustics: Thomas Roger Smith and the Science of Hearing Buildings in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in *Experiencing Architecture in the Nineteenth Century: Buildings and Society in the Modern Age*, ed. Edward Gillin and H. Horatio Joyce (London, 2018), 101–14.

allowing unobstructed hearing for all listeners in a large building.<sup>51</sup> The architect Thomas Roger Smith later incorporated the principle into his *Rudimentary Treatise on the Acoustics of Public Buildings* (1861), a text that Gooday interprets as both a significant precursor to twentieth-century pioneers such as Wallace Sabine, and as an alternative approach to acoustics based on personal experience rather than abstract formulas.<sup>52</sup> Smith grounded his recommendations in an aspiration to curb all obstructions to sound, using the language of efficiency in a manner in keeping with Redgrave's account of circulating air in the Albert Hall. 'An obstruction to the free passage of sound', he declared, 'is presented by every adverse current of air and every variation in the quality of the atmosphere or its temperature, by every sudden contraction of the space through which sound has to travel, and by some, if not all sudden enlargements of space.'<sup>53</sup> Defending the acoustic design of the Hall to the Royal Institute of British Architects in January 1872, Scott acknowledged Smith as an important interlocutor, particularly in the decision to fit resonant wooden soundboards modelled on the success of the Surrey Music Hall and the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. After treating the calico velarium to prevent sound escaping into the domed roof, however, both admitted that echoes were still detectable in some parts of the building, while Smith later concluded that the acoustic defects were an inevitable outcome of the cove between the domed roof and the elliptical walls.<sup>54</sup>

In the aftermath of the Albert Hall's completion, one contributor to the RIBA went beyond the analysis of defects in the building's acoustics to offer some broader insights into the relationship between instrumental music and architecture in modern times. Henry Heathcote Statham responded to the acoustics of the Hall by pointing to a disparity between aesthetic form and practical purpose in buildings for music, stressing a conflict between the architectural vogue for classical revivalism and a sense of the new in contemporary musical life:

A building for musical performances on a large scale is one of those things for which there really is no precedent previous to our own architectural dispensation. Music is pre-eminently the modern art, the only form of high art which has, practically, had its rise during the era of modern life, and the grandest results of which have been realized almost within our generation, in those choral and orchestral performances on a large scale, which are becoming year by year more frequent and more frequented among us.<sup>55</sup>

Statham went on to distinguish between the ear of the acoustician and the ear of the musician, with only the latter capable of discerning expressive intricacies of harmony and phrasing in the moment.<sup>56</sup> As he saw it, the building's compromised acoustics were 'the inevitable result of applying to a building for music an arrangement originally intended for a spectacle'.<sup>57</sup> Particularly striking is that Statham proceeded to offer recommendations for an imagined concert hall of the future, one that would meet the demands of instrumental

<sup>51</sup> John Scott Russell, 'Elementary considerations of some principles in the construction of buildings designed to accommodate spectators and auditors', *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* 27 (April–October 1839), 131–6.

<sup>52</sup> Gooday, 'Architectural Acoustics', 101–14.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Roger Smith, *A Rudimentary Treatise on the Acoustics of Public Buildings, or the Principles of the Science of Sound applied to the Architect and Builder* (London, 1861). Smith republished the treatise in 1872 and 1895.

<sup>54</sup> Gooday, 'Architectural Acoustics', 105–6.

<sup>55</sup> Henry Heathcote Statham, 'Architecture Practically Considered in Reference to Music', *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (20 January 1873), 81–99, at 81. See also 'The Royal Albert Hall and Buildings for Music', *The Builder* (10 June 1871), 440–1; and 'Buildings for Music', *The Builder* (15 July 1871), 543.

<sup>56</sup> 'The Royal Albert Hall and Buildings for Music', 543. John Tyndall, by contrast, applauded the Albert Hall acoustics in a letter of congratulations to Scott, who proudly sent it to *The Times* for publication; *The Times* (1 April 1871), 12.

<sup>57</sup> Statham, 'Architecture Practically Considered', 85.



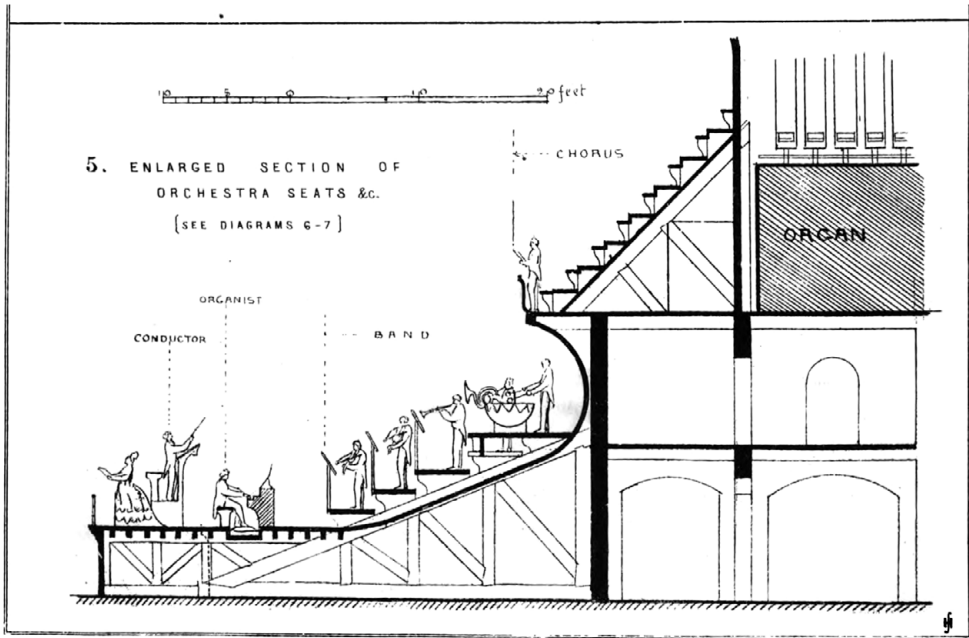


Figure 4. Henry Heathcote Statham, part of a sketch of a semi-enclosed orchestra platform for an imagined concert hall, in 'Architecture Practically Considered in Reference to Music', *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (20 January 1873), 81–99 (85). Courtesy of the RIBA Library.

performance and attentive listening in the modern age (Figure 4). This ideal concert hall would be rectangular with a flat roof; it would allow a consistent listening experience for each audience member; it would follow tried and tested guidance on proper materials for resonance, avoiding glass, iron, canvas and cloth in favour of timber and brick; and it would provide a spacious, semi-enclosed platform for the orchestra beneath the choir and organ. In visualising an improved placement of musicians, Statham suggested enclosing the orchestra within 'a kind of wooden shell or sound-board bending round them in the rear, and coming under their feet to the front'. The integrated soundboard would extend as a covering over the louder brass and percussion sections at the back, allowing the sound to be reflected efficiently and cleanly into the room while veiling excess noise for the singers and providing a 'consentaneous union of instruments'.<sup>58</sup>

Statham's close attention to the placement of musicians for the purposes of acoustic control suggests on the surface a striking resemblance to Wagner's proposals for controlling the projection and balance of instruments through encasing the orchestra within a wooden sounding board. Just as Wagner had envisaged a theatre made from locally sourced materials in opposition to industrial mass production, so Statham campaigned against the dominance of iron construction in favour of a musical building that would 'combine utility and character' through the use of resonant oak. Taking as his model the provisional structure erected for the first commemorative Beethoven festival at Bonn in 1845, Statham in 1873 imagined an organic building specifically for hearing instrumental music, a model auditorium that would be stripped of unnecessary ornament to expose its entire construction – including supports and framing – as integral to acoustic effect.<sup>59</sup> While this insistence on the regulation of

<sup>58</sup> Statham, 'Architecture Practically Considered', 87–8.

<sup>59</sup> Statham, 'Architecture Practically Considered', 96.

orchestral sound certainly points to Wagnerian concerns about acoustic control; however, Statham would also make clear his discrepancies with Wagner from both an architectural and a musical perspective.

In his capacity as a music critic, Statham penned a lengthy critique of Wagner's stance on opera reform. Published in January 1876, in anticipation of the upcoming Bayreuth festival, Statham's essay on 'Wagner and the modern theory of music' reflects his engagement with the scores of *Tristan* and the *Ring*, as well as his critical reading of Wagner's aesthetics.<sup>60</sup> His objections to Wagner stem in large part from his implicit preference for the value of instrumental music over opera, which Statham associated with elite entertainment and privilege. Approaching Wagner through the common binary between 'art' music and theatrical 'entertainment', he turns the composer's own critique of opera against him, criticising his reiteration of orchestral 'tricks' in *Das Rheingold* and his use of instrumental music to illustrate 'glorified pantomimes'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Statham opposed Wagnerian music drama in much the same terms as he objected to the acoustics of the Albert Hall. He argued that Wagner taints instrumental music through a union with spectacle, suggesting that the composer's aesthetics of music drama amount to a 'preference for impulse and sentiment before form, colour before outline'.<sup>62</sup> Above all, he objected to Wagner's appropriation of Beethoven, and alluded to a 'clique of critics' intent on promoting the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as the logical endpoint in the modern history of symphonic music.<sup>63</sup>

### Disseminating music drama: from theatre to concert hall

In this last broadside, Statham was responding to prominent Anglo-German supporters of Wagner in the English periodical press, who sought to reconcile the promotion of his operas with the moral and aesthetic value attached to instrumental music. Shortly following the publication of Wagner's *Beethoven* (1870), the musical critic Francis Hueffer had penned an extended defence of the composer's Schopenhauerian aesthetics of music drama for *The Fortnightly Review*.<sup>64</sup> Whereas Hueffer interpreted Wagner primarily through his allegiance to Schopenhauer, Edward Dannreuther offered more in-depth readings of Wagner's music philosophy, readings that were inspired in part by Friedrich Nietzsche's recent eulogising of music drama as a revival of the Dionysian musical spirit of tragedy.<sup>65</sup> In a series of articles for the specialist journal *The Monthly Musical Record*, Dannreuther followed late Wagner and early Nietzsche in emphasising the redemptive power of German music after Beethoven to bypass the rational intellect and speak directly to the emotions, thereby transforming the conditions of art in contemporary life.<sup>66</sup> Employing a dual concept of music as both sounding reality and as a metaphorical undercurrent to poetry and myth, he regarded all aspects of

<sup>60</sup> Henry Heathcote Statham, 'Wagner and the Modern Theory of Music', *Edinburgh Review* (1 January 1876), 141–76.

<sup>61</sup> Statham, 'Wagner and the Modern Theory of Music', 171.

<sup>62</sup> Statham, 'Wagner and the Modern Theory of Music', 175.

<sup>63</sup> Statham, 'Wagner and the Modern Theory of Music', 167–75. In a much later treatise, *Modern Architecture* (1897), Statham would comment directly on Wagner's theatre. He acknowledged Wagner's successful approach to the stage, seating arrangement and décor, while describing the sunken orchestra as an unnecessary contrivance. Henry Heathcote Statham, *Modern Architecture: A Book for Architects and the Public* (London, 1897).

<sup>64</sup> Francis Hueffer, 'Richard Wagner', *Fortnightly Review* (March 1872), 265–87.

<sup>65</sup> In a letter to Edward Dannreuther, dated 4 March 1872, Wagner recommended Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music), which had been published earlier that year; *SB*, vol. 24, 100–1.

<sup>66</sup> Edward Dannreuther, 'Richard Wagner: his Tendencies and Theories', *The Monthly Musical Record* (April 1872), 49–52; (May 1872), 66–9; (June 1872), 81–3; (July 1872), 93–6. Dannreuther subsequently published his articles in book form as *Richard Wagner: His Tendencies and Theories* (London, 1873). In his essay for the June instalment of the *MMR*, Dannreuther referred directly to Nietzsche's theory of the musical origins of poetry, particularly his analogy

Wagner's approach to drama as 'imbued with the spirit of music'.<sup>67</sup> When Dannreuther was later invited to publish further articles for *Macmillan's Magazine* (edited at that time by George Grove), he lauded Wagner's music for its affective immediacy, its ability to express and evoke emotion 'with a minimum of logical mediation'.<sup>68</sup> Extending the composer's own aspirations for instinctive musical communication, and anticipating an argument that would later become central to Bernard Shaw's promotion of the *Ring*, Dannreuther implied that the intricate and detailed web of musical themes running across the entire drama would speak as much to the 'layman' as to the musical 'connoisseur'.<sup>69</sup>

Dannreuther's writings – with their insistence on the expressive immediacy of Wagner's melodies – coincided (ironically) with the emergence of explanatory programmes designed to mediate performances of instrumental music for listeners in both Britain and Germany. As Christian Thorau and Christina Bashford have shown, the advent of the annotated programme or listening guide was initially a distinguishing feature of concert life in Britain, beginning with John Ella's chamber music series and Grove's Saturday concerts at the Crystal Palace.<sup>70</sup> The tradition of the synoptic programme book was later continued and expanded with the publication of Hans von Wolzogen's *Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Musik zu Richard Wagners Festspiel 'Der Ring des Nibelungen'* (Thematic guide through the music of Richard Wagner's festival drama *The Ring of the Nibelungen*), a systematic commentary on the work published in advance of the Bayreuth festival and available for purchase during the event. Intended as a supplement for Wagnerian listeners, the leitmotivic guide functioned – in Thorau's terms – as a touristic 'marker' for the performance of the *Ring* cycle: it served to guide listeners through an unfamiliar and challenging sound world and helped to assimilate the work into a bourgeois canon of classical works.<sup>71</sup>

It is no coincidence, then, that Dannreuther sought to emphasise the democratic appeal of Wagner's melodies for the 'layman' within the context of Grove's *Macmillan's Magazine*, which aimed at educating a broad readership and concert-going public beyond professional musicians. While Hueffer's and Dannreuther's extensive dissemination of German musical metaphysics was unusual for English periodical criticism at this time, they voiced underlying philosophies that clearly spoke to a growing fascination with musical meaning and appreciation. As Ruth Solie has shown through her analysis of music's wider recurrence in *Macmillan's* during the Grove years, Dannreuther's Wagnerian panegyric was consistent with a tendency for authors to treat Austro-German instrumental music as the cultivated art of a

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between the Dionysian dithyramb and Beethoven's symphonies as precursory to a new musical-dramatic artform; *The Monthly Musical Record* (June 1872), 83.

<sup>67</sup> Dannreuther, *The Monthly Musical Record* (July 1872), 94–6.

<sup>68</sup> Edward Dannreuther, 'The Musical Drama', *Macmillan's Magazine* (November 1875), 81

<sup>69</sup> Dannreuther, 'The Musical Drama', 84.

<sup>70</sup> On the development of the analytical programme guide as a particular feature of British concert life from the 1840s to the 1890s, see Christina Bashford, 'Not just a "G": Towards a History of the Programme Note', in *George Grove, Music and Victorian Culture*, ed. Michael Musgrove (Basingstoke, 2003), 115–42, 301–18; Christina Bashford, 'Concert listening the British Way? Program Notes and Victorian Culture', in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Christian Thorau and Hansjakob Ziemer (Oxford, 2019), 187–206. See also Christian Thorau, 'Werk, Wissen und touristisches Hören: popularisierende Kanonbildung in Programmheften und Konzertführern', in *Der Kanon der Musik: Theorie und Geschichte; ein Handbuch*, ed. Klaus Pietschmann and Melanie Fuhrmann (Munich, 2013), 535–61; Christian Thorau, "'What Ought to be Heard": Touristic Listening and the Guided Ear', in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Listening in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Christian Thorau and Hansjakob Ziemer (Oxford, 2019), 207–27.

<sup>71</sup> Christian Thorau, 'Guides for Wagnerites: Leitmotifs and Wagnerian Listening', in *Richard Wagner and his World*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton, 2009), 133–50. For further discussion of the reception of Wagner via explanatory leitmotiv guides, see Christian Thorau, *Semantisierte Sinnlichkeit: Studien zu Rezeption und Zeichenstruktur der Leitmotivtechnik Richard Wagners* (Stuttgart, 2003).

progressive modern age.<sup>72</sup> But if these musical writers advanced philosophical discourses about the power of instrumental music within the colloquial format of the periodical press, their aesthetic values were also entangled with the built environment, and with practical considerations about music's sounding presence.

The intersection of music criticism and concert reform was clearly exemplified in the anti-Wagnerism of the musician–architect Statham, whose thoughts on the virtues of reverent listening to the inner unfolding of musical form coincided with his campaign for a self-conscious 'modern architecture' based on functional principles grounded in acoustic science. Even for Hueffer and Dannreuther, though, the production of philosophical and ideological tracts about the transformative musical spirit of Wagnerian opera coincided with practical initiatives in arts fundraising, concert programming and conducting. Indeed, the concert dissemination of Wagner's music dramas in London owed much to the activities of these émigré musicians and intellectuals, who went on to establish the first London Wagner Society.<sup>73</sup> Between February 1873 and May 1874, Dannreuther directed nine fundraising concerts at the Hanover Square Rooms and St James's Hall with programmes consisting of music by Wagner, Liszt and Berlioz. To a certain extent, these programmes continued an established practice of performing orchestral excerpts from Wagner's 'Romantic' operas, a practice associated particularly with August Manns' popular Saturday Concerts at the Crystal Palace. But the idea of dedicating entire concerts to the music of living composers was nonetheless a novelty within London concert life, reflecting the wider specialisation of classical music programmes and the 'new seriousness' that accompanied the gradual move away from miscellaneous concert programming.<sup>74</sup> By presenting Wagnerian excerpts self-consciously as 'new music' in a symphonic tradition, Dannreuther's concerts were explicitly designed to distance Wagner from Italian opera and erase any negative associations with an older tradition of programming operatic excerpts. In this respect, he took inspiration from a practice initiated by Wagner himself, who (with the assistance of a team of copyists) first began arranging orchestral excerpts from the *Ring* for a series of seminal concerts in Vienna in 1862–3.<sup>75</sup>

The Albert Hall concerts of 1877 thus built on an established tradition of promotional Wagner concerts, which were becoming a fixture of urban performance culture by the 1870s. Capitalising on the high-profile media attention that surrounded the Bayreuth Festival the previous year, the concerts were marketed as an alternative Wagner Festival with programmes dedicated exclusively to the performance of scenes and excerpts from *Rienzi* to *Götterdämmerung*. If pre-Bayreuth concert performances of the *Ring* provided a 'preview of coming attractions', the Albert Hall series commemorated the premiere by attempting a fuller musical reproduction.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the London Wagner Festival marked a new departure

<sup>72</sup> Ruth A. Solie, 'Music in a Victorian Mirror: *Macmillan's Magazine* in the Grove Years', in her *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley, 2004), 44–84.

<sup>73</sup> The London Wagner Society was established in 1872 as a fundraising initiative modelled on the Bayreuth *Patronatscheine* (Patron Certificates) scheme that began in Mannheim in 1871. See David Cormack, 'Of Earls and Egypt: Founders of the First London Wagner Societies', *The Musical Times* 150/1907 (2009), 27–42.

<sup>74</sup> William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge, 2008), 235–72.

<sup>75</sup> Wagner went on to undertake further concert tours in the run up to the premiere of the complete *Ring* cycle, culminating in an orchestral preview of *Götterdämmerung* in Vienna in March 1875. See *Wagner Werk-Verzeichnis: Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Richard Wagners und ihrer Quellen*, ed. John Deathridge, Martin Geck and Egon Voss (Mainz, 1986), 412–17. See also 'Wagner Introduces Wagner (and Beethoven): Program Notes Written for Concert Performances by and of Richard Wagner, 1846–1880', translated, annotated and introduced by Thomas S. Grey, in *Richard Wagner and his World*, ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton, 2009), 479–567, especially 516–20.

<sup>76</sup> On the analogy between Wagner's conducting of orchestral concerts and the Hollywood film preview, see Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner*, 189–93.

in so far as it advertised the programming of lengthy scenes and complete acts as a novel feature of the series. Each concert was to comprise a first half showcasing segments from Wagner's operas and occasional pieces up to *Die Meistersinger*, followed by a second half featuring large chunks from the *Ring* cycle.<sup>77</sup> Wagner directed the first half of each programme, while Hans Richter stepped in to conduct the performances of the *Ring*, leaving the composer to listen conspicuously from the front of the orchestra.

The aesthetic implications of Wagner's programming decisions were by no means lost on his supporters, who extolled in advance the opportunity for thousands of concert-goers to experience large parts of *Tristan* and the *Ring* for the first time. Writing in *The Academy* prior to Wagner's arrival, the critic Ebenezer Prout emphasised the uniqueness of the six anticipated programmes, which he described as 'one long crescendo', giving 'a complete epitome of Wagner's works'.<sup>78</sup> The impression of an integrated oeuvre and unified compositional method was further emphasised within the lavish bound programme book that accompanied the series (Figure 5a). Owing to the absence of visual scenery and the omission of sections of the drama, the physical programme took on added significance as a tool for the uninitiated listener. In this respect, it contributed in a distinctive way to the aforementioned 'leitmotivic reception' of Wagner's works that did much to domesticate his operas as products for bourgeois listeners.<sup>79</sup> As an early imitation of Wolzogen's *Thematic Guide*, the London programme gave an abridged catalogue of selected 'leading themes', interspersed with plot synopses and relevant extracts from the libretti. In addition, it displayed principal motifs from the *Ring* alongside musical examples from Wagner's earlier operas (Figure 5b). By presenting musical motifs in this way, the programme was designed to orient the listener within the sonic architecture of Wagner's operas, providing an aide for appreciating his musical dramas at the level of discrete melodic units. It also provided concert-goers with a luxury souvenir, one that complemented other official merchandise advertised by Schott, including Karl Klindworth's piano-vocal scores of the *Ring* cycle. Blending the format of the taxonomic listening guide with that of the exhibition catalogue, the hefty programme book even participated more widely in the burgeoning culture of Victorian advertising by including a supplementary 'Wagner Festival Advertiser', illustrating the latest desirable commodities and branded goods.<sup>80</sup>

For all its ambitious programming, the reality of the London Wagner Festival ultimately fell short of expectation, not least because of the unsustainable demands placed upon the principal singers. By the fourth concert, Unger and Hill suffered severe hoarseness, prompting a succession of last-minute changes to the final three concerts, including the omission of much of the planned second act of *Tristan* and all of the proposed scenes from *Siegfried*. Meanwhile, reports of the acoustic idiosyncrasies of the capacious arena inevitably resurfaced as the singers sought to project against the massed orchestral forces. Prout expressed anxieties about the inconsistencies of the Hall's acoustics for comprehending the more delicate orchestral effects,<sup>81</sup> while a critic for *The Musical Standard* confirmed that, from their position near the orchestra, the first performance was 'very much interfered with by echo, which, although not directly audible, made itself felt by confusing everything and rendering

<sup>77</sup> Wagner's working out of the London programmes is evidenced in drafts and notes, once in the possession of Hueffer and now held in the Nationalarchiv der Richard-Wagner-Stiftung, Bayreuth: Richard Wagner, 'Entwürfe und Notizen zu den Programmen der (ersten) sechs Konzerte in London von Richard Wagner' (19 May 1877), NA B II e II Nr. 11, <https://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0305-117335/CC-BY-NC-ND-License> (4.0).

<sup>78</sup> Ebenezer Prout, 'The Programmes of the Wagner Concerts', *The Academy* (21 April 1877), 354–5.

<sup>79</sup> As Thorau has shown, the success of Wolzogen's guide to the *Ring* at Bayreuth subsequently led to a thriving market for explanatory guidebooks, resulting in a 'leitmotivic reception' of the work that underwrote the spread of Wagnerism in the aftermath of the first festival; see Thorau, 'Guides for Wagnerites'.

<sup>80</sup> On Victorian advertising practices in the aftermath of the Great Exhibition, see Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 17–72.

<sup>81</sup> Ebenezer Prout, 'The Wagner Festival at the Albert Hall', *The Academy* (12 May 1877), 425–6.



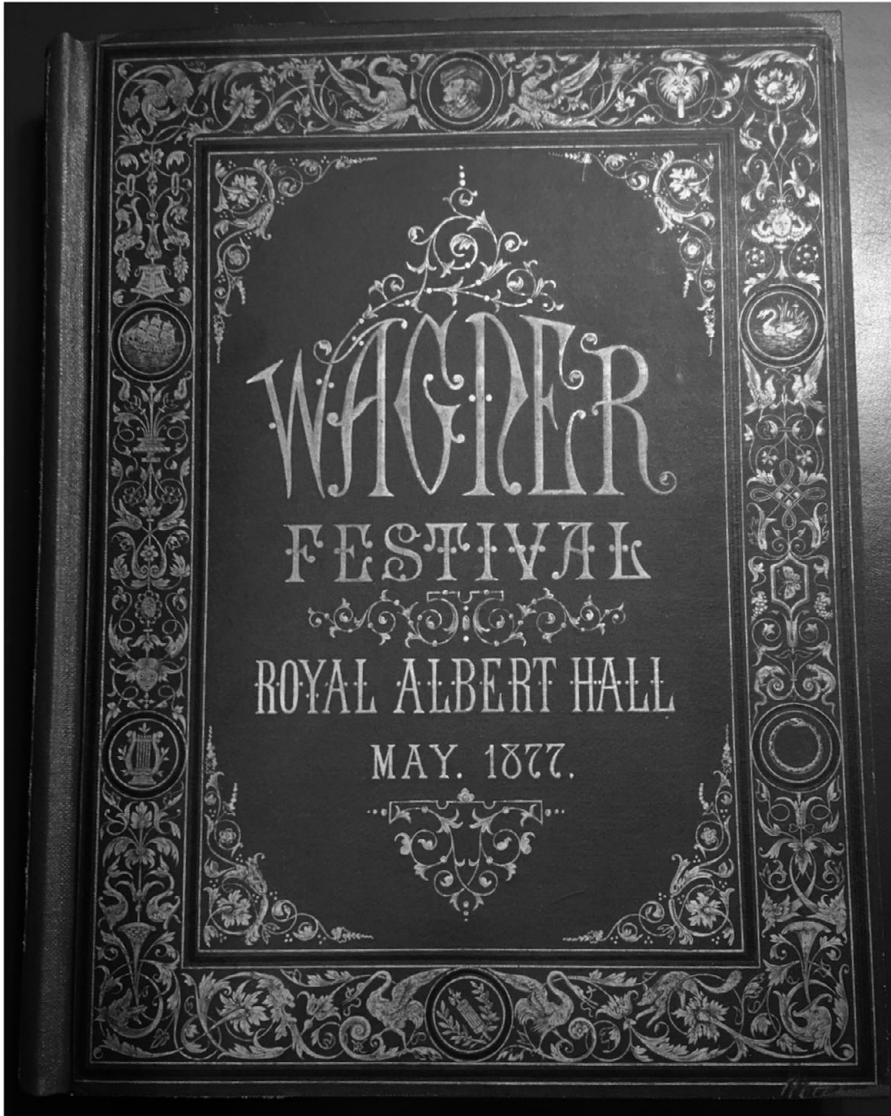


Figure 5a. Programme for the London Wagner Festival, Royal Albert Hall, 1877. RAHE/1/1877/2. Courtesy of the Royal Albert Hall Archive.

many passages mere noise'.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Cosima Wagner reported that even from her seat in the grand tier – where she was joined by George Eliot and George Henry Lewes – she was 'horrified by the sound', experiencing a 'double echo' that drowned out the singers.<sup>83</sup>

In the end, the Albert Hall series did much to disseminate repeatable highlights from the *Ring*, with the 'Ride of the Valkyries' proving a predictable hit.<sup>84</sup> Even Wagner's sympathisers

<sup>82</sup> 'The Wagner Festival', *The Musical Standard* (19 May 1877), 304.

<sup>83</sup> *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, vol. 1 (1869–1877), ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (London, 1978), 7 May 1877, 962.

<sup>84</sup> Wagner capitalised on its popularity that year by publishing the excerpt as an authorised orchestral piece with Schott, thereby facilitating its future reproducibility well beyond the Victorian concert hall.

PART II.  
DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN.<sup>1</sup>  
❖❖❖  
DAS RHEINGOLD.  
(THE RHINEGOLD.)

**T**HE orchestral prelude is based upon a single figure (the "Rhine motive), which in its several aspects may be taken to represent the stillness which reigns in the depths of the river, the rippling and the murmuring of the waves.

RHINE MOTIVE. *pp*

<sup>1</sup> Owing to the largeness of the subject and the complication of the plot of "Der Ring des Nibelungen," it has been found impossible to present them within the limits of an ordinary argument, and those desirous of such information are referred to Mr. ALFRED FORMAN'S translation of the entire work, just issued, from which the large extracts are here given by permission of Messrs. SCHOTT and Co., 159, Regent Street, and which can be obtained in the Hall.

Figure 5b. Page from the London Wagner Festival programme (1877), showing the incorporation of notated musical examples to guide the listener. RAHE/1/1877/2. Courtesy of the Royal Albert Hall Archive.

admitted that the anticipation of musical completeness had descended into the presentation of miscellaneous excerpts.<sup>85</sup> Still, this did not prevent his more enthusiastic supporters from

<sup>85</sup> See for example Ebenezer Prout, 'The Wagner Festival', *The Academy* (26 May 1877), 472.

advocating the ‘purely musical’ value of these selections outside the theatre. In a series of reviews for *The Examiner*, Hueffer would go furthest in justifying concert performances of Wagner as part of a broader conviction in music drama as an essentially acoustic phenomenon. As he saw it, the success of Wagner’s operas in the concert hall helped to disprove a belief that his musical dramas relied on extraneous theatrical machinery and visual effects. Instead, the Albert Hall concerts showed how the immaterial essence of the drama could be conveyed to a varied listening public as something intrinsic to the music alone:

Here was no darkened theatre, no invisible orchestra, no elaborate machinery – merely a few ladies and gentlemen, in ordinary evening dress, and in ordinary concert-room surroundings. And the rushing and gushing of the mighty river, enlivened by the merry gambols of the water-maidens, was placed before the imagination with a distinctness, perhaps all the more vivid as the ear alone conveyed the charm to the mind.<sup>86</sup>

By portraying an opposition between the ‘elaborate machinery’ of the theatre and the ordinary surroundings of the concert hall, Hueffer upheld a Romantic belief in the power of Wagner’s melodies to bypass the other senses and convey meaning to the ear and mind directly.

From the other side of the debate, prominent anti-Wagnerians were quick to parody the reversion to operatic excerpts in concert form as symptomatic of the fallacy of the total work of art. Following the musician–architect Statham, Joseph Bennett (music critic for *The Daily Telegraph*) satirised Wagner’s dismemberment of the *Ring* as a concession to the market, one that went against the serious aspirations of the modern symphonic concert, and undermined the composer’s own supposed conviction in the unbreakable wholeness of the integrated work of art.<sup>87</sup> In stressing Wagner’s mass commercial appeal, Statham and Bennett anticipated the tendency of later philosophical critics to target Wagner’s apparent exploitation of the orchestra as a technology for integrating theatrical effects. Theodor Adorno would extend established nineteenth-century complaints to portray Wagner’s techniques as marking the demise of ‘genuine’ musical development (which he associated with Viennese classicism) in favour of musical tableaux that would sustain the attention of great numbers of inexpert listeners at a distance. Adorno believed that the commodity character of Wagner’s works was rooted above all in the ‘primacy of harmonic and instrumental sound in his music’, lending his operas a quality of magical artifice reminiscent of the phantasmagoria.<sup>88</sup> Adorno’s critique of Wagnerian phantasmagoria is often equated with the architectural conditions of the Bayreuth theatre, and with the innovation of its ‘invisible orchestra’ in particular. Yet the ‘great phantasmagorias’ that Adorno identified – the Venusberg music from *Tannhäuser*, the Magic Fire music from *Die Walküre* and the closing scene from *Götterdämmerung* – were also chief among the popular highlights that Wagner extracted for presentation in concert form.<sup>89</sup> The performance of operatic scenes and orchestral highlights in the heart of London’s burgeoning museum district brought Wagner’s music directly into the orbit of modern consumption practices in such a way as to literalise the analogy between musical technique and commodity fetishism. If the Festspielhaus enacted a separation between hearing and seeing in the service of musical transcendence, the London Wagner Festival rematerialised the orchestral machine as an emblem of industrial progress within the arena of Victorian spectacle.

<sup>86</sup> Francis Hueffer, ‘The Wagner Festival’, *The Examiner* (12 May 1877), 600.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Bennett, ‘The Wagner Festival’, *The Daily Telegraph* (9 May 1877), 5.

<sup>88</sup> Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, 2005), 79.

<sup>89</sup> On this point see also Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner*, 189–93.

## Coda

By the time Wagner left London and returned to Bayreuth in June 1877, his conception of the *Ring* in performance had come a long way from the idea of a radically transitory event as sketched in his correspondence of the 1850s. The failure of the Albert Hall concerts to make a profit and help resolve the deficit arising from the production costs of the Bayreuth Festival only added to his sense of disappointment that the much-anticipated premiere had fallen short of his ideal. As is well known, the prospect of a repeat performance of the *Ring* in Bayreuth proved unviable during Wagner's lifetime and he soon agreed to transfer rights to the impresario Angelo Neumann, a devoted Wagnerian whose sold-out productions of the *Ring* in Leipzig (1878) and Berlin (1881) led to the establishment of the travelling 'Richard Wagner Theater' in 1882. It was in London that Neumann launched his international touring *Ring* cycle, bringing together a mobile orchestra led by the conductor Anton Seidl, a chorus and cast of Wagnerian singers, and a technical team dedicated to installing the disassembled Bayreuth décor and machinery as a model production in theatres across Europe. Early in 1882, he and his team of technicians transferred to Her Majesty's Theatre the 'appurtenances' which had 'lain for six years in the storehouses of the Bayreuth theatre', while Seidl – as Wagner's approved conductor – drilled the orchestra in preparation for the first of four instalments of the complete cycle.<sup>90</sup> On the back of the London premiere in May, the company spent the next year crossing continental Europe on a chartered train, mounting over twenty productions of the *Ring*, as well as promotional concerts, in theatres and concert venues throughout Europe. As Gundula Kreuzer has suggested in her post-Kittlerian reading of Wagner's staging of the *Ring* and its translocation beyond the Festspielhaus, Neumann's operatic assemblage emphasised fidelity to Wagner's musical and directorial intentions by using original materials and artifacts from the Festspielhaus, in addition to performers (Seidl in particular) as agents of the 'faithful' rendition. 'If the Bayreuth Festspielhaus functioned as a stationary machine with recording and playback functions,' she writes, 'the touring production was its itinerant amplifier, designed to extend both reach and shelf life of Bayreuth's inaugural staging.'<sup>91</sup>

In comparison to the elaborate technological production of the *Ring* on stage, Wagner's journey to London in 1877 has been overlooked as a desperate attempt to reap back profits by reverting to ordinary concertising. Yet for all its flaws, the London Wagner Festival continued an established practice of performing concert arrangements of the *Ring* and provided a precedent for Neumann's fully staged touring production five years later. It is tempting in this respect to extend Kreuzer's media interpretation of Neumann's touring Wagner Theatre to include the earlier London initiative. Whereas Neumann presented his touring *Ring* as a trademark reproduction on stage, the London Wagner Festival marketed fidelity by engaging an approved cast of Wagnerian singers, players and conductors. In the absence of stage décor, the orchestra – which was led by Wilhelmj, disciplined under Dannreuther and conducted from memory by Richter – operated as a playback mechanism in full view of the audience and under the eye of the composer, his celebrity endorsement bestowing the ultimate seal of approval.

More than a decade after Wagner's final visit to London, the association between Wagnerism, mass listening and sound technology was captured in a popular caricature for *Punch* by the prolific illustrator and chronicler of the Victorian middlebrow, George du

<sup>90</sup> Angelo Neumann, *Personal Recollections of Wagner*, trans. Edith Livermore (New York, 1908), 216.

<sup>91</sup> Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam*, 223. See also Gundula Kreuzer, 'Authentizität, Visualisierung, Bewahrung: Das reisende "Wagner-Theater" und die Konservierbarkeit von Inszenierungen', in *Angst vor der Zerstörung: Der Meister Künste zwischen Archiv und Erneuerung*, ed. Robert Sollich, Clemens Risi, Sebastian Reus and Stephan Jöris (Berlin, 2008), 139–60. On touring staged productions in the late nineteenth century more widely, see Francesca Vella, *Networking Operatic Italy* (Chicago, 2021), especially 109–32.





Figure 6. George du Maurier, 'The Real Music of the Future', *Punch*, 8 December 1888, 270. Courtesy of Senate House Library, University of London.

Maurier (Figure 6). One of many visual parodies of Wagnerian aestheticism and 'the music of the future' to be found within the pages of the magazine, 'The Real Music of the Future' features an imaginary Wagnerian performer who is 'so disgusted at the frivolity of contemporary musical taste' that he 'buys a *phonograph* instead, and devotes his energies to *singing for posterity*'.

Du Maurier's musician is seen posing within a traditional Victorian drawing room turned home recording studio, wherein the phonograph appears domesticated as an instrumental extension of the piano (operated by the ubiquitous woman at the keyboard). In the background hangs a picture of the Royal Albert Hall, re-imagined as a futuristic shrine to mechanical playback and mass consumption. Next to it is a portrait of Colonel Gouraud, the American Civil War veteran who assumed responsibility for marketing Thomas Edison's latest phonograph in Britain by recording illustrious voices and musical occasions, including the first known reproduction of a live concert: a mass performance of Handel's *Israel in Egypt* performed at the Crystal Palace on 29 June 1888.<sup>92</sup> Coinciding with Edison's re-launch and marketing of his new and improved phonograph the same year, du Maurier's cartoon juxtaposes old and new modes of musical performance and reproduction to imagine the

<sup>92</sup> See John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford, 2003), 113–26; and Emily Thompson, 'Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877–1925', *The Musical Quarterly* 79/1 (1995), 131–71.



future potential of sound archiving and long-range communication as a feature of everyday life. It also combines Victorian fantasies of a technological future with anxieties about Wagnerian modernity, hinting at a parallel between the archival capacities of the phonograph, and the preservationist impulse underpinning the production of high art.<sup>93</sup>

Victorian spectacles of mass listening (of which the London Wagner Festival of 1877 was a prime example) may seem divorced from opera's entwinement with media history, its multisensory wholeness as a 'massive techno-cultural complex'.<sup>94</sup> However, this separation – between the audiovisual mechanisms of opera in the theatre and the 'purely musical' arena of the concert hall – was also one that nineteenth-century critics and concert reformers actively sought to foster. The Albert Hall's acoustic limitations and miscellaneous purpose contrast sharply with the much-lauded innovations of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus; yet this heavy monument, with its roots in the Great Exhibition and imperial visions of European progress in science and industry, also stands as an enduring reminder of the technological conditions underpinning the loftiest musical ideals.

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<sup>93</sup> For a discussion of du Maurier's fascination with media storage and playback as a recurring feature of his other cartoons and novels, see Susan Zieger, *The Mediated Mind: Affect, Ephemera, and Consumerism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2018), 129–65.

<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Sterne, 'Afterword: Opera, Media, Technicity', in *Technology and the Diva: Sopranos, Opera, and Media from Romanticism to the Digital Age*, ed. Karen Henson (Cambridge, 2016), 159–64.

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