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Sounding the town

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Interdisciplinarity has proved to be one of the enduring tenets of British urban history. As Fiona Kisby points out in her contribution to this special issue of *Urban History*, its centrality is enunciated in the agenda set by Jim Dyos in the 1960s, as the subject emerged as a self-conscious subdiscipline of British history, and in the editorials that launched this publication as a *Yearbook* and subsequently as a journal.[1] The appeal of an interdisciplinary approach is that it allows those involved to transcend the straitjacket of traditional research and explore a given issue or subject from a multiplicity of angles. However, prioritizing such a methodology, though it might allow the intellectual high ground to be occupied temporarily, provides a real hostage to fortune, raising expectations that it often proves impossible to fulfil. Interdisciplinarity simply cuts against the dominant grain of academe. Where British urban historians have crossed the disciplinary barricades, they have tended to head in the direction of the social sciences (such as sociology, economics, geography and anthropology). A rapprochement with the arts (painting, film, literature, architecture, music, and the like) is less easy to discern. Yet with the growing interest in the last decade or so in cultural history the time is ripe to redress the balance. This music issue of *Urban History*, like that of August 1995 on 'Art and the City', can be seen as an attempt to do this. Its appearance coincides with the publication of a pioneering volume of essays, edited by Fiona Kisby, on *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns*, whose avowed aim is to 'bring musicology within the sphere of urban history'.[2] Though that collection is predominantly focused on western Europe (with six of the essays on the British Isles, six on the Continent, and one on South America) and on the years 1400 to 1650, it provides a model for how the agendas of musicologists and urban historians might be productively merged.

The town

Leaving aside an almost puritanical mistrust of the arts by the historical profession, there are strong practical and theoretical reasons, which

[1] H.J. Dyos, 'Agenda for urban historians', in H.J. Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History* (London, 1976), 3, 8; D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (eds), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London, 1983), xi; H.J. Dyos, 'Editorial', *Urban History Yearbook* (1974), 4; R. Rodger, 'Urban history: prospect and retrospect', *Urban History*, 19 (1992), 2–4.
[2] F. Kisby (ed.), *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns* (Cambridge, 2001).

cannot be dismissed as simply prejudicial, why music has failed generally to attract the attention of those studying the urban past. These reasons can be usefully grouped under two broad headings: the town, and music. It is patently clear that music was often made in towns (the only other alternative being, presumably, the countryside). But it does not follow from this fact of geography that there is any necessary relationship between music and towns *qua* towns. Indeed, much (particularly early) music-making took place in institutions – such as abbeys, cathedrals, royal courts, aristocratic households and universities (with their attendant colleges) – which, on the face of it, appear relatively isolated from their host communities. One of the most important and consistent lessons now emerging is that these powerhouses of musical production were not as cut off from each other, or from the town in which they were located, as might be thought. Yolanda Plumley's investigation of Laon reveals that despite the 'apparent insularity of the cathedral . . . in reality the cathedral personnel were far from isolated from the local community', with several canons living in the town or holding prebends in its churches. The AHRB project on 'Church music in English towns', reported on by Caroline Barron, demonstrates the high level of musical interaction between the various urban religious institutions, including parish churches, with performers easily moving between one body and another. The studies in *Music and Musicians* reinforce the case for connectivity. James Saunders reveals that in early modern England cathedral choirmen 'moonlighted' as parish clergy, musical teachers and performers, and – more surprisingly – as shopkeepers, alehouse keepers, smallholders, craftsmen and so on; examination of the musical life of Oxford by Beth Anne Lee-De Amici uncovers 'the interlocking communities of both the university and the town';[3] and Beat Kümin emphasizes the overall strength of late medieval parochial music-making, and shows that St Margaret's parish church in London drew on the choral resources of the Chapel Royal, the College of St Stephen's, Cardinal Wolsey's Household and Westminster Abbey's Lady Chapel.[4] The situation in European towns was scarcely different, Barbara Haggh discovering that in Brussels the 'urban environment' afforded 'musicians and choirs opportunities for extra-curricular singing: the possibility of visiting other churches or the court . . . or of performing at civic events',[5] and in Valladolid, Soterraña Aguirre Rincón argues that 'the frequent presence of Charles V's court . . . was the catalyst for the metamorphosis of the cultural life of the town'.[6] The message from musicologists is clear. Urban musical institutions were networked, and – by implication – the practice of music was something which knitted

[3] *Ibid.*, 95.
[4] *Ibid.*, 75.
[5] *Ibid.*, 155.
[6] *Ibid.*, 117.

together the disparate parts of the urban body. If this was so in medieval and early modern towns, there is every reason to believe the same was the case in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when musical clubs and societies proliferated, and there was, because of population growth and social change, an even more pressing need to weld together the different elements that composed the town.

By and large musicologists are stronger at demonstrating the extent to which musical activity permeated towns than they are at showing what was specifically urban about that activity itself. Was there any effective difference between the music of the town and that of the countryside? Elgar might compose an overture (*Cockaine*) and Vaughan Williams a symphony (No. 2) celebrating London, Delius (*The Song of a Great City*) and Gershwin (*An American in Paris*) pieces evoking Paris, but to what extent was the music they produced urban? One feature that does emerge from the work of musicologists is the role of music (and more broadly sound) in generating civic and urban identity. In this issue Tim Carter highlights the extent to which Reinhard Strohm's 1985 study of music in late medieval Bruges 'offers an enticing vision of a world filled with sounds that somehow define both urban space and even urban identity', and Miguel Ángel Marín argues persuasively for the role of bells in the Spanish town of Jaca in defining 'the imaginary line between the urban and the rural worlds' . The theme is one explored in *Music and Musicians*. Small bands of musicians were being employed by the civic authorities in European cities by at least the fourteenth century, and Gretchen Peters argues that in the southern French cities of Montpellier and Toulouse investment in music-making was a way of asserting civic independence, as opposed to Avignon where low levels of expenditure reflected the lack of a strong and autonomous city council owing to the presence of the Papal court. In Venice, as Ian Fenlon demonstrates, music – in the form of chanting, or through the use of trumpets, cymbals, and bells – was a central feature of the extraordinarily elaborate processional and ritual by which the city declared itself not only 'the Perfect Republic' but also 'the City of God'.[7] The Scottish burgh of Haddington could hardly compare with the glories (or financial resources) of *La Serenissima*, but John McGavin argues that the fiddler employed by the town ensured that it 'was well represented, in contexts where civic rights and identity were paramount, by someone who was known to be their civic appointee',[8] and Magnus Williamson presents the case that in the small Lincolnshire town of Louth 'the enrichment of parochial worship through the cultivation of choral polyphony was . . . central to the community's configuration of its identity'.[9]

It is possible to conceive of the role of music in asserting urban

[7] *Ibid*., 44.
[8] *Ibid*., 53.
[9] *Ibid*., 88.

identities without conceding that there is anything particularly urban about the music itself (though the sound of a *multiplicity* of bells might demarcate town from village life). Exploring the musical life of Victorian London, the subject of Derek Scott's study in this issue, does raise several intriguing points in this connection. The sheer scale of concert, choral and music hall performances and venues is striking. Charles Morton's Canterbury Hall, opened in 1851, had a capacity of over 1,500 (by 1866 it was estimated that there were 33 large halls in the metropolis with an average capacity of 1,500), and in 1862 the Sacred Harmonic Society organized a festival at the Crystal Palace using 3,625 performers.[10] Such large-scale gatherings and permanent venues were unthinkable in a rural context. Did they affect the character of the music performed? It would seem not unreasonable to link the development of the concerto and the symphony – with their growing demand for larger and louder performing resources – with the scale and nature of urban audiences and halls. It has been suggested by H.C. Robbins Landon that the 'public' character of the string quartets Op. 71 and 74, composed in the 1790s by Haydn for Salomon's concerts in London' s Hanover Square Rooms, is 'entirely different from the leisurely, more "detailed" and much more intimate works' which 'he had previously written for the Austrian and Hungarian connoisseurs'.[11] Scott emphasizes the impact of professionalization – 'by 1865 London's concert life was entirely professional' – and commercialization on the capital's musical life. It is tempting to assume that in some way these forces, along with others like commodification and secularization, were inherently urban phenomena. But the case needs to be argued. A commercialized agricultural system, for example, had been evolving in England's countryside for several centuries. Nonetheless, towns – because of their service role – were traditionally centres of professional life, and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that dynamic urban growth in London since the mid-sixteenth century (by 1800 it was already one of the three largest cities in the world),[12] and the huge and complex market for cultural goods generated by this greatly advanced the professionalization and commercialization of music.[13] These were trends further stimulated by the *general* urbanization of British society since the late seventeenth century, so that during the eighteenth century many towns came to host regular

[10] P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (London, 1978), 148–9; H.E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870–1914* (London, 1976), 222.

[11] H.C. Robbins Landon, 'The "Salomon" string quartets Op. 71 & 74', in Decca Recording Company, *Haydn String Quartets: Volume 9* (London, 1973), 8.

[12] London grew from a city of around 75,000 in 1550, to 575,000 in 1700, 900,000 by 1800, and 2,362,000 by 1851.

[13] On the early professionalization of music see C. Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford, 1985), 1–75; G. Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State and Society 1680–1730* (London, 1982), 28–31; P. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain 1700–1850* (London, 1995), 31–2, 186.

concerts and musical theatre.[14] The higher standards of musicianship encouraged by professionalization permitted the performance of more demanding scores, at the level of both the individual musician and the ensemble, which in its turn underpinned the evolution of the concerto and symphony. Scott also reveals the way that the world of music both reflected and shaped social relations, and in particular the forces of class (and class conflict) which were such a fundamental feature of the nineteenth-century city. Many music hall songs and 'urban ballads' articulated the very specific concerns of the urban working class, such as 'The Toon Improvement Bill, Or, Ne Pleyce Noo Te Play' (sung by Ned Corven) bemoaning the loss of recreational space to railway and housing development in Newcastle upon Tyne,[15] or the ballads of the late 1880s commenting on the strikes in the London docks and the Bryant and May match factory. Here was a music which grew directly out of the city.

Music

The reluctance of urban historians to place music on their agenda may reflect not so much a denial that music was an important part of town life, but the very nature and scholarly investigation of the medium itself. Like the arts as a whole, the academic study of musical history has tended to focus either on abstract matters of style, form and genre, or more concretely, on the roles of individuals (the 'great composers') and particular institutions (such as a princely court or a monastery), issues that, as treated, seem to bear only a loose association to space and place. How is the urban historian to engage with such an intractable body of scholarship? To some extent the problem has been eased since the early 1980s, as Tim Carter suggests, by the emergence of a 'new musicology', which is driven by 'the increasing sense that the musicologist needed to contextualize musical objects in time and place'. The urban context has been a particular beneficiary of this, with a sheaf of 'music in . . .' studies of cities between the fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries. However, in this new wave of work Italy has undoubtedly enjoyed a privileged position, a reflection of the kudos enjoyed by the Renaissance and its birthplace in the world of Anglo-American art history scholarship. One of the refreshing aspects of *Music and Musicians*, though it retains the chronological emphasis of the Renaissance, is the way that it shifts the geographical focus away from the Italian peninsula towards other areas of western Europe (and even, in the piece by Egberto Bermúdez, to the

[14] S. Sadie, 'Concert life in eighteenth-century England', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 85 (1958–59), 17–30; T. Fawcett, *Music in Eighteenth Century Norwich and Norfolk* (Norwich, 1979); M. Tilmouth, 'The beginnings of provincial concert life in England', in C. Hogwood and R. Luckett (eds), *Music in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1983), 1–17; P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660–1770* (Oxford, 1989), 121–7.

[15] M. Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London, 1974), 311–13.

American continent), and away from the great to the smaller town. All this is welcome. But there is much further to go – notably coverage of eastern Europe and beyond, and periods outside the Renaissance (building, for example, in the case of England on Weber's and McVeigh's pioneering research into the musical life of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London).[16] As Carter argues, the new musicology has not entirely divested itself of the old traditions, with a strong whiff of institution and genre still pervading its pages. He argues for a more multi-faceted, interdisciplinary and theoretically sensitive approach, and in particular one which relates townscape and soundscape and gives to music the power to shape as well as reflect the urban world it occupied.

For historians a problem with the term 'music' is deciding what is meant, and what is not meant by it. Does it, as often used by musicologists, refer only to a narrow world of 'art' music, or is so-called 'popular' music – ballads, 'folk' songs, 'pop' songs, dance music, brass bands, and such like – included? Where is the boundary between music and sound? On which side of the divide lies the ritual use of 'instruments' like drums and bells, or the cries of street traders? Is there a distinction between music and sound, and at what point does sound become noise? It is clear that, whatever the traditional position, these are questions currently exercising the minds of musicologists. Scott is keen to encompass low- as well as high-brow music and Marín to recreate the full soundscape of Jaca, while Emily Cockayne addresses directly the presence of cacophony or bad music on the streets (something attributed at the time especially to traders, balladeers and itinerant musicians), in order 'to explore the point at which music became noise'. In *Music and Musicians*, amongst a more orthodox diet of cantors, choristers and organists, are a good scattering of fiddlers, pipers, drummers and bell-ringers, many playing an important role in the mounting of civic ritual. Such an open-minded approach to what constitutes music should enhance the relevance of musicology to the urban historian, whose own agenda is increasingly concerned with environment and with how the town was mentally constructed, sensed and experienced.[17]

One of the factors that makes the distinction between music and sound so difficult to establish is music's ubiquitous character. It, or something approximating to it, filled – and still fills – many of the

[16] W. Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna, 1830–48* (London, 1975); idem, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual, and Ideology* (Oxford, 1992); S. McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge, 1993).

[17] See, for example, H.L. Platt, 'The emergence of urban environmental history', *Urban History*, 26 (1999), 89–95; M. Jenner, 'From conduit community to commercial network? Water in London, 1500–1725', in P. Griffiths and M. Jenner (eds), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London* (Manchester, 2000), 250–72; P. Corfield, 'Walking the city streets: the urban odyssey in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of Urban History*, 16 (1990), 132–74: P. Borsay, *The Image of Georgian Bath 1700–2000: Towns, Heritage and History* (Oxford, 2000), 5–8, 20–48.

interior and exterior, public and private spaces of the urban world. Take the case of the eighteenth-century English town and its better-off citizens and visitors. Not only was there an expanding provision of club and society meetings, and concerts and festivals in which those who could afford it made or listened to art music in a fashion which was self-conscious of the musical character of the occasion; but there was also a multiplicity of locations in which music played an important but essentially 'supportive' role, such as the street, town hall, church, chapel, assembly rooms, theatre, pleasure gardens, and – in the spa towns – the walks and pump room. At Bath a small band of musicians was funded by the visitors' subscriptions to play in the Pump Room, when the waters were being drunk early in the morning, and at Tunbridge Wells an enclosed gallery (still in place today) was constructed on the Pantiles, the town's most prestigious walk, to accommodate a group of musicians while they soothed the minds of the busy promenaders. In addition the church bells at Bath were rung to announce the arrival of fashionable visitors, who were serenaded to their lodgings by a band of musicians.[18] Polite society must, therefore, have operated its daily and seasonal cycle of pleasure to an almost perpetual background of 'music' – in the manner of the 'wall-to-wall' music that saturates shopping malls, leisure centres and bars today – much of which would have been only subconsciously absorbed. Such omnipresence can, paradoxically, lead music to be ignored as simply a part – and a relatively meaningless part – of the urban milieu. If this charge is to countered, and the significance of music asserted, then there is a need to explain what its function was. It is here that historians hit up against the most intractable of all the problems faced in understanding the role of music, the inherent difficulty in establishing its meaning.

Music, by its very nature, is an abstract mode of expression. A consequence, as Tim Carter notes in this issue, is 'music's relatively weak ability to signify', which in its turn leads, as Fiona Kisby argues, 'to the problem that lies at the heart of all musicological scholarship: that of understanding and writing about music as an aesthetic experience'. If musicologists have difficulty reading the language of music, it is scarcely surprising that historians, whose sources have been dominated traditionally by the written word, discover problems in interpreting it. For those trying to make sense of music in terms of other than a purely self-referencing, internalized system of signification, there may be seen to be three levels or types of 'meaning', each of increasing abstraction. First, there is music as a form of human interaction, organization or commercial activity. The focus here is on groups, clubs, societies, institutions, businesses and such like which deploy, present or promote music. At

[18] Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, 271–2; T.B. Burr, *The History of Tunbridge Wells* (London, 1766), 101; J. Newman, *The Buildings of England: West Kent and the Weald* (Harmondsworth, 1969), 559.

this level music derives its meaning from the economic and social *contexts* in which it operates, and it is here that urban historians have most closely engaged with the subject. The multi-authored *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, the most recent and comprehensive survey available of the past and current concerns of British urban historians, confirms this impression.[19] The medieval volume contains only a scattering of references to music, but these tend to focus on the role of the guild, parish, or convivial society (for example, the London Puy) in providing patronage. Rather more is to be found in the early modern volume. Here the emphasis is on the new modes of public music-making which appeared in London from the late seventeenth century (there are virtually no references in the text to music prior to this date) and later spread to provincial towns, and the underlying concern is with music as a manifestation of a burgeoning associational life (through clubs, societies, festivals, etc.) and commercialization. These themes remain the dominant ones in the modern volume, though with more reference now to 'popular' forms of music – such as brass bands and especially the music hall – and a nod towards the issues of class and gender. Valuable as this type of enquiry has been, music as such is often treated as incidental to the social contexts and economic frameworks, which – for the purposes of analysis – could just as well be supporting a group of horticulturists or a sporting event .

The second level of meaning derives from musical forms which involve sung text; ballads, popular song, music hall, musical theatre, opera, oratorio, liturgy, and such like. In these cases the meaning of the music will normally be taken to be coterminous with the words which accompany it. Some texts have overtly urban resonances, and can be read as a representation of town life, in much the way a Dickens' novel might be. An example would be Leonard Bernstein's (and his librettists') vibrant commentaries on mid-twentieth-century New York life in *West Side Story* (1957), *Wonderful Town* (1953) and *On the Town* (1944). In the last of these, the three sailors on twenty-four hour shore leave declare,

New York, New York, a visitor's place,
Where no one lives on account of the pace,
But seven million are screaming for space.
New York, New York, it's a visitor's place.

The perceived teeming and transient character of the great city is captured, as is its anomie in a later number 'Lonely Town'. Bernstein's musicals are, in many respects, a direct descendant of the first 'ballad opera', John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728) – which included popular songs by Purcell, Handel, Henry Carey and Bononcini – with its representation (among other things) of London's low life in the early eighteenth

[19] P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, c. 600–1950*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 2000).

century. Traditional ballads were one source of musical form that fed into the creation of Victorian music hall songs. Though the contents of these have received a good deal of attention from cultural historians, and the general significance of the metropolitan context is recognized, the analysis of the songs has tended to focus on broad political and social issues – like imperialism, party politics, class and gender – rather than place and space.[20] Yet the music hall was patently the product of a city environment and of a rapidly urbanizing society. The multi-faceted character of the culture which emerged can be detected, paradoxically, in the way urban song commented on the rural world. From the late seventeenth century the London pleasure gardens became key agents in the manufacture of a commercialized pastoral culture, one facet of which was a genre of song specifically composed for the gardens. Replete with bucolic characters and landscapes, the texts represented metropolitan society's reaction to its already huge expansion and its inhabitants' loss of rural identity.[21] Music hall song also contained elements of rural nostalgia, though directed at a wider audience, less able to escape the grip of the city, and spiced with more than a touch of irony. *If it Wasn't for the 'Ouses in Between* (1894), sung by Gus Elen to a tune by George Le Brun, 'celebrates' an East Ender's garden. Decorated 'wiv the turnip tops and cabbages wot people doesn't buy', and 'wiv tomatoes and wiv radishes wot 'adn't any sale', Elen declared, 'We're as countrified as can be wiv a clothes prop for a tree'. However, the chorus drew out the urban constraints on this pastoral vision with the observation,

Wiv a ladder and some glasses,
You could see to 'Ackney Marshes,
If it wasn't for the 'ouses in between.

Analysis of the contents of sung text offers one way of making sense of music. But as an approach it has its limitations. There is the problem of the relationship between text and sound. Within the world of 'popular' music a common stock of traditional tunes is constantly being recycled and set to new words, a frequent practice among the first generation of music hall singers.[22] In such cases, where tune and text are interchangeable, can it be argued that the music, as such, has any inherent meaning at all? Even in sophisticated compositions, where word and sound are closely matched, the historian is unlikely to analyse the purely musical language. When this is allied to the fact that much, perhaps the majority of music is not accompanied by sung text, then it is clear that there

[20] See J.S. Bratton (ed.), *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes, 1986); D. Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1890–1914: A Social History* (Manchester, 1987), 87–132; D. Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict* (Cambridge, 1996).

[21] W. Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century,* repr. (London and Hamden, Conn., 1979); D. Coke, 'Vauxhall Gardens', in *Rococo Art and Design in Hogarth's England*, exhibition catalogue, Victoria and Albert Museum (London, 1984), 75–98.

[22] A. Bennett, 'Music in the halls', in Bratton, *Music Hall*, 4–6.

remain major difficulties in establishing what music signifies. It is here that the third level of meaning, a combination of sound pattern and performance, comes into play. It has to be said that it is a good deal easier to identify the existence of such a level than execute the analysis required to extract meaning from the music. In part this reflects the fact that historians rarely have the disciplinary skills to understand, at anything other than the simplest level, musical notation and performance practice; but in part it is also due to the fact that the meaning is inherently abstruse and illusive. It is unlikely that there is, for example, a specific sound that signifies urbanness, working classness, community, anomie, femininity, etc. Music will not speak to us in the way that a word text will.

However, it does not follow from this that a meaning – however fuzzy, indefinite and ambiguous this may be – cannot be teased out. To the medieval and early modern citizen trumpets, drums, pipes and bells would constitute a 'musical' language which contained its own variety of meanings learnt through local experience. Different churches, for example, would possess different-sounding bells, demarcating territorial/parochial divisions, and different patterns of pealing would alert listeners to widely varying events, and trigger in them the necessary mood changes. When members of a club gathered in an eighteenth-century town to make music, the harmonizing and interplay of the musical parts and sounds, and the collective act of performance, would have constituted a powerful analogue of sociability for both performers and audience, and would have been recognized to be an inherent part of an enlightened urban (and not rural) culture of which sociability was a critical feature. The function and meaning of the music on these occasions was clear to contemporaries, when they cared to articulate it. In 1700 Thomas Naish reminded the Society of Music Lovers at Salisbury that 'as the true pleasure of life consists in the due and regular obedience of our passions, so music serves to bring them into harmony', and in 1752 the Newcastle upon Tyne composer Charles Avison declared 'that it is the peculiar quality of music to raise the sociable and happy passions, and to subdue the contrary ones'.[23] At times the mixture of musical notation and corporate performance could create a sublime vision of human harmony. The energetic amateur musician John Marsh – a man committed to the ethos of sociability, and to music-making as the principal medium to promote this – records on first hearing the *Messiah* at the Handel commemoration in London in 1784, 'many thousands of spirits, actuated as it were by one soul, uttering their united praises and thanksgivings, and afterwards joining together in one universal chorus of simple and

[23] T. Naish, *A Sermon Preached at the Cathedral Church of Sarum, November 22, 1700, before a Society of Lovers of Music* (London, 1701), 12–13; C. Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression* (London, 1752), 5, 8. See also C. Probyn, *The Sociable Humanist: The Life and Works of James Harris 1709–1780* (Oxford, 1991), 210–13.

expressive melody and perfect harmony, the force and effect of which filled me with the most exquisite sensations I have ever yet experienced'.[24] Promenading to the soothing tones of a small musical band may constitute a less exalted experience, but we should not underestimate the capacity of the music to influence subtly the mood and behaviour of those occupying a town's public walks. In the deployment of traditional airs for the setting of new words the music hall drew on a common fund of tunes and forged a link between past and present that gave audiences a sense of continuity and identity. Moreover, the complex interplay between artiste and audiences (for a hall might contain a variety of social groups) created a performing context that provided a collective engagement with series of common problems and issues, and generated – albeit temporarily – sensations of solidarity. It may be misleading to argue that music reaches the parts of the human psyche other modes of expression are unable to access. Feelings of solidarity and identity can also be induced by mass sporting events, ceremonial occasions, and such like. But it is important to explore music and musical performance as phenomena in their own right (and not simply a pretext for organizational and commercial activity, or a neutral vehicle for carrying written text) as powerful modes of personal and social communication, whose very abstract character permits human sentiments to be mobilized in ways not easily open to more concrete forms of expression. In the final analysis, of course, the three layers of musical meaning – organizational, verbal and aural – interact to invest the medium with its rich expressive qualities.

Conclusion

Urban history, despite its avowed interdisciplinary agenda, has not paid as much attention to music as it might. There are strong reasons for this – which cannot easily be dismissed as simple disciplinary prejudice – to do with the urban content of music, and its character and meaning. However, the essays in this issue and the contributions to *Music and Musicians* suggest that whatever the barriers to engagement they are not insuperable. Musicologists are now keen to broaden their agenda in a way that gives the urban historical context a central role in their analysis, and – using their expertise – seeks to tease out the complex layers of meaning from the musical experience. With the growing emphasis among urban historians upon the town as a cultural phenomenon, reflecting the wider upsurge of interest in cultural history, now is the time for urban history to reassess and renew Dyos' interdisciplinary vision of the subject, and music – and the arts as a whole – constitute a fruitful starting point.

[24] Marsh quoted in J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), 546; W. Weber, 'The fabric of daily life and the autobiography of John Marsh', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 59 (1996), 145–69.