

Public Military Music and the Promotion of Patriotism in the British Provinces, c. 1780-c. 1850

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The role and importance of military musicians changed and intensified in the late eighteenth century through two important processes. The first was the culture of display that took root in both the home-based army and units in the colonies. The second was the result of successive militia acts which effectively ensured that military units with bands would be systematically placed in every corner of the British Isles.

It became evident that music as a component of military display served an important diplomatic purpose. Music performed in public spaces was heard by a population deeply sceptical of the army and with an essentially local sense of identity. The experience of the sight and sound of military music raised entirely new perceptions of nation and of the state as a benign power.

Two important and related themes emerge here. The first is the historical process that led, almost accidentally, to a realization that music as part of military display had potential to influence populations across the country and in the colonies. The second, more challenging, theme concerns the nature of the evidence for this idea and how it is to be treated. It is an idea that is totally convincing if the experience of hearing and seeing military spectacle by the mass of the people can be shown to have had impact. What is the evidence of listening to music by those people at whom it was targeted, how robust is it and what can be made of it?

The National Library of Ireland holds 42 letters that passed between J.K. Mackenzie, a young British army lieutenant stationed in Kilkenny, and his mother at home in Edinburgh. The letters span the three years following 1833. They contain little about military matters: for the most part they describe Mackenzie's social life, a narrative of days passed by a young officer of the Georgian army stationed in a rural Irish town. It contrasts sharply with what one finds in letters written from foreign parts where their authors were often on the brink of, or even amidst, theatres of conflict. Mackenzie says much about fishing, hunting, country-house gatherings, local customs and local people. Also, he refers frequently to musical life in the environs in which he was stationed, for the very apparent reason that music was so central to that life. His letter of Friday 22 August 1834, concludes:

While I am writing our [regimental] band is playing quite close to my window, they are very much improved, and are now a very good band, they play the Edinburgh waltz quite beautifully, but I think are too fond of Italian music. On Tuesday evening I was at a very grand party given by Mrs Biggs, the paymasters wife, the principal

people were the Barrackmasters family, and a Mr and Mrs Collis very decent people but not overly genteel.¹

The letter is typical of the kind of evidence in which the Listening Experience Database (LED) project is most interested.² Taken in isolation it is commonplace and conveys little to capture attention, but taken as a group and placed in context the Mackenzie letters offer something more substantial about place and time. They are a private correspondence; they were neither intended nor fashioned for the eyes of anyone other than the writer's mother and his sister, to whom he routinely refers. We learn that there is a competent regimental band attached to his unit, and that its repertoire extends beyond functional military music (such as marches) to dance music. The band has a bandmaster who knows enough about modish musical tastes to introduce what Mackenzie believes to be a surplus of Italian music. From what we know generally of the recruiting strategies for army bands of the time (most were put in the hands of London-based agents who were well-practiced in such matters) it is likely that the bandmaster was Italian or German.³

In one of his letters Mackenzie laments the drafting of some of his regiment to active service:

We have lost two of our best musicians by sending this draft out, which is a great pity for our band was really a very nice one. There were 14 in it, and they played some very difficult music out of some of the Italian Opera's.⁴

From all this we can also make the reasonable assumption that the band was musically literate and as such had a repertoire that was expanding rather than static. The band was heard through a window. As it was a summer day, it may have been rehearsing or even performing in the open air. In any case, it follows that it was not just this middle-class young officer who was the recipient of the listening experience; people of any rank or station within earshot shared it. Intended or not, then, this was public music, and the performance of concerted music, whether it was intended to be public or not, was an important feature of such bands:

I went this afternoon to the Almeida to hear the bands play, the Regiments take it in turns to send their bands, every Sunday, ours, and the 52nd were the performers on this occasion, the music commences at ½ past 4 and lasts untill ½ past 6, and all the people walk up and down, listening, and talking. It is a good sized oblong square, with trees planted round it, and under the trees quantities of wild geraniums, which even now are very sweet, altogether it was a gay scene.⁵

¹ National Library of Ireland, MS 13,527, J.K. Mackenzie letters.

² The Introduction to this issue gives more information about the LED project.

³ Overwhelmingly, the bandmasters of regimental and militia bands were Germans. This was partly because early bands of music in Britain were imitative of the German model and also because of the ready supply of bandmasters through London agents such as George Astor, who directed *Morning Chronicle* advertisements at 'Officers of the Army and Navy' who could 'be immediately supplied with complete sets of instruments for a Band with good musicians to play the same [as well as] several good Masters for teaching'; see *Morning Chronicle*, 8 July 1795.

⁴ National Library of Ireland, MS 13,527, J.K. Mackenzie letters.

⁵ National Library of Ireland, MS 13,527, J.K. Mackenzie letters.

Taken with other similar evidence, the content of Mackenzie's letters tells us something about European repertoire and its dissemination in places distant from major centres of population, and particularly the role of military bands in that process, but it also exemplifies how the value of such evidence is invariably found in minor details: traces, often multiple overlapping traces, that reveal consistencies, which in turn reveal information about musical life in the past and the way it has played a part in the living of lives more generally. 'Reception' is not a helpful description of such sources, because here, as with so much of this type of evidence, we find little specific detail about repertoire or indeed about intentional and careful listening. Rather, as is and has so often been the case, music is seen to be a fundamental constituent of ordinary life: a part of a broad social environment.

Listening experiences often display their greatest strengths and utilities when they are examined as groups or clusters of sources that reveal continuities and changes, not just about the history of music, but of wider historical narratives. Such patterns often support or contradict prevailing assumptions or knowledge sets. For example, evidence from a broader range of sources relating to listening seems to support the conventional view that in the nineteenth century operatic derivatives were much more widely listened to and appreciated than were the complete works from which they were derived⁶ – this is indeed hinted at in Mackenzie's letters. On the other hand, in an analysis of letters and diaries written from the Western Front in the First World War, Helen Barlow has shown that the idea, supported by official agencies, that music strengthened wartime resolve by galvanizing a spirit of patriotism and nationalism in the trenches, was far removed from the way that music actually functioned there.⁷ The private testimonies of listeners show that the opposite was true: almost without exception, the diaries and letters of soldiers and nurses demonstrate that the emotions stirred by music (even by 'patriotic' music) were largely centred on self rather than country. Music acted powerfully in the context of life on the front by prompting deeply personal sentiments of nostalgia and equally strong concerns that can be understood only in the context of individual lives rather than shared sentiments of nationhood.

Such evidence also holds the possibility of contributing to our understanding of how music has, explicitly or implicitly, reflected or even influenced historical trends. In this article I apply such evidence alongside other sources to examine how musical experiences contributed to the way patriotism was encouraged across the country in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly among the rural poor. The emphasis on military music runs through my argument because, as I explain below, it was by far the most widely distributed form of instrumental music in the country.

Several historians have examined the emergence of a shared British identity, and its causes and manifestations have been the subject of debate, but it seems

⁶ See also Trevor Herbert, ed., *The British Brass Band: A Musical and Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Trevor Herbert and Arnold Myers, 'Music for the Multitude: Accounts of Brass Bands Entering Enderby Jackson's Crystal Palace Contests in the 1860s', *Early Music* 38/4 (2010): 571–84. Operatic derivatives are especially prominent in the repertoires of brass and military bands in the nineteenth century. Surviving documents relating to the music played at brass band contests evidence this.

⁷ Helen Barlow, "'A Vital Necessity': Musical Experiences in the Life Writing of British Military Personnel at the Western Front', in *A 'Great Divide' or a Longer Nineteenth Century?: Music, Britain, and the First World War*, ed. Michelle Meinhardt (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

beyond controversy that if 'Britishness' had a clear point of origin it was in the later eighteenth century and the nineteenth that it took root.⁸ It is a complex picture because alongside those features that worked to unify the country there were others, equally strong, that acted in favour of diversification; and historians of 'the discovery of Britain' in the period also emphasize diversity within England, and perhaps more markedly across the Celtic nations.⁹ For all these reasons, I should clarify the limits of my argument. My aim is to illustrate how the development of military music and its new role as a component of public display impacted across the country, particularly on the lower classes, so as to change attitudes to the army and, consequently, to promote a more instinctive involvement in the idea of nationhood. I am especially interested in the extent to which the propaganda strategy applied by the state within the country succeeded in influencing the poor, particularly those distant from the main metropolitan areas. Usually no more than observers and untitled actors in the historical process, they were influenced less by the written word and probably the political sermonizing to which many were routinely subjected, than by the impact of the type of sight and sound that military display provided. This contrasts with the culture prevailing in more elevated sectors of society where there was an almost natural familiarity with those grand narratives in which King, state, country, loyalty and patriotism were common components of the vocabulary.¹⁰ Such themes were present because of a persistent and understandable preoccupation with the Napoleonic wars: the threat of invasion was real and there was a need to engage the population in the prospect of mobilization for the defence of the country.

Propaganda and Its Reach

The propaganda strategy at the turn of the new century embraced a belief that music could play a part in stimulating patriotic sentiments. The most evident example of this among metropolitan populations was the Addington government's 1803 commission of Charles Dibdin to compose his series of *British War Songs* to stir public opinion in the direction of the war effort. Within a year the *Songs* were integrated into Dibdin's stage production *Britons, Strike Home! A new entertainment of Sans Souci*, which opened on 17 September with a military band in attendance.¹¹ The texts of the songs were also published by Dibdin in his Music Warehouse imprint. The *Morning Chronicle* proclaimed *Britons, Strike Home* a 'Powerful compliment to the army' and stated that it was 'inspired with

⁸ See, for example, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London: Vintage Books, 1996); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Keith Robbins, *Nineteenth Century Britain: Integration and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁹ See for example, Robbins, *Nineteenth Century Britain*.

¹⁰ For a discussion of contemporary expressions of patriotism and the relationship between patriotism and dissent, see Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism 1750–1914', *History Workshop* 12 (Autumn 1981): 8–37.

¹¹ *Britons, Strike Home!* originates in George Powell's theatrical production *Bonduca* (1695) for which Henry Purcell wrote the music. It was adapted by Dibdin. For a discussion of the song's origins and reception see Martha Vandrei, "'Britons, Strike Home': Politics, Patriotism and Popular Song in British Culture, c. 1695–1900", *Historical Research*, 87/238 (2014): 679–702.

the most patriotic feelings ... and to every description of national character, by the exertions of which this country is so proudly distinguished'.¹²

The *Songs and Britons, Strike Home* had an important impact on patriotic zeal and, more importantly, on the intended outcome of increasing the number of volunteers who entered the regular army. Few things stirred the idea of Britishness among the privileged classes more than the prospect of war, and this is why *Britons, Strike Home* was such a successful enterprise irrespective of its role as a tool of propaganda. The songs, as patriotic songs generally tend to do, romanticized and glorified war, but some also attempted to rationalize it, as this verse from 'Peace and War' shows:

War, for security, for dignity
War, that forever war may cease
War, that deplores, with such benignity,
Those ravages that purchase peace.¹³

The scope of the distribution of Dibdin's songs is difficult to calculate, but they seem to have reached well beyond London. Dibdin was an inveterate touring performer: his 1798 tour, for example, lasted for four months and took in more than forty venues; but by 1803 he had finished with touring and was looking to retire (which he did in 1805). But his reputation as a patriot was established long before the government commission, and many of his songs were heard regularly in the provinces. According to Vice Admiral W.S. Lovell, an eyewitness at the battle of Trafalgar, 'Britons, Strike Home' was played by the bands with the men singing on every ship as the fleet entered combat and 'sent those feelings to our hearts that ensured victory'.¹⁴ Similar sentiments were raised when captured French ships were brought into Portsmouth:

The glorious spectacle of the French men of war prizes being brought into that port, drew thousands of spectators ... who all assembled on the different points of land, and gave them as they passed three such cheers as made the welkin ring again, on which each ship piped all hands on deck, and manned the sides, and returned three as hearty cheers ... and the bands of the different regiments, and drums and inspiring fifes of the Royal Lancashire Regiment, playing and beating 'God Save the King', 'Rule Britannia', and 'Britons strike home'.¹⁵

It is easy to imagine how music might have acted effectively among fighting men, to raise spirits and unify them to a patriotic cause, and similarly when the image of victory was as evident as it was in Portsmouth when captured ships were brought to port, but the extent to which those same songs and the sentiments they proclaimed achieved a more general effect in the home country and across the barriers of class is more open to question. In the provinces, especially among the lower classes, outlooks tended to be defined by the extent of individual

¹² *Morning Chronicle*, 19 September 1803.

¹³ *Songs &c. in Britons Strike Home. A new entertainment of Sans Souci. Written and composed, sung and accompanied by Mr. Dibdin* (London: The Author, 1803).

¹⁴ Vice-Admiral W.S. Lovell, 'A Personal Narrative of Events from 1799–1815', in *Music of the Sea*, ed. David Proctor and Richard Baker (London: National Maritime Museum, 2005): 45.

¹⁵ *Ipswich Journal*, 16 November 1805. Quoted in Martha Vandrei 'Britons, Strike Home', 692.

experiences, and 'Britishness' was a largely abstract concept that may not even have been fully understood.

Music, the Provinces, the People and the Question of Class

Much of what has been written about musical life in the British provinces in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has centred on the aristocracy and the gentry.¹⁶ For this reason, it has often focused on the culture of the country house and the annual congregations that occurred in county towns for festivals and events such as the assizes and horse races, to which concert performances were invariably appended.¹⁷ Most such events were private and subscription-based, and consequently they were witnessed by just a small and self-selected segment of the population. Many performances by military bands, often in their role as the private bands of officers, were also exclusive, as this letter from Mary Nash, written from Ipswich to her sister-in-law Mary Ann Ryan, shows. The letter, dated 4 January 1805, reveals much about the place of military music in the social lives of the wealthy in the provinces:

Many years have pass'd since Ive known so healthful a winter or so gay a Christmas, it commenced Xmas Eve with a supper after 12 at one of our officers, then our gentlemen invited all the Ladys to dine at their mess where we had a superb dinner, Ball and supper, all conducted in the best and easiest stile possible. I never spent 10 pleasanter hours than from 5 that day to 3 next mornng. Col. Gibbon's Lady gave the next party, after which follow'd Bess's ... On Monday next Captn & Mrs Prince give a Ball & after that Captn & Mrs Sack give a party, then the Colonels, Majors & Captns give us a picnic Ball & supper at the assembly room, & several Ladys are still to come forward with their Xmas devoirs, the Royal East Midlesx keep it up in a great stile, the other 4 Regts are dead as mutton, don't like their Ladys & leave them quiet, in fact our Regt is very superior to most, the Officers are so perfectly correct & the least deviation from propriety instantly taken notice of in the most decided manner, I never thought there cd be such good conduct & politeness in an entire Regt.¹⁸

People like Mary Nash and her sister, despite their preoccupation with their social lives, were also familiar with ideas such as patriotism, loyalty and nationhood because such matters were prominent in newspapers and other written records of the time. A more open question can be posed about the extent to which these concepts meaningfully impacted on the majority whose lives were largely confined to matters of which they had personal witness.

At this stage I should offer an explanation for what could be seen as loose categorizations of social groups. I have routinely used terms such as 'lower social classes' and 'the poor' to denote the majority: the provincial, especially rural, social

¹⁶ Several current projects take this focus. See, for example, 'Music, Home and Heritage: Sounding the Domestic in Georgian Britain', University of Southampton, www.southampton.ac.uk/music/research/projects/music-home-and-heritage.page, and research being conducted at Bangor University's Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates, <http://iswe.bangor.ac.uk/>.

¹⁷ Such events had an established ancestry; see for example Michael Tilmouth, 'A Calendar of References to Music in Newspapers in London and the Provinces (1660–1719)', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicles* 1/1 (1961).

¹⁸ University College Cork Archives, Ryan of Inch Collection, BL/EP/R/455(1–2).

groups made up mainly of families and individuals who were poor by any socio-economic determinant of the time that can reasonably be applied. This includes agricultural labourers, the category identified by E.P. Thompson as 'the largest group of workers in any industry' between 1790 and 1830.¹⁹ Though it may seem invidious to categorize or even imply that they can be understood as a monolithic human group possessed of the same or similar attributes and feelings, I am using this expediency because my argument is limited so strictly.²⁰ My purpose is simply to acknowledge and attempt to capture the effect of music on what Golby and Purdue and others have termed 'the crowd' as a phenomenon of mass culture, and to examine the idea that there was a popular response to music in public military display that was essentially *emotional*, and that it contributed to a positive shift in attitudes towards the army, and by association to the idea of nationhood.²¹

Social stratifications are always difficult to define, but many writers of the time drew attention to the sharp differences in material circumstance that existed between the poor and the more elevated sectors of society which were as evident in the rural shires as in urban areas. The inveterate traveller and cleric William Cobbett provided a vivid illustration:

But go down into the villages; invited by the spires, rising up amongst the trees in the dells, at scarcely ever more than a mile apart; invited by these spires go down into these villages, view the large, and once most beautiful churches: see the parson's house, large and in the midst of pleasure gardens, and then look at the miserable sheds on which the labourers reside. Look at these hovels made of mud and straw; bits of glass, or off-cast windows without frames or hinges frequently, but merely stuck in the mud wall. Enter them and look at the bits of chairs or stools; the wretched boards tacked together to serve for a table; the floor of pebble, broken brick, or bare grounds; look at the thing called a bed; and survey the rags on the backs of the wretched inhabitants; and then wonder if you can, that the gaols and the dungeons and treadmills increase, and that a standing army and barracks are becoming the favorite establishments of England.²²

It was to this class that the strategy of promoting patriotism was particularly directed, because it was the majority. Successive governments sought both to muster a local defence force in the form of a militia, and to swell the number of recruits to the regular army. Both endeavours presented formidable challenges. The army was deeply unpopular: it was perceived as disruptive to local life, and its role as a

¹⁹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 232.

²⁰ A further problem concerns the economic data that can be called on with any reliability across the period under consideration. See for example, Elizabeth W Gilboy, *Wages in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), Brian R. Mitchell, *International Historical Statistics* (London: Macmillan, 1998), and especially Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Leaving aside the absence of a continuous thread of data on wages over the entire period, uncertainties about variations in prices also prevail. What data there is shows wages to be higher in towns than in the countryside, but few would dissent from the idea that a segment of society characterized by their socio-economic poverty prevailed in both demographics through the entire period.

²¹ See for example, John Golby and A.W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd* (London: Batsford, 1984), and Mark Harrison, *Crowds and History: Mass Phenomena in English Towns, 1790–1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²² William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, vol. 2 (London: Dent, 1912): 266.

putative police force caused it to be more feared than admired; the unscrupulous behaviour of recruiting parties also gave substance to this perception.

The Army and its Music as a National Network

Despite such challenges it was the military itself that was to prove the most potent agent for change. This was caused by a dramatic shift in the way the army was presented in both the urban and the rural provinces. The change started in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and developed incrementally in the first four decades of the following century: it embraced the entirely new idea that military music and colourful display could generate a positive popular impression by appealing to the *senses* of the populace at large. The process was to a large extent coincidental: the new measures were initially conceived in purely military terms, but it did not take long for military leaders and then the state to utilize their potential in a propaganda strategy.

The traditions of song and dance, usually attached to cyclic festivals and other events such as weddings and funerals, were a feature of provincial and rural life – but for many the sound of military bands that confronted people in the late eighteenth century was unprecedented; the sonic richness and its combination with the visual impact of parading soldiers in colourful uniforms must have made a major impact.²³

Some public military assemblies were particularly striking and were often given added importance by being centred on a royal anniversary, as this account of an event in Canterbury in 1798, from the journal of Caroline Powys, testifies:

We all set off to Barham Downs by ten a.m. to see the troops reviewed. Twenty cannons fired a *feu-de-joie* in honour of the Prince of Wales' birthday (then 36 years of age). The whole garrison of the city paraded on the ground in front of the Royal Cavalry Barracks, and made a most brilliant appearance, forming a square consisting of artillery, the Prince of Wales', and the 17th Dragoons, the West Kent, and Hereford Militia, with the supplementary men attached to each battalion, forming a body of near 5000 men. ... The review over, the music ended with 'God save the King'.²⁴

Many such assemblies were aimed at the upper classes:

After tea we all walked to 'The Oaks', another Green so-called, to see the regiments of the York, Hereford, West Kent, and supplementary militia perform their exercise, and a very pretty sight it was; the music of some of the bands very fine. Colonel Cottrel (a relation of Mrs. Freeman of the Park), was so obliging as to have his band entertaining the ladies (of whom numbers attend every evening), till half-past

²³ Richard Leppert has drawn attention to the impact of the *sight* of music, and its visual impact in performance. Though the focus of his argument (on gender construction) is somewhat different from mine, nonetheless there is considerable relevance in his emphasis on music as an 'activity subject to the gaze, not least because music, both as a social practice and a sonority was thought to possess sensual power'. See Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 64.

²⁴ Caroline Powys, *Canterbury Journal*, 1798. In Emily J. Climensen, ed., *Passages from the Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys of Hardwick House, Oxon. A.D. 1756 to 1808* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1899): 308–9.

nine, always ending with 'God save the King'. After that was concluded we all walk'd home.²⁵

Assemblies of the lower classes were different, and not all drew unequivocal support. In 1791 Reverend A. Macaulay, in his *History of Claybrook*, expressed exasperation about the musical lives of what he termed 'the lower sort of people' who celebrate the annual wakes festivals:

with feasting, with music, and with dancing. The spirit of old English hospitality is conspicuous among the farmers on those occasions, but, with the lower sort of people, especially in manufacturing villages, the return of the wake never fails to produce a week, at least, of idleness, intoxication, and riot.²⁶

Macaulay hints at a dilemma about perceptions of 'the crowd' that were persistent among the authorities. On the one hand, crowds held a dark potential to nourish dissent and were thus a threat to social order,²⁷ but on the other they held equal potential to promote 'mass ebullition around monarchical and military celebrations [that] were consciously encouraged by many of those in power'.²⁸ Mark Harrison characterized this dichotomy as 'Awe and Anxiety', but he also offered the interesting observation that in a period when radicalism and rioting was often seen as an unwelcome feature of many assemblies, the mobilization of the crowd in support of patriotic events occurred in broadly similar proportions. Furthermore, these conflicting behaviours were often acted out by more or less the same people. The aim of those in power was thus to turn the sentiment of the crowd in the direction of the objectives that supported rather than opposed the prevailing authority. For these reasons military processions were eventually aimed at much broader social groups, and even events that were of a modest scale were the subject of careful choreography in which military bands became an essential ingredient.

The Rise and Expansion of Military Music

The importance of military music lies primarily in the way it democratized the musical experience through the scale and breadth of its distribution. By the late eighteenth century, militia and regimental bands were systematically distributed across the country and would have made a striking impression, for despite the relative simplicity of their repertoire, they had rich sonic qualities and were heard to particularly good effect in public places.

A distinction must be made between musicians who played 'instruments of command' and those who were part of what were widely referred to as 'bands of music'. In the former category were drummers and trumpeters. Trumpeters and drummers were part of the official army establishment and were accommodated in the *King's/Queen's Regulations* and funded by the state. Their repertoire

²⁵ Powys, *Canterbury Journal*, 1798.

²⁶ Rev. Aulay Macaulay, *The history and antiquities of Claybrook in the county of Leicester; including the hamlets of Bittesby, Ullesthorpe, Wibtoft and Little Wigston* (Leicester: printed for the author, [1791]): 128.

²⁷ For several examples that explain why such sentiments existed, see Tony Hayter, *The Army and the Crowd in Mid-Georgian England* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

²⁸ Harrison, *Crowds and History*, 169.

was entirely functional, learned by rote and retained in memory.²⁹ On the other hand, bands of music, which did not exist in the British army before the second half of the eighteenth century, had no formal place in the British military system because they were primarily the private bands of officers and were funded by them. Musical literacy was an absolute requirement because the players performed a notated repertoire that was constantly expanding.³⁰ The performance quality was high because they rehearsed and performed together each day; they were disciplined, well equipped and well trained.

Following the Militia Acts of the 1770s, which were passed as concerns about the foreign threat increased, musicians were attached to the various denominations of the irregular (part-time) army as well as the regular (full-time) regiments. Several types of irregular units existed in the period, but the militia, the yeomanry and the volunteers were most prominent. Outside periods of emergency each was made up of part-time soldiers, and they were more evenly dispersed across the British Isles than was the regular army. The Acts ensured that there would be a force of men, organized at county level, mustered by ballot and systematically distributed across the entirety of the British Isles. The requirement for the raising of a militia and the obligation for service in it was mandatory, and its oversight lay in the hands of Lord-Lieutenants of counties.³¹ By 1779 each county in England and Wales had at least one regiment, several had two or three, and larger counties had more: Devon had four, Lancashire five and Yorkshire a total of eight.

As was the case in the regular army, the officer class of the militia was drawn almost exclusively from the aristocracy and landed gentry. The provision of facilities that ensured a social life commensurate with high social status had long been seen as essential in the regular army. The impression made by officers on young ladies, which features so prominently in the literature and images of the period, is verified in other documentary sources and should not be dismissed as trivial: it glorified the army, made it fashionable and as such conferred status. Fine music was an essential enhancement, and regiments became known for the quality of their bands of music and their capacity to provide social entertainment.

All this was conscientiously imitated by militia units across the country, and with good cause: there was an urgent need to galvanize military commands at county level. What could have been a tiresome burden for a land-owning class which had little experience of being told what to do, was turned to a benefit, as social events organized by both regular and militia units assumed prime importance in their social calendars.

²⁹ The word 'functional' is used literally. Irrespective of any subsequent uses of military calls and their referencing in art music, their original purpose was to convey precise signals from commanders to troops. Several sources from the eighteenth century contain signals in notated form. These were undoubtedly notated for record, but there is also no doubt that in practice they were memorized.

³⁰ For an overview of military music in this period, see Herbert and Barlow, *Music and the British Military*.

³¹ For a general discussion of the eighteenth-century militia, see J.R. Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century: The Story of a Political Issue, 1600–1802* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), and Ian F.W. Beckett, *Britain's Part-Time Soldiers: The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558–1945* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2011).

Sight, Sound and the Idea of Display

Evidence of the employment of bands by militia units is abundant. At the turn of the nineteenth century the Shropshire militia had a band of 14 players who played a repertoire that took 113 band books to contain, and in other English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish counties there was similar provision.³² Many units sought the services of black musicians dressed in highly decorative uniforms to play janissary instruments (a feature of many elite London regimental bands in the late eighteenth century, which played to a modish fascination with the exotic). One report from 1807 describes the effect of the janissary musicians as having 'a fierce and remarkable appearance, while hammering away on their brass drums'.³³

There is also plentiful evidence of the witness of military band performances, and it comes from a wide geographical orbit. Boswell commented on the quality of 'the regimental band of musick playing in the square' when visiting the Hebrides in 1773.³⁴ Similar evidence is found in almost every British county, even Rutland, Britain's smallest county, which mustered a total militia force of just 80 men and officers had a band of nine players.

Unsurprisingly, celebrations of royal occasions were seized as an excuse for the assembly of crowds in the cause of patriotism. George III's birthday in 1801 was such an event: in Bristol, a local paper reported the 'sensation of joy that was visible on every countenance' of the 'innumerable spectators'.³⁵ And in Liverpool, amidst the celebrations for the coronation of George IV in 1821,

several companies of a regular Regiment, backed by the mass of the male inhabitants of the town, from the highest to the lowest, and richly spangled with the gems of female beauty, all arranged in their best apparel, and in numbers exceeding the adult population of the town itself, perhaps 80,000 individuals ... formed a spectacle, calculated to arouse at once, feelings of pride and exultation and hope, in the inhabitants of a town that owes its prosperity and elevation to the daring of British seamen and the enterprise of British merchants.³⁶

By the beginning of the new century the idea of military display, which was to flourish fully in the mid-nineteenth century, was just taking root. Evidence of it can be seen in the increased attention given to the design of uniforms and indeed their increased cost, especially to officers.³⁷ Attention to the way officers looked became a preoccupation that bordered on absurdity. Each regiment competed with others to have the most fashionable attire and some uniforms were tailored to fit so tightly

³² See Herbert and Barlow, *Music and the British Military*, Chapter 5.

³³ Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle From the Napoleonic Wars Through the Crimea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996): 129. Myerly cites sources that refer to the aesthetic effect of black drummers. Janissary influences, originating in bands of the Ottoman Empire, were one of the most common features of early military bands in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. See Herbert and Barlow, *Music and the British Military*, 46–8.

³⁴ F.A. Pottle and C.H. Bennett, eds, *Boswell's Journal and a Tour of the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson LL.D* (London: William Heinemann, 1936): 94.

³⁵ *Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal*, 6 June 1821, quoted in Harrison, *Crowds and History*, 170.

³⁶ *Liverpool Mercury*, 20 July 1821, quoted in Harrison, *Crowds and History*, 170.

³⁷ See Western, *The English Militia*, 344–7. Additional costs for the music, which often exceeded the amount generated by the band fund, were often hidden in militia accounts. Direct funding from the government accommodated only a single drummer.

that they effectively rendered their wearers immobile. Young army recruits were shown pictures of uniforms at recruiting stations so they could choose the regiment to which they would be destined. In the absence of any other information capable of being rationally processed, image became overwhelmingly important. There was however a further innovation that was to have a crucial impact on the way soldiers were perceived in the country.³⁸

The practice of soldiers marching to step was not introduced in the British army until the middle of the eighteenth century and its spread as a practice was slow and uneven. The idea was initially opposed on three grounds, each thought completely rational at the time: it resembled dancing, it was reminiscent of the French, and it was 'unmanly'. Humphrey Bland, in his *A Treatise on Military Discipline* (1727), saw its merit, but doubted its value: 'The common Objection against it, is, that it looks too much like Dancing, and makes Men appear with too stiff an Air.'³⁹ Even Wellington, who had a relatively relaxed attitude to the way soldiers dressed 'providing it is in a uniform manner and he [the soldier] is forced to keep himself clean and smart', found it necessary to stress that 'there is one thing I deprecate, and that is any imitation of the French in any manner'.⁴⁰

Despite prevailing attitudes, marching to step was absorbed into common practice by the end of the eighteenth century. It soon became impossible to deny the important added value imparted to those who observed soldiers marching in a disciplined manner, which John MacIntire had described in his *Military Treatise* (1763): 'When Men march in Cadence, it gives them a bold imposing air.'⁴¹ It seems to have been a key feature in the realization that the British military and the use of display could cause an important diplomatic interaction with the British people. The exact point when music became mandatory in this process is difficult to define, but clear indications are evident in military drill manuals published in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. From this time they incorporated bands of music *formally*, and by implication universally, into military drill. It followed that drill instruction was revised across the army to ensure that soldiers on the march played to their audience. Thomas Reide's *A treatise on the duty of infantry officers, and the present system of British military discipline* (1795) stressed that an impression must be conveyed when there is a reasonable chance of observation of marching soldiers by the people:

When a regiment marches from a town or garrison to a camp ... the words *quick march* [are given]. The music plays and drums beat [until] the regiment is entirely clear of the town ... [when the men] *march at ease* On entering ... [a] town, the music plays and drums beat ...

If the commander in chief of an army meets a regiment on a march, it is halted, fronted, arms presented, officers salute, drummers beat a march, and music plays.⁴²

³⁸ For a general discussion of the development of display and imaging in the British army, see Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*.

³⁹ Quoted in Herbert and Barlow, *Music and the British Military*, 24.

⁴⁰ Letter from Wellington to Henry Torrense, November 1811. Quoted in Philip Haythornthwaite, *The Armies of Wellington* (London: Arms and Armour Press, c. 1994): 83.

⁴¹ John MacIntire, *A Military Treatise on the Discipline of Marine Forces* ... (London: T. Davies, 1773): 174.

⁴² Thomas Reide, *A treatise on the duty of infantry officers, and the present system of British military discipline* (London: T. Egerton, 1795): 76–9.

There are two important points here: first, the new emphasis on the sonic and visual appearance of the army could have had no purpose other than to make an impression on those who observed it, and second, from the time that the sound of music became mandatory as a component of drill, the presence of a band of music in a military unit (regular or auxiliary) became a necessity rather than an option.

Tied to this were attitudinal changes in the highest echelons of the army that ensured that the people's experience of display was to be aural as well as visual. It is put neatly in Ronald Hamilton's late eighteenth-century assessment of the army:

Though a band of music may not be thought proper to teach the soldier the cadence in marching, it is ornamental, and by drawing the attention of the people, flatters his military pride at home: abroad also, by the association of ideas, it rouses his desire of distinction, and in every situation cheers his languishing spirits; let him not therefore be without national music.⁴³

This type of reasoning was hard to counter as display became a routine feature of military behaviour across the entire country, and though the scale of such displays may have been modest in comparison to what they were to become later in the nineteenth century, it was seen by the military itself as important. In consequence, rather than avoid the military, people sought out army manoeuvres such as militia exercises and parades, because they provided entertainment, and even events that were aimed at more refined audiences became public music. In Cardiff in 1800,

The Militia went to Church and in the Evening Paraded in the Castle. A great number of Ladies and Gentlemen and others were highly gratified by the Officers causing the Glamorgan Band to play for near 2 Hours in Front of the Castle.⁴⁴

While this account refers somewhat selectively to 'Ladies and Gentlemen and others', it was of course, in common with most such events, *public* music. The editor of the *United Services Journal* reported in 1829 that the recent exclusion of the public from an event that included the Coldstream Guards band at the Tower of London drew an angry response, and a similar disappointment suffered by the public at Wimbledon in 1816, concerning a proposed celebration of the Waterloo victory, caused the crowd to 'set Combe Wood Heath on fire'.⁴⁵

Impact and the Listening Experience

The Militia Acts and the changes to drill regulations caused military units in every part of the British Isles to incorporate music and orderly display when marching. They also ensured that by the 1800s bands of music were widely and broadly equally distributed. Though it was never conceived as such, this was the first

⁴³ Major Ronald Hamilton, *Sketch of the present state of the Army; with reflections on the mode of recruiting* (London, 1796): 45–6.

⁴⁴ John Bird, Diary of John Bird of Cardiff, 27 July 1800. In Hilary M. Thomas, ed., *The Diaries of John Bird of Cardiff: Clerk to the first Marquis of Bute 1790–1803* (Cardiff: South Wales Record Society, 1987): 124.

⁴⁵ Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, 143.

systematic process to establish a network of concerted music ensembles in Britain on such a scale and scope. It is possible, and, judging from the evidence at hand, likely even, that for many of the populace the experience of listening to such bands was a new experience: they had never heard this type of music before. It is difficult to contemplate the effect it had on individuals, for the schism between musical life in the town and country at this time was much greater than is often acknowledged.

Linda Colley makes the point that

it is easy to forget how limited a range of sounds was normally available to the mass of people at this time. Music lessons, concerts and assembly room orchestras were confined to the affluent few, and most men and women had to make do with the human voice, church bells and perhaps the stray fiddler at fairs and weddings.⁴⁶

This was certainly true, but the impact of soldiers marching to music also had an enhanced and probably profound effect on the crowd, as Lewis Mumford noted in more general terms:

The aesthetic effect of regular ranks and the straight line of soldiers ... greatly contributes to the display of power, and a regiment moving thus gives the impression that it would break through a solid wall without losing a beat. That of course, is exactly the belief that the soldiers and the prince desire to inculcate in the populace; it helps keep order without coming to an actual trial of strength.⁴⁷

A more difficult matter to grasp in modern times, as Colley suggests, is the impact that a wider range of sounds – especially, one suspects, of timbres – had on those who had not previously been exposed to them. John Yeoman, an amateur organist from Bath, was so impressed when he heard the Haymarket theatre orchestra for the first time that he found it difficult to muster the words to describe it,⁴⁸ and Charles Dibdin's account of his own first encounter with London theatre music more than hints at such an impact:

I have no power of expression that can give the faintest idea of what I felt when I heard the first crash of an overture. What an immense distinction between this electrical power and the clerical strumming I had been accustomed to in the country! I was music mad; but what astonished me most was that, merely from hearing how the parts were combined and worked together in the band, I completely learnt the secret of composition.⁴⁹

Perhaps the most telling evidence is that of listeners whose lives seem to have been changed by the experience of hearing military bands. What evidence we

⁴⁶ Colley, *Britons*, 325

⁴⁷ Quoted in Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, 129.

⁴⁸ *The Diary of the Visits of John Yeoman to London in the years 1774 and 1777*, edited, with an introduction, by MacLeod Yearsley (London, Watts & Co, 1934): 26. For John Yeoman's listening experiences, see David Rowland, 'John Yeoman's Listening Experiences (1748–1824)', in *The Experience of Listening to Music: Methodologies, Identities, Histories*, ed. Helen Barlow and David Rowland, The Open University, 2019, https://ledbooks.org/proceedings2019/#sec_42_h2_john-yeoman-at-drury-lane.

⁴⁹ Charles Dibdin *The professional life of Mr. Dibdin, written by himself*, vol. 1 (London, 1803): 20.

have of such witnesses reveals interesting consistencies. John Shipp, a destitute orphan who joined the army as a youth and reached the rank of lieutenant, described how, as a boy while working in a turnip field in the depths of a snow-bound winter's day in 1797, he heard the sound of a military band:

I had just put my cold fingers into my mouth for the purpose of warming them, and given the first puff, when I heard the distant sound of martial music. Down went my hands and up went my heels. I ... jumped over the gate; brought up my right shoulder a little; then gave the word forward and marched in double-quick time. The music soon got nearer, or at all events I soon got so near the music that I was glad to halt. Just at this moment the whole band struck up *Over the hills and far away*, which kindled a flame in my bosom which nothing but death can extinguish.⁵⁰

Like Shipp, Joseph Mayett of Quainton in Buckinghamshire (1783–1839) was born into abject poverty and learned literacy at a Sunday school. His autobiography describes the abuse he suffered as a youth working as a labourer on a succession of farms. He worked long hours for little reward and was regularly beaten by his employers. His only recourse was to a religious faith that was itself imposed as a component of the restrictive discipline placed on him by his superiors. It was at a church service in February 1803 that he encountered the sight and sound of the army:

The soldiers that attended there struck my attention more than the service ... all Sergeants and Corporals and musick men and very Clean I was much delighted to see them and hear the musick this was Congenial with my Carnal nature and a great opening for Satan to draw me away from all thoughts of religion.⁵¹

When he was drawn in the militia ballot, he served with the Royal Buckinghamshire King's Own Militia, then transferred to the regular army, where he remained until 1815.

Alexander Alexander was born and soon abandoned as a child in the village of Dundonald in Ayrshire. He too was the victim of persistent cruelty by those appointed to care for him. In 1801 his life was changed by the call of a military parade:

As I sauntered about the streets of Glasgow, I saw the new guard marching to relieve the old, their band playing a cheerful air. This being the first military band I had ever heard, I was quite charmed with it, and followed, unconsciously taking the step and holding up my head. A military enthusiasm instantly seized me, and I felt as if a soldier's life was the only station for which nature had designed me.⁵²

Alexander's testimony is specific – it was the first military band he had ever heard; but one gains the sense that each of these subjects experienced something new, that was, to them, especially important – certainly it was emotional. For Alexander and

⁵⁰ John Shipp, *Memoirs of the extraordinary military career of John Shipp, a late lieutenant in His Majesty's 87th regiment. Written by himself*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst Chance, 1829): 11–12.

⁵¹ Ann Kussmaul, ed., *The Autobiography of Joseph Mayett of Quainton (1783–1839)* ([Aylesbury]: Buckinghamshire Record Society, 1986): 23.

⁵² John Howells, ed., *The Life of Alexander Alexander. Written by Himself* (Edinburgh, 1830), quoted in T. H. McGuffie (comp.), *Rank and File: The Common Soldier at Peace and War 1642–1914* (London: Hutchinson, 1964): 13.

Mayett there is a further sense that the experience was sudden and unexpected. This may well have been true in many such cases, because this is what the military sought to achieve. To John Shipp the experience was not entirely new. Earlier in his memoir he describes his initial encounter with military music, which took place when he was a nine-year-old boy. A recruiting party from the Royal Artillery arrived with 'the shrill notes of a fife and the hollow sound of a distant drum'. The fifer, by his estimate, was no older than he himself:

The pretty little well-dressed fifer was the principal object of my notice. His finery and shrill music were themselves sufficient attractions to my youthful fancy: but what occupied my thoughts more than either was the size of the musical warrior, whose height very little exceeded that of the drum by which he stood.

Boys were often targeted for recruitment on the understanding that their growth to manhood – in their teens – was an imminent prospect, but the narrative delivered by the Sergeant to what Shipp termed 'the gaping rustics by whom he was surrounded' was more widely addressed:

It was all about 'gentlemen soldier' – 'merry life' – 'muskets rattling' – 'cannons roaring' – 'drums beating' – 'colours flying' – 'regiments charging' – and shouts of 'victory! victory!'⁵³

By the end of the Napoleonic wars the objective of the army to turn the people's minds in its favour was largely realized, as was the acknowledgement that military music had played an important part in that process. One commentator remarked in 1806 how common the *sound* of the military became in the country at this time:

Every town ... was a sort of garrison ... in one place you might hear the 'tattoo' of some youth learning to beat the drum, at another place some march or national air being practised upon the fife, and every morning at five o'clock the bugle horn was sounded through the streets, to call the volunteers to a two hour drill ... and then heard the pop, pop, pop of the single musket, or the heavy sound of the volley, or the distant sound of the artillery.⁵⁴

As it became obvious that military bands and militia bands in particular were a public relations asset, they were routinely appropriated by political candidates who also held positions as militia officers. In Chichester in 1823 a militia band supported a candidate who appears to have been its colonel. A yeomanry band attended a dinner for the Conservatives at Lymington in 1839, where various patriotic airs were performed, and another played in 1846 to celebrate the return as Member of Parliament for Buckingham of the Marquis of Chandos, commander of the 2nd Regiment of Buckinghamshire Yeomanry Cavalry. In Bristol in 1812,

The ceremony of the chairing through the principal streets of the city ... was enlivened by the music of the Bristol volunteers, and a private band. The windows of the different streets were crowded to excess, with beautiful females waving blue

⁵³ Shipp, *Memoirs*, 6–7.

⁵⁴ G. Cruikshank, *A Pop-gun Fired off by George Cruikshank, in Defence of the British Volunteers of 1803, Against the Uncivil Attack upon that Body by General W. Napier ...* (London, [1860]): 11.

handkerchiefs and ribbons; greeting with every demonstration of joy, the newly elected member, as he passed.⁵⁵

The presence of military bands conferred legitimacy on an event that was intended to attract a crowd and caused it to be anticipated with a heightened sense of expectation. Such appropriations became so frequent and were having such a noted effect that in 1853 an amendment to the *Expenses at Elections Bill* was put before parliament which imposed fines on any parliamentary candidate who 'shall hire, employ or engage any such band, musical instruments, bandsman or other musicians, bell-ringers, [or] flagmen in their cause'.⁵⁶

By the middle of the century military display was further developed in enactments of mock battles in public entertainments labelled 'tattoos' that were popular throughout the country. It was also being used to promote loyalty in the expanding colonies. The journal of a visitor to Hobart, Australia, in 1828 described the scenes in the town's Barrack Square which had been transformed for a military reception,⁵⁷ and in New Zealand similar representations of authority and patriotism were evident:

His Excellency was received on landing by a guard of honor, consisting of the flank companies of the 99th regt., under the command of Major Reid and Lieut. De Winton, and escorted to Government House (Col. Wakefield's late residence), the band of the 65th regt. playing God save the Queen the day was remarkably fine and a numerous concourse of settlers assembled to witness his landing.⁵⁸

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century most European countries had embraced military display with music as a means of communicating with the mass of their own people to emphasize the authority of the state – be it monarchical or republican; but its adoption at national level in Britain was not smooth. The coronation of Victoria in 1838 was regarded as an organizational shambles, and the funeral in 1852 of the Duke of Wellington, a former Prime Minister and Britain's most celebrated soldier, was yet more embarrassing.⁵⁹ A visiting Belgian journalist, whose report appeared in translation in the *Illustrated London News*, captured what appears to have been a general feeling:

As regards the military display, decidedly this excellent English nation understands nothing whatever about this kind of spectacle ... The fact is, that the spectacle of the military procession was poor ... this part of the ceremony altogether miscarried.⁶⁰

Many hundreds of troops took part in the procession which included 17 large military bands. This was in addition to the 120 singers and instrumentalists at St Paul's, where the concern of the organist John Goss centred on whether the musicians would produce sufficient volume to be heard throughout the Cathedral.

⁵⁵ Harrison, *Crowds and History*, 215.

⁵⁶ See 'Politics and Parliament: Expenses of Elections Bill', *The Times*, Thursday, 7 July 1853, 3.

⁵⁷ *Hobart Town Courier*, 22 March 1828, 3.

⁵⁸ *New Zealand Spectator, and Cook's Strait Guardian*, Saturday, 1 September 1847, 2.

⁵⁹ See Herbert and Barlow, *Music and the British Military*, 226–9.

⁶⁰ *Illustrated London News*, 27 November 1852.

An assessment of later nineteenth-century military ceremony is outside the scope of this essay, but it is interesting that a propaganda strategy that had earlier worked so well in the provinces failed to achieve equal effect at national level. The probability is that these much larger events were based on a flawed assumption that the effect of ceremony increases in proportion to its scale, but at a more basic level they were also badly organized and executed. Lord Robert Cecil, writing in 1862, referred to ceremonial as the acting out of a 'little drama', and lamented the failure of the British to do it well:

some malignant spell broods over all our most solemn ceremonials, and inserts into them some feature which makes them all ridiculous ... Something always breaks down, somebody contrives to escape doing his part, or by some bye-motive is suffered to interfere and ruin it all.⁶¹

We learn a limited amount by comparing earlier local ceremonials to state occasions that were to become a tradition of British life, because they were different species. David Cannadine, when discussing the meaning of such events in the tradition of the British monarchy, emphasizes the importance of context and the extent to which it influenced the reception of ritual.⁶² I would argue that it is indeed differences in social and cultural context, rather than just the passage of time or even the scale of such events, that separate later ceremonials from those that have occupied the bulk of this essay. It settles primarily on effect: on the experience of witnesses, the types of people they were, the way they saw their world, and the way ceremony touched their emotions. It was reported that the greatest emotional response of the crowd at Wellington's funeral procession was stimulated not by the mass of the military ceremonial but by the sight of the Duke's horse being led riderless behind the bier. It was a simple symbolic act, but it humanized the event in an especially potent way.⁶³ In Georgian Britain, military musical display was based on the equally simple idea that, through the impact of sight and sound, routine military drill could stimulate a benign view of the army and by implication the state. The strategy largely succeeded in contributing to a sense among the people that their localities were part of, and embraced within, a British nation. This idea was widely accepted, especially in the rural provinces, because it appealed on an emotional level to sectors of the population who were otherwise innocent of such experiences.

⁶¹ *The Saturday Review*, 9 February 1861, quoted in David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c. 1820–1977', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 101–2. Cecil, who was to become third marquess of Salisbury, published the article anonymously.

⁶² Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual', 106–8.

⁶³ For the relevant sources and for a discussion of Wellington's funeral, see John Wolfe, *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2000): 28–56.