Chapter Thirty-Two

Wider Still and Wider: British Music Criticism since WWII

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The story of British music criticism since the Second World War is straightforward and disheartening. At least, it is straightforward to the various fellow academics, critics, musicians, promoters and assorted music cognoscenti who have kindly (and sometimes not so kindly) shared their views on the matter over the past decade. It is a story of a long golden age, in which venerable figures were given unlimited acres of space to espouse their great wisdom, followed by a precipitous decline in both quantity and quality. It is a perception that echoes a generally nuanced 2001 editorial by Marc Bridle for *Seen & Heard*: 'Since then [the 1980s], critics have lost their influence as movers and shakers, in part due to philistinism amongst arts editors and decreased critical coverage in newspapers. Moreover, the decline of classical music is irrevocably linked to the rise of popular music – and the nefarious (and probably incorrect) belief that this is what readers want.'[2] As will become apparent, this widely- and sincerely-held perception of post-war music criticism in Britain is, at the very least, questionable, if not demonstrably flawed in key respects. It is not that this view is necessarily entirely wrong, but it is certainly simplistic and usually based purely on anecdotal evidence. Throughout the period in question, and especially the decades at each end, the

[1] Various aspects of this chapter draw on research undertaken jointly with Laura Hamer. I am also grateful to Sophie Redfern for assorted bits of useful ferreting.

[2] Marc Bridle, 'The Art of Critics and Criticism?', *Seen & Heard* (November 2001), online, available at: www.musicweb-international.com.

health of British music criticism is more complex and surprising. Moreover, the story told in any history depends on the outlook of the teller and it is a conceit of many of those subscribing to the perspective given above that music criticism means classical music criticism. Popular music criticism does not count in this view; the 'philistinism' and 'decreased critical coverage' is in relation to classical music as written about in traditional media. Popular music criticism tends to be framed as a threat, often in terms uncannily resonant of those used by opponents of immigration. While individual critics or specific articles may be viewed as decent, criticism of popular music is a discipline that is generalized as being an interloper, bringing its uncivilized ways and stealing 'our' reviewing space. And yet, popular music shares the same challenges, as is clear from Simon Frith's observations in chapter twenty-six of this book:

> By the turn of the century, the most interesting rock writing was appearing in online rather than print magazines, and the blogosphere had become a significant outlet for established rock writers, as the space in print outlets was steadily reduced … the fragmentation of the music market, which was both a cause and an effect of new digital music services, meant that rock criticism had less significance anyway.

There are certainly challenges for criticism of all types of music (and other fields) in twenty-first-century Britain, and there has been a discernible decline in some respects, but the prime causes and location of these are not always as commonly supposed, and the resulting picture is more tangled than that produced by simplified nostalgia for a bygone and often misremembered era.

This chapter falls broadly into two parts. The first considers the main body of the period since the Second World War primarily in terms of the tastes and practices of some

notable figures in British music criticism. The second part of the chapter then looks beyond these to consider the context for the British press, notably in the immediate post-war period and then the 1980s, in the hope of providing a deeper perspective for the ensuing discussion of more recent history.

The Post-War Situation 1: Figures of Varying Quality

In the decade immediately after the war, key positions in the British newspapers and journals were filled by men who were already well-established as critics in the 1930s. Like many in their generation, they exhibited in their different ways a broad conservatism suggesting an understandable desire to re-establish the norms that had existed before the war. Ernest Newman continued to make *ex cathedra* pronouncements at *The Sunday Times* and showed no sign of retiring, much to the chagrin of Neville Cardus, who briefly joined the newspaper in 1948 as a cricket writer on his return from spending the war years in Australia writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.[3] After a brief spell at the *Evening Standard* and short period back in Australia, Cardus eventually settled in London where his heart-on-sleeve superior eloquence returned to the pages of *The Manchester Guardian*.[4] To these titans can be added Richard Capell, long-standing critic of *The Daily Telegraph*, and Frank Howes, who had taken over from H. C. Colles as chief music critic at *The Times* in 1943. John Amis later described them as being 'like Canutes trying to stem the tide of modernism'.[5] That's not to

[3] Robin Daniels, *Cardus: Celebrant of Beauty* (Lancaster: Palatine, 2009), p. 270.

[4] *The Manchester Guardian* became *The Guardian* in 1959.

[5] John Amis, 'Critical Pastmasters', *John Amis Online* (16 December 2011), available at: johnamismusic.blogspot.co.uk.

say that there was a lack of insight from the old guard, even if the views often now seem dated. For instance, in a broadly sceptical review of the first British concert performance of Messiaen's *Turangalîla-Symphonie* in 1954, Cardus notes that 'In the first "Chant d'amour" a sentimental strain on the strings reminded me of the saying that if you scratch any contemporary French composer you will find Massenet.'[6] While the comparison may have seemed humorous, even provocative in the mid-1950s, Messiaen did indeed feel kinship with Massenet, recent research revealing that his admiration extended to various borrowings.[7]

As the grand old man of British music criticism, Newman remained compulsive reading, and his continued advocacy of Wagner in the post-war years was telling. He rarely covered live events, preferring to write about musical issues of the day. That he now belonged to a different age, though, was apparent from his comments in 1958 about the BBC radio programme *Desert Island Discs*. Having described it in one article as 'the most comically lunatic of all the B.B.C.'s inventions',[8] a further column a fortnight later was devoted to responding to the resulting postbag, suggesting that 'the castaway might have saved a few of his scores from the wreck' and suggesting that 'any ordinarily intelligent musician' would prefer losing hearing to sight.[9] Newman eventually stepped down as chief music critic at *The Sunday Times* in 1958, a year before his death aged 90. To a degree,

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[6] Neville Cardus, 'Messiaen's Turangalila [sic]: Love Song in Ten Movements', *Manchester Guardian* (14 April 1954), 5.

[7] Yves Balmer, Thomas Lacôte and Christopher Brent Murray, '"Un cri de passion ne s'analyse pas": Messiaen's Harmonic Borrowings from Massenet', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 13/2 (September 2016), 199–377.

[8] Ernest Newman, 'The Mad World of the Diskers [sic]', *Sunday Times* (22 June 1958), 10.

[9] Ernest Newman, 'The Ultimate Things', *Sunday Times* (6 July 1958), 8.

Cardus took over his mantle and was similarly feted, even becoming, in 1966, the first music critic to receive a knighthood (though his cricket writing may have been more instrumental given Prince Philip's enthusiasm for the sport). Perhaps most tellingly, he repeatedly used his 'survey' articles during the 1950s to promote the cause of Mahler's music, still a niche area in Britain at that time.

Alongside these older figures, a younger generation soon emerged, many of whom, such as Andrew Porter, Desmond Shawe-Taylor and William Mann, were advocates for new music of all kinds and change in all sorts of aspects of musical life. The South African-born Porter wrote for various newspapers, including *The Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Express* before joining the *Financial Times* as it introduced music criticism to its pages. Wide-ranging in taste, Porter was allowed an unusually generous amount of space and latitude by the *Financial Times* for his discursive style. His particular enthusiasm for opera and new music also helped reinvigorate *The Musical Times*, which he edited from 1960–67. Shawe-Taylor established his credentials as critic for *The New Statesman*, where he was an articulate supporter of new music and a major authority on the voice, before being appointed in 1958 to the daunting position of successor to Ernest Newman as chief music critic for *The Sunday Times*. Not that *The Sunday Times* had been entirely devoid of fresh blood, for Felix Aprahamian had been appointed as Newman's deputy a decade earlier in 1948. As all who met him will testify, Aprahamian was a larger than life character, neatly encapsulated by John Amis's fond recollection that 'if Felix were put into a book his character would seem overwritten. No one could be at the same time like something out of Proust and something out of P. G. Wodehouse. But he was.'[10] Aprahamian's innate flamboyance was disciplined in his writing by adopting Newman's strict precision and professed objectivity. Crucially, as a

[10] John Amis, *Amiscellany: My Life, My Music* (London: Faber, 1985), pp. 67–8.

friend of both Poulenc and Messiaen, among numerous others, Aprahamian was closely acquainted with the radical musical developments of the new generation of composers in Paris and beyond, even if he was not untempered in admiration for them. Similarly, when William Mann joined the music staff of *The Times* in 1948, aged just 24, his writings acted as a progressive counterweight to Frank Howes, who, despite having been a keen champion of British composers such as Walton and Vaughan Williams between the wars, struggled with Britten and Tippett, never mind the continental avant garde. A staunch advocate of opera in English, Howes also believed strongly in the policy of *The Times* that criticism should be anonymous. Howes's retirement came in 1960 and it was entirely apt that Mann should replace him as chief music critic on the cusp of a decade characterized as looking forwards rather than back.

The figure straddling the generations was William Glock, who had written for *The Telegraph* in the early 1930s and long advocated engaging with the various new compositional paths being forged. After *The Telegraph*, Glock wrote for *The Observer* until October 1945 when the editor, Ivor Brown, reportedly exclaimed that 'one more article about Britten, Tippett, Bartók and co., and I'll fire you'. The following Sunday Glock wrote about Bartók and was duly sacked.[11] Brown was profoundly mistaken, though, if he thought that would stem the modernist tide. Glock would go on to become arguably the most influential figure in British music with his appointment in 1959 as Controller of Music at the BBC, The Proms being added to his portfolio the following year, giving free rein to implement his conviction that new music and new areas must be explored. The ground was laid for the

[11] Amis, 'Critical Pastmasters'. Glock's last review for *The Observer* appeared on 28 October 1945 and discussed interesting aspects of upcoming concerts, including works by Bartók and Tippett in Liverpool, and Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Britten in London.

resulting revolution in both broadcast and concert programming not just by Glock's writings – after *The Observer* he was briefly a critic for *The Scotsman* then *The New Statesman* as well as founding and editing the journal *The Score* – but also those of the more progressively-minded post-war generation, such as Porter, Shawe-Taylor and Mann.

Glock's move from critic to taking charge of what is now BBC Radio 3 and The Proms was repeated three decades later by Nicholas Kenyon, who (presumably coincidentally) also wrote for *The Observer* beforehand.[12] Such movement between the role of critic and that of administrator or promoter was not unusual. Aprahamian's multifarious activities, for instance, included a period as *de facto* promoter for various French performers, being employed as a consultant for United Music Publishers (UK distributors for almost all French publishers), advisor representing the Delius Trust, and a leading voice in various organ societies. All of this was at the same time as writing for *The Sunday Times*.[13] Similarly, John Amis, London critic of *The Scotsman* after Glock, was Sir Thomas Beecham's manager for a time, worked for the London Philharmonic Orchestra and was administrative director of Dartington Summer Music School. These diverse activities reflect, perhaps, the fact that, even in the 1950s and 1960s, what would now be termed portfolio careers were the norm for anyone working in the arts. It was usual for critics to be active participants in the musical world, advocates from within, rather than dispassionate observers. That Aprahamian would

[12] Kenyon became Controller of BBC Radio 3 in 1992 and became director of The Proms in 1996. He left the BBC in 2007 to become Managing Director of the Barbican Centre in London.

[13] For an enjoyable insight into the range of Aprahamian's activities, see Felix Aprahamian, *A Life in Music and Criticism*, Lewis and Susan Foreman (eds), (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015).

review an organ concert given at the Royal Festival Hall for which he had written the programme notes, and sometimes advised on the music, or a French performer whose engagements he had arranged, was not seen by him, nor many others, as problematic. Similarly, Amis admitted that, in the post-war period, the anonymity of reviews in several newspapers meant that critics could cover for each other, sometimes even writing two reviews of the same event with differing perspectives.[14]

Aprahamian and Amis lacked formal musical training, bringing the enthusiasm and inquisitiveness of the autodidact, as did in their differing ways Edward Greenfield or Michael Kennedy. While not born into such abject poverty as his esteemed *Manchester Guardian* colleague Neville Cardus, Greenfield was from a working class background. Having done his national service then studied languages and law at Cambridge, he served a similar apprenticeship at the newspaper to that of his older colleague, working first as a filing clerk, then a lobby correspondent, before getting the chance to write about music as a record critic.[15] Similarly, Kennedy started at the Manchester office of *The Telegraph* as a tea boy in 1941 aged just 15, returning as a night editor following service in the Royal Navy. He started writing about music for the newspaper in 1948 and became a staff critic in 1950.

Despite such self-taught figures, there was marked rise in the number of musicologist-critics, who not only had university music degrees, doctorates in some cases, but also continued scholarly research alongside their criticism. As Andrew Porter noted, ‘in England,

[14] Amis, *Amiscellany,* p. 165.

[15] Stephen Walsh, ‘Portrait of a Guardian Music Critic’, *The Spectator* (8 February 2014, online), available at: www.spectator.co.uk.

a line between musicology and musical journalism is not strictly drawn',[16] and it was not uncommon for critics to hold posts in universities or music colleges before, after or even alongside their newspaper careers. While Newman led the way, notably with his work on Wagner, Michael Cooper, Winton Dean, Joan Chisell, Stanley Sadie, Stephen Walsh and Barry Millington among the following critical cohorts made telling contributions in both spheres. In particular, Cooper, who wrote for *The Telegraph* gave insight into French repertoire at a time when, despite the two World Wars, Germanic thought and culture still predominated, while a generation later Millington addressed issues of anti-Semitism in Wagner. A specialist in Schumann, Joan Chissell taught at the Royal College of Music, Oxford University and University of London in the 1940s, before tempering the male hegemony of the critical world by joining *The Times* in 1948 (the same year William Mann) as its first female critic. Stanley Sadie joined *The Times* a generation later, in 1964, moving in 1981 to the *Financial Times*, by which time he had overseen the first of edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and was already working on various supplementary volumes as well as being editor of *The Musical Times*.

The presence of active scholars among the critics meant that there was informed debate, from some quarters at least, as research was put into practice. In particular, as the push for historically informed performance gained increasing traction from the 1960s onwards, there were critics aware of the scholarship underpinning what were often viewed initially as cranky attempts at musical archeology.

[16] Andrew Porter, *Music of Three Seasons 1974–1977* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1978), p. ix.

> People have begun to realize that style in performance is no abstract thing, and that it cannot be dissociated from instruments themselves … During 1968 I also heard, in the Purcell Room, Couperin on a harpsichord of authentic size and specification, and Mozart on a contemporary fortepiano: in each case use of the proper means gives sharper insight on the composer's ends.[17]

Not that there was an un-nuanced welcome for all such experiments, as is clear from a 1974 round-up of recordings by Sadie where Jean-Claude Malgoire's approach to Handel reminded him 'that authenticity may have its painful side', going on to observe that it would be preferable for performers 'to think in terms of a composer's ideal rather than some possible, disagreeable actuality'. By contrast, the same round-up enthuses about a Mozart horn concerto 'on a natural horn, whose patchiness of tone – expected, of course, by Mozart – puts phrase after phrase in a new light'.[18]

If what would later come to be termed Historically Informed Performance increasingly challenged the hegemony of the late-Romantic approach to performance in the 1970s, Glock's encouragement of new (and old) music at the BBC was reinforced by critics such as Bayan Northcott and Paul Griffiths who were thoroughly immersed in the various strands of contemporary experimentation. Neither Northcott nor Griffiths trained initially in music. Griffiths trained in biochemistry and microbiology but immediately started a career in music writing, editing articles on twentieth-century music for *The New Grove*.[19] He started

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[17] Stanley Sadie, 'Sound as a Clue to Style', *The Times* (Friday 17 January 1969), 12.

[18] Standley Sadie, 'The Sound of Authenticity', *The Times* (Saturday 15 June 1974), 11.

[19] Rosemary Williamson, 'Griffiths, Paul' *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, available at: www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed 17 January 2017).

writing for *The Times* as a freelancer in 1973, rapidly being recognized as an authority on new currents in music with fluency of word and thought in areas often thought difficult. He became chief music critic at *The Times* for a decade from 1982 and also wrote articles for numerous journals, as well as books on key figures such as Barraqué, Boulez, Cage, Ligeti, Maxwell Davies, Messiaen and Stravinsky, along with several influential overviews of new music.[20] Having read English at Oxford, Northcott spent much of the 1960s working as a teacher, but, his developing interest in composition turned at the end of the decade to formal study at Southampton with Alexander Goehr and Jonathan Harvey. He became music critic for the *New Statesman* in 1973, then *The Sunday Telegraph* in 1976, writing primarily about new music.[21] Northcott joined *The Independent* as chief music critic when it launched in 1986 and, as Fiona Maddocks, the first classical music editor, recalls 'the Saturday music page every week had a big article from Bayan on really quite tricky subjects and they were not commercial subjects at all, they were entirely music driven'.[22]

As a new national broadsheet, *The Independent* shook up arts coverage in British newspapers, with much more explicit delineation of different types of music being reviewed,

[20] Notably, *Modern Music: A Concise History from Debussy to Boulez* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978); *Modern Music: The avant garde since 1945* (London: Dent, 1981); *Modern Music and After: Directions since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[21] Rosemary Williamson, 'Northcott, Bayan' *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, available at: www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed 17 January 2017).

[22] Jennifer Skellington, 'Transforming Music Criticism? An Examination of Changes in Music Journalism in the English Broadsheet Press from 1981 to 1991', unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford Brookes University (2010), 439.

such as a specific music page with a feature at the top and usually three reviews below.[23] It also attempted to break the London-centric critical focus. Whereas one of the contracted critics from other newspapers would, in the words of Maddocks, 'be sent to Manchester or to Birmingham or Liverpool or to Glasgow or Edinburgh to sort of look around, report, and come back again', *The Independent* would use local voices such as Raymond Monelle.[24] Unsurprisingly, the influence of *The Independent* on the way that newspaper criticism was undertaken was at its height in the early years of its existence, for its rivals soon adopted aspects of its approach.

There were, of course, other outlets for music criticism aside from newspapers, notably various magazines and journals. Indeed, for much of the period covered by this chapter, magazines and fanzines were generally the prime, if not the only outlet for written criticism of popular music and jazz. Many of these were led by consideration of reviewing recordings, while, in the classical sphere, *Gramophone* was the enduring survivor with no sustained competition until the 1990s. Broadcasting also provided new opportunities, with radio programmes such as 'Musical Magazine' on the BBC's Home Service having periodic reviews of events, recordings and books on music.[25] BBC Radio 3's long-running *Record Review* dates itself back to 1949 on the Third Programme and 1957 as a regular slot, though the Light Programme[26] featured a weekly programme with the same name from 1945 to

[23] Ibid., 440.

[24] Ibid., 438.

[25] Details of individual programmes can be found by searching the BBC Genome Project website: genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/.

[26] The Third Programme and Light Programmes were the names of BBC radio stations, not individual programmes.

1946, usually presented by Christopher Stone, *The Gramophone*'s London editor. Not that such opportunities necessarily represented a broadening of the pool of critics, as, throughout the period of this chapter, many of those writing for national newspapers also contributed to *The Gramophone* and appeared on BBC programmes.

Closely related to BBC output was the magazine *The Listener*. Originally set-up in 1929 to publish scripts and transcripts of talks on BBC programmes, it soon featured previews and reviews as well as essays. Aimed at an intelligent readership, with relatively long essays that sometimes stopped only a little way short of musicological, its eventual demise in January 1991 was much lamented in some quarters. In musical circles it is sometimes described as having being replaced by *BBC Music Magazine*, which launched the following year. However, this can only be partially accurate as music formed a relatively small portion of *The Listener*'s content, which also encompassed areas as diverse as drama, gardening and chess. In fact, *BBC Music Magazine* was more of a rival to *Gramophone*, though it was actually a general music title, with recordings forming just part of its remit. Having played a crucial role at *The Independent*, Fiona Maddocks was engaged as the founding editor of *BBC Music Magazine* with the thinking behind the new glossy being in part to attract the new potential audience for classical music revealed by the success of *The Three Tenors*.[27] In September 1992, just after the first issue of *BBC Music Magazine* appeared, a new radio station, Classic FM, started broadcasting and itself soon launched a magazine. Marked as it is by such new ventures, which had parallels in other musical genres, as well as the arrival of *The Independent* and a general expansion of overall coverage, this period may be viewed as representing a high water mark in terms of music criticism in its traditional print formats. In order to put recent developments into perspective, it is necessary

[27] Skellington, 'Transforming Music Criticism?', 443–4.

to consider the broader context of newspaper publishing, not just in the new millennium, but across the period as a whole.

The Post-War Perspective 2: Figures of Varying Quantity

Just as with other aspects of life, the Second World War had a discernible impact on music criticism in Britain for years after the end of fighting in the summer of 1945. The outbreak of war saw the British government use emergency powers to impose rationing on newsprint, controlling not just the number of pages in newspapers and magazine, but also pegging their circulations at their 1939 levels. As the war continued, the restrictions on the number of pages tightened. In 1939, 'full sheet' or 'broadsheet' daily newspapers averaged 16–24 pages. By 1945, this had fallen to 4 pages for most papers, notable exceptions being *The Times* with 8–10 pages, *The Manchester Guardian* with 6–8 pages and *The Telegraph* with 4–6 pages.[28] The situation was similar for magazines, with *The Listener* dropping from a pre-war size of 52 pages to 28 pages. This had an obvious effect on every aspect of newspaper content, with the number and length of music reviews and news pieces falling dramatically.

Such a situation during the war is not so surprising. However, as with food, clothing and fuel, the severely damaged infrastructure, combined with an economy bankrupted and distorted by fighting the war, meant that rationing continued until well into the 1950s. In 1954, the United Kingdom's supply of paper was still only two-thirds of pre-war levels,[29] reflected by the fact that *The Times*, which had 20 pages on 1 September 1939 and a mere ten

[28] Figures from J. Edward Gerald, *The British Press under Government Economic Controls* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 201.

[29] Gerald, *The British Press*, p. 31.

on 1 September 1945 had just 12 pages on 1st September 1954. Even when the supply of paper became more plentiful, the newspapers were in no rush for the restrictions to be lifted. In marked contrast to the cut-throat world of the 1930s (and the present day), which saw numerous titles come and mostly go, the government controls of the 1940s and 1950s provided an absolutely predictable business model in which significant growth in newspaper size or circulation was impossible without government approval while decline was unlikely. The situation was neatly summarized by Lord Beaverbrook, who ironically observed that the government had given the press freedom in four respects; freedom from competition, advertising revenue, newsprint and enterprise.[30]

What this meant in practical terms is that, from the outbreak of the war until the late 1950s, the amount of writing about music in newspapers and journals was significantly less than before the war. For example, in the week beginning 6 June 1946, *The Times* carried 7 live reviews of around 300 words and one record review (see Table 32.1), while *The Manchester Guardian* published just four reviews. By the mid-1960s, the number of reviews in *The Times* had more than doubled and, while some were barely 230 words, others were closer to 650 words. In terms of classical content, there was a slight dip in the number of concert reviews in 1988, but this was offset by a long review of records. Moreover, there was now also popular music content with one article, one review and a 'rock' round-up of recordings, while jazz also had two gig reviews as well as a record review. Far from a drastic decline, the equivalent week in 2011 saw an expansion of coverage. Popular content had increased significantly and, although there are slightly fewer classical concert reviews, this is more than balanced by the articles, one of which 'When Barenboim met Boulez' is over 1500 words and was also advertised in a banner on the newspaper's front page.

[30] Gerald, *The British Press*, p. 34.

Year(all 6–11 June)	Concert Reviews	Record Reviews	Articles
1946	7	1	0
1966	17	0	2
1988	16 (13 classical, 1 popular, 1 jazz)	3 (1 classical, 1 rock, 1 jazz)	1 (popular)
2011	18 (10 classical, 7 popular, 1 jazz)	11 (3 classical, 6 popular, 1 jazz)	6 (1 general, 2 classical, 3 popular) + 3 obituaries (2 popular, 1 classical)

Table 32.1: Samples of Music Content in *The Times*

While there are naturally variants, the figures in Table 32.1 broadly reflect those for further sampling. What becomes clear is that the when reviews of 'rock' events appeared on a more frequent and regular basis in *The Times* from the 1980s, any consequent reduction in classical coverage was slight as overall music coverage increased, at least until the mid-2010s. In other words, popular music was part of the expansion of British newspapers in size and scope that occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century, with much larger sections for sport and areas such as cookery, motoring or holidays on a more regular basis.

Such figures are given greater nuance for a specific period in Jennifer Skellington's commendably detailed study of changes in music coverage in British broadsheets between 1981 and 1991, one strand of which sampled three daily newspapers and three Sunday titles in each year of the decade. She found, for instance, that the number of words devoted to classical coverage in *The Guardian* stayed broadly steady, peaking in 1988, the figure for *The Times* in this decade declined, yet there was a notable increase in *The Sunday Times* towards

the end of the decade. In terms of rock and pop, there was a slight increase in *The Guardian*, a significant one in *The Times*, while the *Sunday Times* actually saw a fall. Even this is simplifying, for the figures for *The Guardian* show a fall for rock and pop at the end of the period and a rise for the number of words given to classical music.[31] Skellington's study finds slightly different experiences within each newspaper and, if repeated for the following decade, might find significantly different results. For instance, while the period covered by her study partially supports the notion of classical coverage in *The Times* being squeezed by popular music, Graham Stewart is clear that classical reporting strengthened at the end of the decade with the appointment of Richard Morrison as arts editor and 'during the nineties coverage increased again'.[32]

Alongside such quantitative matters, there has also been a significant qualitative change in the nature of British newspapers over the last half century prompted initially by the rise of broadcast media, especially the advent of rolling news channels towards the end of the last century. This transformation might be characterized rather simplistically as moving from reporting what has happened to commenting on it or on what might happen as a consequence. Given that they are expected to convey views, much of what critics wrote already anticipated this transformation. Even so, reviews that pre-date it have a much greater sense of straightforward provision of information. Critics were also responsible for brief news items that would now be regarded as too mundane without contextualization or comment. The following punctilious announcement in *The Times* is a typical unmediated regurgitation of a press release:

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[31] Jennifer Skellington, 'Transforming Music Criticism?', 74–80.

[32] Graham Stewart, *The History of The Times: The Murdoch Years* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 447–52.

COVENT GARDEN OPERA

A change in the cast of Mr. Benjamin Britten's opera *Gloriana* at the Royal Opera House to-morrow night will see Miss Constance Shacklock in the part of Queen Elizabeth I and Mr. John Lanigan in that of Essex. These two singers will also perform these parts on July 9. On Friday the Convent Garden Opera Company will give the first of four performances of *Die Meistersinger* under Mr. Clemens Krauss. All of them will be sung in German, and in the cast will be Mr. Frederick Dalberg, Mr. Murray Dickie, Mr. Richard Holm, Mr. Hans Hopf, Mr. Karl Kamann, Mr. Benno Kusche, Mr. Paul Schoeffler, Miss Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, and Miss Shacklock.[33]

While critics were generally adroit at grabbing their readers' attention at the opening of reviews, it was not uncommon for them to open in a similarly prosaic manner: 'Mr David Oistrakh played two concertos with the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Albert Hall last night before a large audience – Brahms's, which was conducted by Mr. Norman Del Mar, and Khachaturian's, conducted by the composer, who is here with the part of artists and scientists now on a visit from Russia to this country.'[34]

The shift in approach by newspapers, from which music coverage was not immune, was most marked in the 1980s. Profound changes in technology with the introduction of computer typesetting and new forms of printing went hand-in-hand with the greater emphasis on comment and a more image-led approach to page construction. Skellington summarizes the effects of this transformation on music criticism as follows:

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[33] Unsigned, 'Covent Garden Opera', *The Times* (29 June 1953), 11.

[34] Unsigned, 'Mr. David Oistrakh: Two Concertos', *The Times* (26 November 1954), 5.

> At the beginning of the period, music-related writing typically appeared on a single arts page, comprising a series of overnight concert reviews predominantly associated with classical music, alongside an occasional small black and white photographic accompaniment, with written material most often supplied by long-standing music specialists employed directly by the newspaper, although in some cases by editors or staff writers from other areas of the newspaper who possessed an interest in music. However, by the end of the period examined newspapers had dramatically expanded in size and music coverage was often placed not only on the arts pages but also within the many different component parts of the newspaper, including supplementary magazines; music coverage was frequently accompanied by large pictorial illustrations, which were increasingly printed in colour, and music writing was more often provided by an increased number of freelance music journalists. By the end of the period examined, the broadsheet press appears to have shifted its stance to one which readily embraced popular music coverage, to the extent that the former dominance of classical music was being challenged, and overnight concert reviewing was diminishing in favour of feature writing, an approach preoccupied with personalities and celebrity rather than the music itself.[35]

This qualitative change in the nature of newspapers underlines the fact that they are very different beasts today from 35 or 70 years ago, a point that is conveyed succinctly by considering a little more quantitative data. While the pagination of *The Times* had increased in the late 1950s to its pre-war proportions of around 24 pages and grown to around 32 pages

[35] Jennifer Skellington, 'Transforming Music Criticism?', 14.

by the 1980s, the move away from hot metal to computer-based printing in that decade presaged a vast expansion so that editions in the 2010s regularly comprised substantially more than 100 pages. A whole host of caveats need to be made with such comparisons, not least that the page size was smaller and the font size and number of columns changed at various points over the period in question. Even charting word counts can be misleading since modern newspapers use images to a far greater extent so that a piece with fewer words may have much greater prominence on the page. In essence, a British newspaper from the 2010s bears as much resemblance to its counterpart from 60 years ago as an out-of-town supermarket does to a 1950s corner store, containing many things that were simply not thought part of their remit before.[36] This is obvious at a glance since, in the post-war period, the front pages of *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian* carried not news, but were filled with classified advertisements. While most lower-brow newspapers had the now-familiar front-page headlines from early in the century, and most broadsheets changed during the war, *The Manchester Guardian* only adopted what many regarded as an uncouth American trait in September 1952 and *The Times* did not relent until May 1966.

In terms of where music fits into these changes, it is dangerous to generalize and all sorts of factors can distort the picture. An extreme instance comes from the fact that there

[36] For more on the methodological challenges of charting changes in newspaper coverage of music criticism, see Christopher Dingle and Laura Hamer, 'False Memories and Dissonant Truths: Digital Newspaper Archives as a Catalyst for a New Approach to Music Reception Studies', in Clare Mills, Michael Pidd and Esther Ward (eds), *Proceedings of the Digital Humanities Congress 2012*. *Studies in the Digital Humanities* (Sheffield: HRI Online Publications, 2014), 1–22. Skellington's excellent thesis takes a mixed approach to charting developments across a single decade.

was no musical content at all in *The Times* for nearly a year as an industrial dispute caused the paper to cease production from 1 December 1978 to 12 November 1979. Many of the figures provided in this chapter have come from *The Times*, but other titles will show a different ebb and flow. These are caused not just by major external factors, but also matters as local as the character of the editor and owner of each newspaper, who will each have their own preferences. For instance, coverage of music in *The Telegraph* contracted significantly in the first decade-and-a-half of the new century. Conversely, music content at *The Guardian* suffered no worse than other areas of the newspaper (which is not to say it did not suffer) in the various rounds of belt-tightening in the 2000s, possibly a reflection of the fact that the editor was the classical music-loving Alan Rusbridger. It is too early to tell the extent or nature of change prompted by his departure at the end of 2015.

Among critics themselves, there was much disquiet in the new century, as typified by comments made in 2006 by Tom Sutcliffe, deputy arts editor at *The Guardian* until 1985:[37]

> As we've got towards the year 2000 … editors don't really see any distinction between the different forms of music … They feel that classical music doesn't have as a large an audience, isn't as interesting to their readers, their young readers in particular … so they feel they are still doing a perfectly good job even though the perception among classical music critics of the Critics' Circle,[38] of which I'm Chairman, is that in fact the situation is a complete disaster.[39]

[37] Not to be confused with his namesake who, among other things, was the first arts editor at *The Independent*.

[38] A kind of society for arts critics, though many are not members.

[39] Jennifer Skellington, 'Transforming Music Criticism?', 493.

Sutcliffe goes on to bemoan the coverage of culture as entertainment, which is 'simply to provide people with a useful consumer guide'.[40] It is a sentiment that echoes Charles Kensington Salaman's observation about the general state of music and criticism that 'We are living in a utilitarian, not an artistic or poetic age. This is the "golden age" of royalties and advertisements! From the dignity of a profession, music appears to be fast descending to a trade'. Except that Salaman was speaking in the nineteenth century.[41] Closer to Sutcliffe's time, and with his newspaper in mind, Cardus referred to the subeditors' room at *The Guardian* as 'the abattoir' for their lack of sensitivity to the subject, acting 'like a butcher cutting a weekend joint'.[42]

Despite this, the fact that there are many precedents for Sutcliffe's remarks does not necessarily invalidate them. The move away from reporting to commenting, along with a greater concentration on images, made it harder to justify chronicling events that were neither part of a series nor had repeat performances. In other words, the issue was not the amount of space given to various genres of music, but the change in sensibility of newspapers. Hilary Finch, one of the staff critics for *The Times* is clear that classical coverage in the 1980s 'wasn't so much elbowed out by the other genres of music as by features' noting that 'once you got a great big feature at the top with a great big photo … it halved your space for

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Charles Kensington Salaman, 'On Musical Criticism', *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 2nd Sess. (1875–1876), 7 [1–15].

[42] Christopher Brookes, *His Own Man: The Life of Neville Cardus* (London: Methuen, 1985), p, 257.

reviews'.[43] Such observations are an important corrective to the view of popular and classical music as being in competition, opposition even. This easy fallacy reflects the anxieties and prejudices of both camps (or, rather, those who view themselves as belonging to a camp, regardless of which it is). In terms of British outlets, while there are numerous variations from time to time and newspaper to newspaper, total coverage for music expanded dramatically from the 1980s until well into the 2000s, sometimes dramatically. Even in the less frivolous tabloids, what might be called the semi-serious press, the evidence can be surprising. Eric Mason, the *Daily Mail* music critic in the 1960s generally had around 130 words, sometimes much less, to convey his thoughts. In the 2000s, there was considerable coverage of popular music, but classical music had not disappeared and Mason's successor, David Gillard, generally had around 380 words to play with. Moreover, it is also important to remember that newspapers going defunct is not a new phenomenon. For instance, younger composers in the post-war years found a keen advocate in Scott Godard until his newspaper, the liberal-minded *News Chronicle*, was absorbed by Mason's employers at the right-wing *Daily Mail*.

One consequence of popular music and other genres taking a regular place alongside criticism of classical music in newspapers was a greater demarcation of music into sub-categories. When William Mann wrote his famed article about The Beatles in *The Times* in 1963, the surprise, outrage for some, was that he viewed the music worthy of discussion. The notion that this would need a distinct kind of critical coverage did not occur. Music critics in newspapers wrote about any music that was deemed of interest, whether Beethoven or The Beatles, jazz, folk or Chinese opera. Classical music dominated, but other genres did get discussed. When *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was released in 1967, it was

[43] Jennifer Skellington, 'Transforming Music Criticism?', p. 401.

reviewed in *The Guardian* by Edward Greenfield as part of his 'Gramophone Records' column alongside releases of music by Copland and Penderecki, Greenfield musing that 'In intention and even in execution they [Aaron Copland and Krzysztof Penderecki] do not strike me as very different from some of the way-out sounds on the Beatles' latest LP … There is no longer any need, thank goodness, to apologise for talking seriously about Beatles music'.[44] As they came to be more regular features, newspapers started to delineate between types of music in their layout. By the end of the century, it was commonplace to have separate columns or sections variously for classical, pop or rock, jazz, folk and/or world music, each with their own specialist critics. By the 2010s, on newspaper websites such as theguardian.com, arts coverage is now within a 'Culture' section, 'Music' primarily refers to various forms of popular music, while 'Classical' is a distinct category. As such demarcations became more common in the 1980s, critics within each field were often wide-ranging. For instance, Richard Williams's 1983 'rock' columns included artists as diverse as Luther Vandross, Elkie Brookes, Culture Club, Nile Rodgers, Joni Mitchell, New Order and Eddy Grant. In terms of criticism, the term 'rock' was largely synonymous with 'popular', but denoted a seriousness of intent by the writer. This is similar to the way that most of those writing about classical music for newspapers and magazines tended to describe themselves as critics rather than journalists.[45] It is also worth noting that the prestige attached to criticism in a given publication varied according to the genre, Matt Brennan observing that:

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[44] Edward Greenfield, 'Gramophone Records', *The Guardian* (Monday 12 June 1967), 7.

[45] While readily noticed anecdotally, this trait is one of the emerging strands in Gemma Harries and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, 'The Culture of Arts Journalists: Elitists, Saviors or Manic Depressives?', *Journalism*, 8/6 (2007), 619–39.

> This press hierarchy for the independent rock field finds glossy music magazines at the top and broadsheets roughly at the bottom of the list. But this hierarchy is reversed in the jazz sector: quality dailies become the most desirable form of coverage, while jazz magazines are relegated to the bottom.[46]

Told from the perspective of popular music, the notion that there has been a persistent expansion of coverage from the 1950s onwards lacks nuance. It is possible to cite the appearance of magazines, such as *New Musical Express* (*NME*) in 1952 and equally significant shift in various newspapers towards a much more populist approach, the gradual appearance of rock criticism in broadsheet newspapers and successive waves of new magazines. However, brief consideration of an iconic title like *Melody Maker* is instructive. Having started in 1926 essentially as a jazz journal, the 1950s saw coverage of pop and jazz side-by-side, but, by the 1960s, its coverage was almost exclusively pop in orientation.[47] This gradual transformation was significant for the development of rock criticism, but was doubtless mourned by the *Melody Maker*'s jazz aficionados. Despite numerous competitors, the magazine thrived in its new guise, though, as noted by Simon Frith in chapter twenty-six, a group of its writers left in 1970 to form a new magazine, *Sounds,* and an injection of new blood from the underground press at *NME* left *Melody Maker* trailing behind the circulation of its principal rival. New competition came in the 1980s and 1990s, initially from new teen-oriented titles such as *Smash Hits* on the populist side and *The Wire* for more searching

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[46] Matt Brennan, 'The Rough Guide to Critics: Musicians Discuss the Role of the Music Press', *Popular Music,* 25/2 (2006), 225 [221–34].

[47] Barney Hoskyns, '*Melody Maker,* 1926–2000, RIP', *Rock's Backpages* (15 December 2000), available at: www.rocksbackpages.com.

readers, then glossies like *Q* and *Uncut* that also encompassed an older readership. Despite these newcomers, *Melody Maker* retained its reputation as the musician's paper, covering indie and alternative rock. As the new millennium approached, its circulation dropped from its 1970s high of 200,000 to 32,500[48] and the magazine folded in 2000. According to Dave Laing, it was a failure to engage with the emerging dance music of the 1980s that was ultimate the principal factor in the closure of *Melody Maker*.[49] However, the establishment of rock criticism and more extensive coverage of popular music in newspapers and non-music magazines may also have been a factor. As Caroline Sullivan observed, 'suddenly everyone from broadsheets to fashion magazines were covering the antics of Oasis and Blur … *Melody Maker* should have been ideally placed to benefit, but when the Gallaghers began turning up in *Vogue* there was no need to read an inky weekly'.[50] The hard-won success of rock criticism within the mainstream may have undermined the utility of some specialist titles.

What this brief digest of the existence of the *Melody Maker* underlines is the fact that the fortunes of newspapers and magazines of all types, even iconic titles, have always fluctuated and been inherently unpredictable. While the UK saw a vast expansion of outlets for popular music criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century, becoming a standard feature of the broadsheet press from the late-1980s onwards, rock criticism also saw its high profile casualties. *Smash Hits* folded in 2006, and though *NME* may have sustained a higher

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Dave Laing, 'Anglo-American Music Journalism: Texts and Contexts', in Andy Bennett, B. Shank and Jason Toynbee (eds), *The Popular Music Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 335 [333–39].

[50] Caroline Sullivan, 'Magazine No Longer In Tune with Tastes of Teenagers' *The Guardian* (15 December 2000), 7.

circulation than *Melody Maker*, ultimately outlasting its rival, it ceased hardcopy publication and became a purely online entity in 2018.

The British experience in the new century has been that, where coverage of classical music has declined, this has generally reflected an existential challenge for the newspaper in question, with numerous other areas, including aspects of news reporting, also being severely cut-back in the face of competition from the internet and the effects of the 2008 financial crash. Even before the latter, the commercial context for all types of music changed significantly. In 2006, Matt Brennan noted substantial shifts in retail markets, with the majority of records being sold in supermarkets, while, beyond their limited selection, just five chains of record stores accounted for 75 per cent of the sales of jazz records.[51] In terms of the press, while the long waning of a national title like *The Independent* was especially visible, the regional and local newspapers saw the most dramatic changes. London's *Evening Standard* became a freesheet in 2009 as part of a new financial model. Outside of the capital, local papers either disappeared or, like the *Birmingham Post*, changed from daily to weekly publication, with consequent reduction in the scope for music reviewing. With the national press remaining preponderantly London-centric in its coverage, the decline of local newspapers saw the most substantial drop in dedicated coverage of music.

In the 2010s, overall music content in *The Times* and *The Guardian* was still higher than thirty years before, with classical coverage broadly holding steady even if the number of critics and amount of reviewing had fallen. There were signs of a contraction at *The Guardian* from the middle of the decade. Similarly, music coverage at *The Telegraph* had shrunk considerably by this point, with no content at all on some days each week, but classical reviews were generally predominant in what remained.

[51] Matt Brennan, 'The Rough Guide to Critics', 223–4.

Nonetheless, even though the ongoing challenges for newspapers resulted in a reduction of music content in some titles, this was countered by the proliferation and expansion of magazines and specialist journals as well as the appearance and growth of internet journals and websites such as *Seen & Heard International*, *MusicWeb International*, *MusicalCriticism.com*, *Drowned in Sound*, *The Arts Desk* and *Bachtrack* as well as numerous individual blogs. These have often enabled a much lengthier, more detailed writing than has ever tended to be possible in the daily press. Within the classical sphere, coverage was still strong in the first decade-and-a-half of the new century and roamed far wider in terms of repertoire and musical approach than in the post-war period, and British critics remained predominant in two of the magazines with the widest international readership, *BBC Music Magazine* and *Gramophone*. British music criticism in the decade after the Second World War was restricted in terms of quantity by rationing, but was also dominated by voices that were broadly conservative in outlook. This coincided with a period of unprecedented stability in the British press afforded by government paper controls. After that time, there was a vast increase in the amount of writing and range of genres covered, resulting in a diversity of style, scope and subject matter that was simply unimaginable in 1945. The new century saw immense change, with external factors causing the future for many of the existing structures for music criticism to be uncertain, with the traditional media arguably facing existential challenges. And yet, amidst the profound instability, new outlets for criticism were created with greater scope for new voices, repertoires and approaches. The story of British music criticism since the Second World War is neither straightforward nor necessarily disheartening.