

## The Forties: A Pyramid of Taste

*Prologue, the Twenties and Thirties—classical music radio in wartime Britain—after the war was over—classical music on the Home Service and the Light Programme 1945–1946—start of the Third Programme—Classical music radio 1947–1949—assessing the Forties output.*

This history is primarily concerned with classical music broadcasts on the radio during the years after the end of the Second World War, from 1945 onwards. Those did not come out of the void, and this chapter will begin with a brief sketch of the pre-war years as relevant to the later period. However, the relevance is limited. Although attitudes and indeed orchestras founded in the Twenties and Thirties carried over into the second half of the century, the break represented by the war years was perhaps as substantial as any in modern British history. More attention will therefore be given to wartime, its implications for classical music radio and its legacy. The chapter will then move on to examine the state of such radio output before the arrival of the Third Programme on 26 September 1946; and then recount the years of multi-channel and wide-appeal radio over the final years of the decade. Central to those later years was the notion of a ‘pyramid of taste’, an image coined by the BBC’s wartime Director General, William Haley, to reflect an aspiration to move listeners from the entry level to the peak of cultural awareness, considered in detail later in the chapter.

## PROLOGUE: THE TWENTIES AND THIRTIES

Classical music had featured on BBC radio services from the very beginning, even before the earliest radio companies had come together in the new British Broadcasting Company in 1922. Opera diva Dame Nellie Melba famously broadcast a recital on Marconi's Chelmsford radio station on 15 June 1920 (Street 2005: 11), before performing it for King George V two weeks later.<sup>i</sup> In the very first edition of the *Radio Times*, a year after the formation of the Company, its Music Director, Lionel Stanton-Jefferies, wrote of the 'astounding progress' that the broadcasting of concerts had made in that short time, despite early teething problems:

We had that enthusiastic soprano who 'blasted' – technically speaking, of course – on every note and shook both the valves and the engineers' patience to their utmost endurance by singing *ffffff* throughout her performance, in order that her friends in Scotland might hear her more distinctly.<sup>ii</sup>

The first outside opera broadcast was a relay of the *Magic Flute* from Covent Garden in January 1923, and classical music comprised between a fifth and a quarter of all BBC radio programmes between 1927 and 1930 (Briggs 1965: 35). Interwoven with the total output, 'serious music'—as John Reith's BBC insistently described it—was a consistent feature. In these very early years, large-scale concerts, operas, smaller chamber ensembles and individual recitals all featured. Lighter music, typically dance band material, attracted listeners but seems to have occupied less of the attention of those creating a distinctive sound for the BBC (Briggs 1961: 277).

The BBC's approach towards 'serious music' was consistently high minded. Guided initially by Percy Pitt, its first Director of Music, and from 1930 by his successor, the conductor Adrian Boult, it offered what Pitt described as a 'panorama of music', covering the entire canon of classical music and not shying away from more avant-garde works (Briggs 1965: 170). This fitted well with the aspiration to lift the cultural level of audiences. However, all this belonged firmly to the pre-war world, its attitudes, technology and insularity. As this chapter will discuss substantively, there was a paradigmatic shift in British culture, attitudes and broadcasting once the Second World War had ended, already starting to become evident as the conflict progressed and the existential threat diminished.

A key manifestation of its initial aspirational approach was the BBC's creation and support of its own in-house orchestras. Pre-eminent among those was the BBC Symphony Orchestra (BBCSO) which gave its first performance in London's Queen's Hall on 22 October 1930, after almost a decade of wrangling with the classical music establishment (Kenyon 1981: 49). Its first Chief Conductor, Adrian Boult, was in charge of the BBCSO from 1931 until 1950, and was also the BBC's first Director of Music, serving from 1930 to 1942, when he was succeeded by composer Arthur Bliss. This emphasises the extent to which the BBC in the Twenties and Thirties gave primacy to concerts and live performances of classical music. This is a significant distinction with the post-war years, when commercial recordings steadily assumed ever-greater importance in classical music output as well as for popular music.

The British Broadcasting Company, formed in 1922, had quickly established a range of provincial orchestras (Briggs 1965: 306) in Manchester, Glasgow, Cardiff, Belfast, Newcastle, Bournemouth and Aberdeen, reflecting the nature of the semi-independent regional stations which comprised the Company, but they were reduced in the centralisation which followed the establishment of the Corporation at the start of 1927. The Northern and Midland Orchestras were formed in 1934, followed in 1935 by the BBC Scottish Orchestra and the BBC Welsh Orchestra.<sup>1</sup>

Conductor Henry Wood and music administrator Robert Newman had begun the Promenade Concerts—the Proms—in 1895, the same year that Marconi had carried out the first wireless telegraph transmissions (Langley in Doctor, ed. 2007: 32). In 1927, the Proms were failing, and the BBC stepped into save them from disappearing, with the first 'BBC Prom' broadcast across all the Corporation's stations on 13 August 1927 (Doctor in Doctor, ed. 2007: 94). The BBC's relationship with the Proms continues to the present, with a break in the early war years.

Generally, Britain in the Thirties had been a troubled place. Just as across the rest of Europe, the bleak twins of communism and fascism threatened the democratic state. Economic dislocation had joined with political uncertainty to produce a bifurcated culture, where the elite were

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<sup>1</sup>The BBC orchestras are a research topic in their own right. At one time or another, there were 18 orchestras under the BBC banner and three choral ensembles.

diverted by the avant-garde, such as the British premiere on BBC radio of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* on 14 April 1927, while the contemporary mass culture of Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley was mostly ordinary and unambitious, certainly compared with the post-war years. That finds an echo in the music policy adopted by Reith's BBC. The Company and then the Corporation were increasingly willing to offer ultra-modern 'serious' works, defending this approach with spirit (Doctor 1999: 118). On the other hand, 'popular music was low in the musical hierarchy and bore the taint of commercialism while serious music existed for its own sake' (Baade 2012: 18).

Pre-war radio had been broadcast by the BBC on one National Service, supplemented by separate regional output, and from 1932 the Empire Service (renamed the Overseas Service in 1939). Classical music, largely concerts or recitals, was woven into the general programming. From its earliest years, the BBC was the dominant provider of UK classical music radio, although European state broadcasts could be heard in parts of the UK at times. In the mid-Thirties, the BBC had become obsessed by the challenge from English-language commercial radio stations, such as Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandy, broadcasting popular programming into Britain from the near continent (Street 2006). These stations included a little accessible classical music. Schedules published in *Radio Pictorial* and *World Radio* list some light classical works from these commercial stations, and more formal concerts from other European state broadcasters. The *Radio Times* continued to list major music broadcasts by European state broadcasters right up until 1970, but by the Thirties certainly it was the BBC which defined the acknowledged canon by what it broadcast.

### CLASSICAL MUSIC RADIO IN WARTIME BRITAIN

BBC radio regained its domestic monopoly of broadcasting when the Panzer divisions rolled across Belgium and Northern France in 1940, silencing Radio Luxembourg (for a while), Radio Normandy and the rest. For better or worse, the BBC was the dominant voice of Britain and in Britain throughout the Second World War. The pre-1940 National Service/Regional Services/Overseas Service structure was soon changed into a Home Service and something variously named the Forces Service or the General Forces Service. In all of those, classical music played an important part.

Classical music was very much a soundtrack to the Second World War: Hitler ordering that the overture of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* should introduce each of the Nuremberg rallies; Stalin arranging the broadcasting of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony across the front line of the siege of Leningrad, by flying in the orchestral parts to the beleaguered city; Messiaen composing modernism's seminal *Quartet for the End of Time*, while imprisoned in the Stalag Luft VIIIa prisoner of war camp; and Laurence Olivier commissioning Walton's *Agincourt* music for his wartime propagandist film of Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

In wartime Britain also, classical music radio acquired a particular resonance, as the BBC orchestras played concerts in cities around the nation (Kenyon 1981). These events, and especially the BBC's rescuing of the Proms from the ashes of the Queen's Hall in 1941 described below, were among many symbols of the British 'wartime spirit' expressed through classical music, as Arthur Marwick encapsulates:

Wars quicken the pulse ... Myra Hess, the distinguished concert pianist, put on her favourite lunch-time recitals in the National Gallery in London; the Sadler's Wells Opera company, driven out of that same London by the bombing of its theatre, carried opera around the provinces. (Marwick 1991: 14)

For the BBC's classical music radio broadcasts—and much other programming—there were challenges and issues to confront, good and bad solutions adopted, and both creditable and discreditable results. As discussed below, such music raised issues about the playing of works by 'enemy composers'; the position of 'new' music; the significance of émigré refugees in British musical life; and the impact of de-nazification on British radio broadcasts after the war.

The significance of classical music on UK radio was enhanced by the role which such music played within a society at war, symbolised by Myra Hess and Sadler's Wells Opera. The wartime government created the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in 1940 to promote musical activity on the 'Home Front', while the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) was not just about comedians and variety, but brought a good range of concerts and live music to the troops at home and overseas. Many people speak about a 'cultural renaissance' during the later years of the war, which carried forward into peacetime. Among its fruits was the Arts Council, the

successor to CEMA, and in broadcasting the introduction of the Third Programme in September 1946.

During the war, BBC radio included many more ‘gramophone record’ programmes (in the terminology of the times) than would have been permitted before the war. Nevertheless, the main source of programmes was the BBC orchestras, variously reorganising as wartime pressures permitted. The BBC Symphony Orchestra itself was evacuated first to Bristol, on the assumption that it would be safer there than in London. The bombing of the Bristol docks from June 1940 onwards put paid to that idea. Kenyon (1981: 166) has written about how ‘as the raids increased, it became progressively more difficult to justify moving about at night. Concerts began to be recorded in the afternoons and broadcast by the engineers at night’. Its next home was Bedford, where the Orchestra (but not its administration) was to remain from June 1941 until the end of the war.

Despite all the upheavals, the Sunday of the sampled week in May 1942 included on the Home Service three live orchestral concerts, two live chamber music recitals and one on gramophone records, plus a talk by BBC critic Ralph Hill on ‘the essence of Brahms’. The rest of this sample week indicates a similar pattern and volume, a level of output which was sustained almost until the end of the war, when scarcity of both resources and manpower shifted the emphasis more towards commercial recordings. From 1940 until the end of 1943, classical music accounted for around 15% of the Home Service output and nearly 4% of the Forces Programme, with Home Service output slipping to 10% only in the last year of the war (when the General Forces percentage actually rose). The audiences for classical music programmes reached levels which were rarely to be achieved in peacetime. For example, on just one Friday in May 1945, a lunchtime performance of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony was listened to by 1.25 million adults, while an evening concert of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas reached a remarkable 3.5 million (Table 2.1).

Malcolm Sargent, who was to take over as the chief conductor of the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts in 1947, at least partly made his popular reputation as provincial orchestral tours became a feature of wartime. Alison Garnham et al. (in Doctor, ed. 2007: 149) recounts that ‘his “Blitz Tour” with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, bringing orchestral music to the music halls and variety theatres of major provincial cities, then suffering heavily under the bombings, had been a tremendously popular contribution to the war effort’.

**Table 2.1** Classical music as a percentage of total BBC radio output before 1945

| <i>Classical music as % of total programme output</i> | <i>National programme</i> | <i>Regional programmes</i> | <i>Home service</i> | <i>Forces/overseas/general forces programme</i> |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---|
| 1936  | 19.96                     | 15.03                      |                     |   |
| 1938  | 17.83                     | 16.84                      |                     |   |
| 1939  | 15.97                     |                            |                     |   |
| 1940  |                           |                            | 17.80               | 2.54  |
| 1941  |                           |                            | 13.51               | 1.28  |
| 1942  |                           |                            | 12.27               | 6.00  |
| 1943  |                           |                            | 15.88               | 4.75  |
| 1944  |                           |                            | 9.62                | 5.31  |

*Source* Analysis of *Radio Times* listing for sample weeks

The Proms themselves were dealt a shattering blow when their traditional home, the Queen's Hall in Langham Place, was destroyed by firebombing during the night of 10–11 May 1941. The photograph of Henry Wood standing amid the ruins of the hall became, in Jenny Doctor's words, 'a powerful symbol of defiant survival in Britain during the Blitz' (in Doctor, ed. 2007: 122). The Proms were relocated to the Royal Albert Hall. Once the BBC resumed running them in 1942 after a short gap in the hands of the Royal Philharmonic Society, these concerts—along with the recitals of Myra Hess—gave London some cultural continuity in a time of change and horror. The Proms had to be suspended late in June 1944, after a near miss with a V1 flying bomb, but resumed in time for the dying Henry Wood to conduct his final performance 'with a forceful and memorable broadcast of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony' on 28 July 1944 (Doctor 2007: 128).

Beethoven's music was everywhere, notably in the audio symbol of wartime resistance, the opening notes from his Fifth Symphony (the Morse Code rhythm for the letter V, for 'victory'). That happened despite debates about the playing of 'enemy music'. The BBC was reluctant to broadcast the works of living German, Italian or Finnish composers on the proffered grounds that their royalty payments would be destined for hostile nations (or could at least be collected once the war had ended).<sup>iii</sup> Robert Mackay (2000) has suggested that the BBC operated a much more jingoistic process of exclusion, especially of German

composers: that in a phrase taken from the words of a Noel Coward popular song—itsself banned by the BBC—it was ‘being beastly to the Germans’.<sup>iv</sup> However, the dominating presence of Beethoven and Bach confounds any suggestion of a policy of ‘racial’ exclusion. The composers for the sampled week in 1942 were overwhelmingly the late masters of the nineteenth-century classical canon, with the March from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* in the Forces Programme striking a German, martial note.

From a modern perspective, we might assume that Wagner’s work would be at the centre of any such exclusion, given his authorship in 1850 of the article *Das Judenthum in der Musik*, one of the seminal texts of modern German anti-Semitism (Wagner and Evans 1850), and the fondness of the Nazi leadership for his music. In the event, many of his works were played regularly. The first concert in the BBC Symphony Orchestra’s 1940 series ‘boldly devoted its entire second part, which was broadcast, to extracts from Wagner’s operas’ (Kenyon 1981: 163). In response to a letter of complaint, the *Bristol Evening Post*’s music critic expressed the majority and the BBC view that ‘by their unstinted applause, the audience gave the lie to the fantastic myth that the music of Wagner cannot or should not be appreciated by civilised people at war with Germany’.<sup>v</sup>

Much more difficulty surrounded the work of Richard Strauss, as a consequence of his willingness to accept musical posts in the Third Reich; and, for a while, broadcasts of Sibelius’ *Finlandia*, because of its nationalistic tone relating to a country at war with Britain’s ‘ally’, the Soviet Union. Bizarrely, Max Bruch, banned by the Nazis for his presumed Jewish ancestry, was put by the BBC on the list where ‘the Corporation wishes to limit the performance of [their] works ... to a minimum far below their appearance in peace time, because the royalties payable for performances of his works would mean less available for “British, Allied and friendly composers”’.<sup>vi</sup> The BBC ‘ban’ was a dubious distinction Bruch shared with Verdi, Puccini and others; but he was surely alone in being excluded by both sides.

Analysis of the *Radio Times* listings largely exonerates the BBC from any claims that it was excluding musical works of value on a jingoistic basis. However, the British Government is much less easily defended over the internment of so-called ‘enemy aliens’, many of whom were actually refugees from those countries with which Britain was at war. Foremost among them was Hans Keller, a Viennese Jew who was to become one of the dominant forces in British music radio after the war, but he is simply the best known of dozens of musicians detained

in camps on the Isle of Man and elsewhere. It might be said with a little exaggeration that during these years the Ramsay Internment Camp was the centre of European musical life: with Norbert Brainin, Martin Lovett, Peter Schidlöf and Siegmund Nissel, who met in Ramsay and were to form the Amadeus Quartet, not least among its distinguished residents. There is more than a slight echo here of Oliver Messiaen's composition in Stalag Luft VIIIa.

Senior BBC figures—notably Boult and Bliss—were active in agitating for the internees' release, often but not always with some success. Keller himself was released from internment on 23 March 1941, having made friends with a number of notable musicians, such as Peter Gellhorn, who would play a major part in British musical life after the war as a distinguished conductor, composer, pianist and teacher (Kenyon 1981: 183). The role of BBC figures in challenging government in this respect was especially creditable given what is now acknowledged as the endemic anti-Semitism within the BBC generally at the time. Jean Seaton, who was for a time the Corporation's official historian, has written that 'the BBC displayed, both before and during the war, views and decisions that were quite simply anti-Semitic' (1987: 71), although there were clear exceptions as the efforts of Boult and Bliss on behalf of internees illustrate. Before the full reality of the death camps was known—or at least truly comprehended—there was an evident wish to stay out of what was thought to be simply a 'domestic issue' for Germany; even, on occasion, to avoid addressing any issues relating to the Jews in that country for fear of making their situation worse.

The real impact was felt on 'new' music (which represented, then, before and since, only a small proportion of radio broadcasts, albeit one which attracts perhaps disproportionate critical attention). Bliss had succeeded Boult as the BBC's Director of Music in 1942, a post the latter had held since 1930. Bliss took the view 'that in wartime, the BBC ought to give special support and encouragement to British Empire composers'.<sup>vii</sup> As a result, from 1942 until after the end of the war, almost all the new music heard broadcast by the BBC originated from countries allied to, or sympathetic with, the cause of Britain in the war (Kenyon 1981: 175). In the sampled week of 1942, there was no non-British 'new music' broadcast at all.

In Germany itself after the war, classical music became a tool of reconstruction and denazification, an effective if ironic riposte to the use which the Nazi regime made of the Austro/German music canon.

Under the influence of American musicologists, the annual *Ferienkurse* (summer school) at Darmstadt from 1946 became the central event of modernist music, featuring composers such as Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, and their successors including Milhaud, Varese and Honneger. This approach was to dominate musical scholarship—though not usually radio output—for much of the rest of the century.

### AFTER THE WAR WAS OVER

The war marked the end of Britain as a major imperial power. After the existential struggle of the early wartime years, the nation, its broadcasters and its musicians began a rebuilding process which was to produce a post-war state substantially different from that before 1939. This was surely deliberate. Peter Hennessy entitled his study of the Forties *Never Again* because:

the phrase captures the motivating impulse of the first half-dozen years after the war – never again would there be war; never again would the British people be housed in slums, living off a meagre diet thanks to low wages or no wages at all; never again would mass unemployment blight the lives of millions; never again would natural abilities remain dormant in the absence of educational stimulus. (1992: 2)

He observed that the UK emerged from Hitler, Stalin and Hirohito's wars impoverished, but infused by a consciousness of what had been its finest hour. 'We were, in short, morally magnificent but economically bankrupt' (1992: 95).

Christopher Logue accurately recalls Britain in the mid-Forties as 'sad ... a place of war-damaged, unpainted houses'.<sup>viii</sup> Alan Taylor (1965: 600), who was 33 and an established historian when war broke out, strikes a more resilient and aspirational note. He saw it as the time when 'the British people came of age'. Britain had been—along with Germany—the only nation to fight both the First and the Second World War from beginning to end, 'yet they remained a peaceful and civilised people, tolerant, patient and generous'. In place of some of the traditional values such as Imperial greatness came a new welfare state. 'The British Empire declined; the condition of the people improved. Few now sang "Land of Hope and Glory". Few even sang "England Arise". England had risen all the same'.

This dichotomy informs any assessment of the cultural response to those years, despite growing austerity which saw the nation far worse off in the years immediately after the war than it had been even in 1945. Paul Addison (1985: 114) notes that ‘leisure has to compensate for many other things’.<sup>ix</sup> Central among those ‘other things’ was encouragement for the arts as a whole. Secretary of State John Anderson told the House of Commons on 12 June 1945 that the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts was to be succeeded by the Arts Council in 1946, because war-time experience had demonstrated that ‘there will be a lasting need after the war for a body of this kind to encourage knowledge, understanding and practice of the arts in the broad sense of that term’.<sup>x</sup>

It was in the same spirit, and against this background of aspirational austerity, that the Third Programme was authorised by the Cabinet in January 1946 and began broadcasting on Sunday 26 September of the same year. This new service was to become ‘almost notorious’ as an icon of high culture (Kynaston 2008: 176). But it is important to note—and most academic and critical discourse does not—that the Third Programme was just one part of the post-war broadcasting settlement, and not necessarily the most important one even for classical music radio broadcasting. More substantially, the resumption of television services in June 1946, contemporaneous with the establishment of the BBC’s new radio structure, soon began to have a significant impact on the resources and audiences available for sound broadcasting.<sup>2</sup>

There were three different international aspects to the way in which classical music developed from 1945. The major block was led by the United States, which ‘unquestionably inherited musical leadership during this period from Europe’ (Taruskin 2010: xix–xx). It was American sponsorship of the annual modernist *festschrift* at Darmstadt which set the tone for classical music composition in Europe and America. Through this, classical music in Western Europe experienced what amounted to a cultural insurrection, represented by modernist music.

The chief exception in mainland Europe was the Soviet Union, where serial and open-form music were developed in ‘a direct correlation with contemporary political events’ (Fox 2007: 5).

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<sup>2</sup>Lacey (2013: 38) points out the paradox in using the term ‘audience’ indiscriminately for radio *listening* and for television *viewing*. For classical music, however, it is appropriate since television has rarely managed to find a satisfactory way of matching the sound with pictures which add to the auditory experience.

The post-war response in British classical music was the other dissenting voice. Wartime broadcasting of classical music in Britain had taken a notably isolationist approach, and that set the tone for the post-war radio pattern. The two works by British composers which rank with the compositions of Shostakovich as great signifiers of that war—Britten's *War Requiem* and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*—are unmistakably British works, in a style and idiom which is different from that dominating the rest of the musical world. Both composers were to have a close relationship with the BBC in the succeeding decades.

Beginning in the middle years of the war, but of particular significance after its end, Britain enjoyed a remarkable resurgence of cultural activity. The prevailing ambition is reflected in the Dartington Arts Enquiries conducted between 1941 and 1947, which considered first the literary and performing arts, and then music in post-war England. Despite the harshness of the wartime years and afterwards, British cultural identity as a whole—in painting, sculpture, architecture as well as music—took a different route from the European continent, embracing modernism—even pastoralism—but mostly rejecting brutalism. The ambition of classical music radio in the UK in the late Forties owed almost everything to this cultural renaissance which began in the darkest years of the war.

Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, who willingly returned to Britain in the spring of 1942 after having followed Auden to America in 1939, were not alone in feeling that Britain in wartime was undergoing such a renaissance (Kennedy 1991: 37, 43). That was especially marked for classical music, where both the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic (in 1942) and the Hallé (in 1943) became full-time orchestras during the war, with notable implications for the post-war classical music revival. The later war years, during which both radio and classical music had played significant parts in sustaining the Home Front, saw the confirmation in popular taste of the English pastoral composers. Championed by Bliss at the BBC from 1942, their works were to characterise British music after 1945. That modernist critics dubbed this the 'cow-pat' school of music, mattered not a whit to concert audiences or listeners.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Lutyens in a lecture at the Dartington Summer School in the Fifties, where she spoke also of 'folky-wolky melodies on the cor anglais' (*Oxford Dictionary of Music*, Rutherford-Johnson, T. and Kennedy, M, eds., 2013: 202).

For consumers of classical music, whether on gramophone record, in concerts or on the radio, there was a distinction between British culture as it was asserted by critics and academics, and what the British consumed. And what was true from the mid-Forties in this respect continued right through the rest of the century, and is key to understanding what classical music radio has to say about the relationship between elite and popular culture in the UK during these years. The Forties provided the canvas on which radio began to picture its post-war output. The arrival of the Third Programme in September 1946 in the form which it took owed much to the democratisation of taste in these brief years before the musical elite reasserted itself in the Fifties.

Yet while accepting that, in 1945, British classical music as a whole ‘was basking in the warmth which the work of CEMA and ENSA and thousands of wartime concerts had kindled’ (Kenyon 1981: 198), that does not mean the quality was all that good. The years of isolation from continental European music meant that ‘musical chauvinism had by now reached a pitch of unreality in England’ (Pirie 1979: 181). The younger progressive composers in Britain saw themselves as opposed and hamstrung by the older conservative musicians, including conductor and Hallé Orchestra boss John Barbirolli, whom the BBC had tried and failed to recruit as Chief Conductor for the BBCSO, as discussed further below. Only by the end of the decade was the standard of playing much improved, and the number of genuinely accomplished composers active in the country began to increase: notably including Alan Rawsthorne, Lennox Berkeley and Peter Maxwell Davies, and women composers such as Elisabeth Lutyens, Thea Musgrave, Priaulx Rainier and Elizabeth Maconchy.<sup>4</sup>

As far as UK radio broadcasting was concerned, three particular considerations affected classical music after the war. The first was a keen awareness, especially among BBC staff either returning from war service or through involvement with the BBC German Service, of the significance of classical music in the reconstruction of post-war Germany and Austria. It was deliberate Allied policy to use classical music, including in radio broadcasts, as part of the process of re-establishing civil society (Thacker 2007: 3). That fitted in with the sense among many

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<sup>4</sup>The phrase ‘women composers’ is uncomfortable to modern reading, but it reflects the context of the UK classical music scene in these years.

Germans—as they struggled with the privations of the immediate post-war years—that among the things which could be rescued from the wreckage of the Third Reich was their great classical music tradition. One result of that was that these became ‘golden years’, as German orchestras and performers returned to their former prominence, at least as far as the programme of denazification would permit, and this in turn influenced the UK classical canon and the broadcast repertoire.

Second, the war changed classical music itself. As discussed above, in both the West (Europe and the USA) and the East (essentially the Soviet bloc), the end of the war and its aftermath released a second wave of modernism which was to last as a dominant feature in self-regarding musical circles until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. That challenged radio programmers accordingly, if only to provoke a conscious negative reaction.

The third issue was the treatment of those composers who were considered to have collaborated in the enemy war effort, or whose music was integral to the Nazi project. In the immediate aftermath of the war, it was straightforward to exclude certain works, and music with militarist themes. The Nazi ‘anthem’ of the *Horst Wessel Lied* was banned outright.<sup>xi</sup> But what about Beethoven, Brucker, Wagner and above all Richard Strauss, who was—along with Hans Pritzner—the most frequently performed twentieth-century composer in the Third Reich?<sup>xii</sup> Wagner remained a staple part of the BBC’s musical output, with the BBC going out of its way to broadcast his operas. Two complete 1946 performances of *Tristan und Isolde*, with Thomas Beecham conducting the BBCSO, and then of *Die Walküre* in December, were singled out for positive mention in the 1947 *BBC Handbook*.<sup>xiii</sup>

Otherwise, the BBC’s post-war response was equivocal, especially about Richard Strauss. A list ‘of those [alien] composers most in demand’ whose works might now be broadcast was prepared in 1946, but with the warning to ‘guard against a flooding with foreign works as a result of this clearance ... the actual choice of works also should be made more discreetly: for example, apart from its use in an appropriate feature programme, we should not yet perform Strauss’ “Ein Heldenleben”’.<sup>xiv</sup>

Similarly, in 1947 a BBC producer was warned that:

you will have to watch your step about the Strauss Festival, in view of the Board ruling that ex-Nazis can be employed ad hoc but not glorified by a festival or anything equivalent.<sup>xv</sup>

Yet a photograph of Richard Strauss adorns the *BBC Handbook* of 1949,<sup>xvi</sup> in resolution perhaps of the shattering discord of the image of the firebombed Queen's Hall in 1941.

The BBC had been planning with government the pattern of post-war sound broadcasting since 1943, proceeding on the basis of three national services: two on medium wave and long wave, respectively, as soon as the General Forces programme became otiose, and a further service on medium wave 'to be introduced at a later stage'.<sup>xvii</sup> Plans were well advanced by March 1945,<sup>xviii</sup> and once victory in Europe was confirmed the first part of the new pattern was implemented from Sunday 29 July 1945 on the basis of a Home Service and a Light Programme, with a 'programme C' to follow later; which was to be the Third Programme.<sup>xix</sup>

As discussed further below, BBC Director General Haley envisaged a 'pyramid of taste' for classical music radio: the mass audiences, listening to the Light Programme, would form the base of the pyramid; the middle block would comprise those giving more serious attention through the Home Service; the pinnacle would be the Third Programme. Crucially, listeners could rise from one level to the next (and presumably descend as well), in that way making possible the entire range of cultural appreciation to each potential listener, irrespective of their class or education.

Nevertheless, many of the BBC's instincts were at odds with the democratisation of cultural interest during the wartime cultural renaissance. It was as if many of the elite within the BBC (and elsewhere) wished to return to the pre-war class division of culture. The themes of 'height of brow', and the extent to which listeners were 'entitled' to engage with programme output outside their 'designated' class, run throughout this history, not least in the establishment of the aspirational pyramid of music radio in 1946 and its all-too-swift abandonment by the early Fifties.

From the outset, many at the BBC approached the new pattern of radio broadcasting according to an assumed hierarchy of class and taste:

The new Home Service, it is hoped, will contain something for all tastes in radio and some of the best of everything in each field ... By its side will be the Light Programme, intended as the name suggests to provide the civilian listener with first-rate light entertainment. At a later date – on May 8 next year – it is planned to add to those a third programme so far unnamed, which will be frankly 'serious' in subject-matter and treatment. It can thus be seen that broadcast programme structure in this country will

soon be nicely balanced if the horrid but convenient terms can be permitted. *High-brows, low-brows, and middle-brows will each have a programme to themselves* [my emphasis] – thereby, one hopes, decreasing mutual jealousies and increasing the general stock of happiness. Personal taste of course cuts across frontiers. There will be nothing to prevent the lover of serious music listening, say, to a broadcast of a sporting event on the Light Programme, nor is the thriller ‘fan’ debarred from tuning into a talk on foreign affairs or astronomy on another wavelength.<sup>xx</sup>

It is significant that at this point the BBC had no intention of restricting classical music to any sort of cultural ghetto on the Third Programme. Quite the reverse. Not until the arrival of genre-defined national radio services at the end of the Sixties did the idea arise that such music should not be heard right across the BBC’s output. BBC Senior Controller Basil Nicholls and composer/conductor Bliss, who was soon to become the BBC’s Director of Music, had debated in 1941 what the latter called ‘coaxing Caliban’—getting a maximum audience for classical music radio—in the light of Nicholls’ view that ‘it was the size of audience that was primarily important, not what in a later decade was to be called the “quality of listening”’ (Kenyon 1981: 174–175).

### CLASSICAL MUSIC ON THE HOME SERVICE AND THE LIGHT PROGRAMME 1945–1946

Food rationing became steadily tighter in the later years of the war and beyond, as shortages of credit exacerbated supply issues. By May 1945 each person was allowed only 2 oz of cheese and 2 oz of butter per week. It might be thought that classical music radio was similarly rationed. In the sample week in May 1945, fewer than 20 hours programming was listed, with only 39 composers featured. The dominant musical offering was light music, with occasional classical items sprinkled within dance band programmes. Yet popular appetite for classical music remained. In the 1945 sample week, the highest audience for a scheduled classical programme on the Home Service was nearly 2 million adults, and that on the General Forces Programme getting on for 1.5 million. On VE Day itself, Tuesday 8 May 1945, a half-hour of the BBCSO and Chorus was listened to by 3.3 million people across the two networks.

Analysis of the first week of peace in 1945 provides a valuable picture of the *status quo ante*. There were 13 hours of classical music broadcast

on the Home Service, and 6 hours on the General Forces network. The median audience for such Home Service output was over 1 million adults, with the highest nearly 2 million; while the Forces Programme had a median audience of just over 500,000 and an audience high of 1.3 million.

Of the scheduled programmes on the Home Service, the most popular was the fortnightly *Music Magazine* on Sunday morning of the sample week, and there was a substantial evening audience for a Tchaikovsky *Serenade* on Monday evening of 1.5 million listeners. Daytime audiences of around 700,000 adults heard music very much centred on the conventional canonic repertoire, with hardly any current composers apart from a scattering of British music. Contemporary perception was that there was ‘a constant demand for more programmes of good music’, not least from servicemen overseas:

We want music. Thank you for the records, they have been invaluable: but please send us more live music and musicians, and instruments and copies to that we can make our own music as well as enjoy more fully what is made for us by others.<sup>xxi</sup>

As discussed above, classical music was changing across the Western world. After the cataclysm of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, new compositions for a nuclear age were substantially different from those of the pre-war canon. Meanwhile, the American occupying forces in Germany, in the form of the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS), were helping to inaugurate in Darmstadt the principal show-place for the avant-garde from 1946 onwards. How would BBC radio respond to the new world? And how would it blend that with the very different nature of the British cultural renaissance, now firmly underway. For classical music that included the premiere of Britten’s *Peter Grimes* at Sadler’s Wells in June to mark the reopening of that theatre in London.

The imminent arrival of Programme C, now designated the ‘Third Programme’, was therefore not merely an internal BBC concern. Wittingly or not, it was part of a world-wide response to post-war realities and opportunities, albeit modified by British musical and cultural isolation which had arisen as a consequence of wartime conditions and decisions.

By May 1946, the Home Service and the Light Programme were firmly established. Director General Haley, writing at the time of the launch of the Third Programme, asserted that:

the range of the BBC Home Service and the Light Programme is admitted by all who have studied broadcasting programmes throughout the world to be outstanding.<sup>xxii</sup>

While not accepting such puffery uncritically, BBC radio classical music output before the arrival of the Third Programme in 1946 certainly indicated a broad appeal, aimed at meeting the expectations of a relatively wide audience. On both networks, the majority of the output fell firmly into the centre of the canonic repertoire, and as such may be thought to have been generally accessible, not least to an audience which had been quite extensively exposed to this type of music during the war. The largest audience of the 1946 sample week on the Home Service was for Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, broadcast on Wednesday evening. For the Light Programme, it was *Music in Miniature*—billed in the *Radio Times* as 'a musical entertainment'—of works by Françaix, Liszt, Beethoven and Mozart. Each programme was listened to by almost 3 million adults, an audience well beyond any supposed elite.

The importance of the Light Programme in the totality of classical music radio in these years—and later—deserves to be stressed. It illustrates the broad availability of the genre in those early post-war years, and how in this period—and others later in this history—it escaped from its elitist preserve. *Music in Miniature* was picked out by a 1949 report on BBC music output as 'one of the best things' on the Light Programme. This exemplar brought together a wish to open classical music to a wide audience with a continuing concern not to make it seem too 'serious', and frighten listeners off:

As far as the Light Programme is out to catch the wandering ear and teach it to be musical this feature shows the best method. The title is no more forbidding than 'album of familiar music', 'time for music', 'musical memories' and other enticements; and for a beginning the listener is given some fairly tuneful and go-ahead piece without being put off by the words 'chamber music' or 'string quartet'. The songs and singing are the kind to catch the fancy; and other items are in keeping. A half-hour of pretty good entertainment-value music that handed out good stuff without giving the game away.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Worrying about 'giving the game away' is just as patronising to modern ears as Bliss' characterising the mass audience as a collection of Calibans, but in the context of the Forties the total approach reached for genuine democratisation, at least to begin with.

Among other programmes attracting substantial audiences in the sample week on the Home Service were a piano recital late on Tuesday evening of Beethoven, Weber and C.P.E. Bach, a Hallé orchestral concert under Barbirolli of Weber, Delius, Ravel and Berlioz, and the Light Programme's weekday *Concert Hour* which—although never lasting for a full hour—featured Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Holst, Borodin, Haydn, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven and Rimsky-Korsakov, and regularly attracted an audience of around 1.5 million adults. Taking the Home Service and the Light Programme together, the BBC was doing an excellent job of demonstrating the existence of a popular audience for classical music radio well before the Third Programme arrived.

The total output of around 26 hours across the 1946 sample week was modest by later standards, and there were still very few contemporary composers included, apart from a few living British composers. There was no early music, and little baroque. In the year of the first Darmstadt *Ferienspiele*, the BBC's *Composers of the Week* in May 1946 were Bax and Vaughan Williams. When the Home Service ventured to broadcast Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in June, it was in the form of four excerpts rather than the entire opera. When the Home Service broadcast from the Festival of Contemporary Music in July 1946, it did so in the knowledge that 'contemporary' music was thought by most 'to stand for every kind of nerve-wracking cacophony or deliberate experimentation'.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### START OF THE THIRD PROGRAMME

1946 was a year of new institutions in the UK. The Bank of England was nationalised in March, the Arts Council was established in August and the National Health Service Act was passed in November. Modern broadcasting also arrived. BBC television transmissions resumed on 7 June 1946, though there had been test transmissions from February, and the BBC ran trials of new-fangled frequency modulation (FM) transmissions for sound broadcasting.<sup>xxv</sup>

The Third Programme began broadcasting at 6 pm on Sunday 29 September 1946, and was to continue as an evening-only offering until the channel was succeeded by Radio 3 in 1970. Broadcasts were initially planned to be for 6 hours daily, although that was soon reduced for a while, as the impact of the 1947 fuel crisis was felt, leading to a reduction in hours for all BBC radio and its suspension for two weeks in early

February. The hours of the Third Programme continued to vary thereafter, according to prevailing economic stringencies within the BBC.

This history is more concerned with the programmes and who listened to them than with the internal politics of the BBC, the latter having been covered exhaustively already by Humphrey Carpenter (1996) and Asa Briggs (1979), among others. They trace the BBC's wish to have a cultural programme back to an idea for a 'Minerva' programme, suggested in 1930 by J.C. Stobart, the Head of the BBC's Education Department, and relate the progress made from 1943 onwards up to Cabinet approval in January 1946. In Carpenter's view, 'the Third was born at an exciting time' (Carpenter and Doctor 1996: 14), although it encountered immediate and continuing reception difficulties. Its initial leadership, Controller George Barnes, along with Assistants Etienne Amyot and Leslie Stokes, faced the prospect at a late stage of having to postpone the new service in the light of the transmission challenge from a Latvian/Soviet station at Riga which threatened—and actually caused—extensive interference to the intended wavelength of the Third Programme.

The BBC expected that its audience 'would doubtless widen as the years went by' but intended that 'no effort should be made to force the process', explicitly rejecting 'an identifiable educational dimension' (Briggs 1979: 69). Arguably, this was to misunderstand the opportunity presented by an unprecedented British public interest in and appetite for classical music. Briggs understood that there was a real risk that the apparent objectives and the actual achievement of the Third Programme might well not match. This arose, as he observed, 'from the tendency of some producers and planners to go beyond Haley's initial rubric and to select avant-garde items which at times reduced the minority audience to a series of coteries' (Briggs 1979: 75). That risk crystallised early on, and continued to exist for much of the period covered by this book.

Haley perceptively saw the Third Programme as 'a cultural reinforcement and not a replacement' for the output on the Home Service or the Light Programme.<sup>xxvi</sup> Briggs notes—and analysis for 1947 confirms—that the arrival of the Third Programme increased the total cultural and 'serious' music offering by the BBC (1979: 80), although it was not exclusively or even primarily about 'serious' music. Yet scholarship has had almost nothing to say about the classical music output on either the Home Service or the Light Programme, which distorts understanding of a central part of British radio history, and suggests that historians too are seduced by the concept of the Third Programme as new, unique to Britain, and almost validated by that alone. That ignores the

key dimension that, while the Third Programme flared briefly and then faded in the minds of much of its potential audience, classical music radio continued and flourished on the Home Service and the Light Programme. It was the wide provision and consumption of classical music radio across *all* the BBC channels which was the notable occurrence, and indicative of the relationship between culture and society in those years.

The agreed terms of reference for the Third Programme noted that:

this programme is designed to be of artistic and cultural importance. The audience is one already aware of artistic experience and will include *persons of taste, of intelligence, and of education* [my italics]; it is, therefore, selected not casual, and both attentive and critical. The programme need not cultivate any other audience.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Thus in the view of some, perhaps most, of its begetters, class distinction was built into the new service from the very start, although they disagreed on what that should mean. George Barnes, the first Head of the Third Programme, told the Board of Governors in June 1947 that:

the programme is for the serious, attentive listener, and not as a background to work, to reading or to washing-up. It can be assumed, therefore, that the audience would include the most intelligent and receptive listeners – persons who have a thirst for knowledge, and who wish to hear ideas discussed even if their own education is limited.<sup>xxviii</sup>

He went on to insist in September 1947 that the Third Programme would set out to serve:

those who dislike being ‘talked at’, who demand ‘performance’ and nothing else, who find popular exposition often condescending and often irritating – highbrows is the name given to them by their opponents ... We shall provide the programme and not the notes. There will be few ‘hearing aids’ for listeners to the Third Programme. We hope that our approach will be at once sensitive and adult: that our audience will enjoy itself without crutches and will satisfy its desire for knowledge without a primer.<sup>xxix</sup>

However, Haley was telling the Governors in July 1947 that:

we do not intend that the three programmes shall be rigidly stratified. Rather will they shade into each other, their differences being in approach and treatment rather than in range of content. Music, plays, and talks, for

instance, will be found in each ... care will be taken consistently to ensure that the general aim of the BBC to raise public taste is not weakened. We feel, however, that it cannot be achieved simply by plunging the unsuspecting listener from Ivy Benson to Bach. We shall seek to do it more subtly; the classical music in the Light Programme will, we hope, be attractive enough to lead listeners onto the Home Service; the Home Service should lead onto the Third Programme. Items will, of course, be interchangeable. The Home Service and the Third Programme will repeat some of each other's broadcasts. So will the Home and Light programmes. Light and Third Programme exchanges will be rarer.<sup>xxx</sup>

Haley was to argue 30 years later that he had envisaged an active 'pyramid of taste' up which even the most ill-educated working-class listeners might ascend:

I designed these three programmes with the idea that we would have a Light Programme which would cover the lower third of the pyramid. We would have a Home Service which would take more than the middle third, take everything up to the tip. Then we'd have a Third Programme ... It was not meant to be a static pyramid ... my conception was of a BBC through the years, many years, which would slowly move listeners from one strata of this pyramid to the next ... I would want the Light Programme to play the waltz from *Der Rosenkavalier*. Then about a week or 10 days later I would hope the Home Service would play one act – the most tuneful act – of the opera. And within the month the Third Programme would do the whole work from beginning to end, dialogue and all.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Listeners—especially the potential wider audience available in 1946—were exposed to the contradictions in the BBC's approach, and the implicit (often explicit) class-based assumptions. Hennessy encapsulates the ambition shared by the founders of the Third Programme:

Haley ... would have wanted to be remembered for the pioneering, unique Third Programme, the kind of cultural gem that could only have been produced in early post-war Britain under conditions of broadcasting monopoly. In their way, Haley and George Barnes, the first Controller of the Third, were licence-funded Medicis. (1992: 312)

It was not likely, therefore, that the Third Programme would seize the opportunity presented by a newly hungry popular audience, although

for a while that seemed a genuine possibility. Promotion of what was in store for the early weeks cited performances of new works by home-grown composers Britten, Tippett, Bax, Berkeley and Rubbra, but nothing from contemporary composers playing and being talked about at the annual festival of modern music in Darmstadt—Hindemith, Schoenberg, Messiaen, Leibowitz, or Cage. The Third Programme was envisaged as being part of the distinctively British cultural renaissance, notably separate from the American leadership of the classical music world and from the continental European composers.

An early research study of the Third Programme noted in November 1947 that the audience initially averaged 3.1% of the civilian adult population (or a little over 1 million), but had steadily declined to below 2% by the end of the year, when the ‘patronage’ of the Third Programme was (probably ambitiously) claimed to be 2,350,000 adults.<sup>xxxii</sup>

From the first, BBC research was built around stereotypical assumptions of the nature of the audience for the Third Programme. That early study found that:

the section of the population which holds the Third Programme in real affection did not grow between October and June, despite the fact that during these months many people tried this programme for the first time [and that] the Third Programme’s public – those who are in sympathy with its aims and to whom its broadcasts frequently appeal – is about eight percent of the listening public, or roughly 2,600,000.

As to who they were, the class-based assumptions of the Forties could not be escaped even when the data challenged them:

as might be expected, the Third Programme appealed far more to middle class than to working class listeners (30 per cent of upper-middle-class as compared with 4 per cent of working class gave a warm welcome to the Third Programme). Nevertheless, the numerical preponderance of the working class in the population is so great, that among the 2,600,000 Third Programme enthusiasts ... about one in three are working class listeners.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The Third Programme never made the progress in appeal which some of its designers had hoped for; rather, it quickly found its audiences falling fast, and had to seek justification in that very elitism which evidently was a factor in the decline. It may be argued that this was because class-based

preconceptions were built into its approach from the start, or that they surfaced all too quickly once it was broadcasting. That one third of Third Programme listeners initially were working class was counter-intuitive for the station's designers, and they mostly failed to act upon that finding.

### CLASSICAL MUSIC RADIO 1947–1949

Nevertheless, 1947 showed what could be achieved even in the most challenging of circumstances, by bringing together the elite and the popular in the three radio networks, and by extension in respect of British culture as a whole. The winter of 1946/1947 had been a brutal test of the realism of the UK's post-war optimism, 'as the big freeze started to tighten its grip' (Kynaston 2008: 190), and even broadcasting hours were curtailed. Yet across the country, the cultural renaissance was sustained despite privations. Covent Garden Opera gave its first post-war performance in January 1947, of *Carmen*, and the first Edinburgh Festival took place in the autumn. As the unusually harsh weather began to retreat, with the arrival of May 1947, the sample week provides an opportunity to look in detail at how BBC radio output of classical music compared with the initial ambition and rhetoric which had accompanied the launch of the Third Programme the previous autumn, and how far audience response to the products of the cultural renaissance continued after the initial relief and bloom of victory.

In line with Haley's expectations, there was interplay between the Home Service and the Third Programme. The Home Service broadcast on Wednesday evening a BBCSO concert of Bach, Mozart and van Dieren; the Third Programme repeated that the following evening, adding the second half of Schoenberg's Piano Concerto and a Dvořák overture. Van Dieren's overture, *Anjou*, was exactly the sort of curiosity which the Third Programme had been expected to provide, but hearing it first on the Home Service indicated a wish to make it more popularly available—though it had disappeared from the BBC repertoire 30 years later (Grimley and Wiegold 1977). Notably, the Home Service was the major provider, offering over 16 hours of classical music programmes compared with 13 hours for the Third Programme. Add in the Light Programme's 6½ hours and the Third Programme represented just 37% of this genre in the sample week.

In terms of the works selected for broadcast, the Home Service majored on works by Mozart, Haydn, Bach and Schubert, giving space

also to Elgar as *This Week's Composer* and to British composer Lennox Berkeley. The repertoire on the Third Programme ranged more widely, featuring British composers such as Walton, Vaughan Williams and Bax, but finding space also for Schoenberg and Hindemith. The Light Programme maintained a consistent level of mainstream classical music, including works by Rossini, Mozart, Massenet, Tchaikovsky and Weber. The *Friday Concert* exemplified the genuinely popular but still unashamedly major works offered by the Light Programme: Schubert's 'Unfinished' Symphony, Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1, Ravel's *Pavanne* and Kodály's *Dances of Galanta*.

A listener of whatever class or level of education could spend the weekend of 4/5 May 1947 listening on the Home Service to two concerts by the BBCSO, one of Mendelssohn, Rousel, Rimsky-Korsakov and Lennox Berkeley, the other of Schumann, Carl Nielsen, Dvořák and Hindemith; plus the BBC Scottish Orchestra offering Rossini, Elgar and Tchaikovsky. He or she could also take in scenes from *Tosca*, and a Haydn string quartet, be educated, informed and diverted by the fortnightly *Music Magazine*, or even hear 'gramophone records' of short works by Elgar, Dvořák, Wagner and Debussy on Saturday morning. On the Third Programme, there was string quartet music from Purcell and Walton, a Vaughan Williams mass and Schubert lieder. Not to be outdone (although more of its classical music output was available during the week than at weekends), the Light Programme chipped in with a concert of works by Rossini, Pierné and Vaughan Williams.

The significance of the Home Service was evident also on weekdays. For example, on the Tuesday of the sample week, there were five separate classical music programmes: a song recital; a Berlioz overture on records; a Schubert symphony; a concert by the BBC Northern Orchestra of works by Mozart and Harty; and a piano recital given by Clifford Curzon. For the 'ordinary' listener, this was surely the BBC's main classical music radio channel. The BBC's audience research shows audiences of over 2 million adults for a concert. Over on the Light Programme, the weekday *Concert Hour* consistently attracted between 1 million and 1.5 million listeners. *Music in Miniature* on Thursday evening—a 'musical entertainment' of works by an ensemble supporting contralto Kathleen Ferrier—was heard by a remarkable 11% of the adult population, nearly 4 million people, while the *Friday Concert* on the Light Programme the following evening attracted over 3 million listeners to hear Schubert, Bruch, Ravel and Kodály. On the Third Programme, the

Berlioz *Requiem* played to an audience of 700,000 on Friday evening, despite being up against the Light Programme's popular concert.

Taking the week as a whole, this was a cornucopia of classical music radio. Genuinely accessible music across all three networks was supplemented by enough high-brow ambition to produce a rounded whole. The late Forties were one of those spells of benign balance, replicated in the late Sixties and early Nineties. The output was multi-channel, ambitious but accessible. It was relatively heedless of 'brow' or of class, driven rather by the reflexively related taste of producer and consumer, of broadcaster and listener.

The musical purist might argue that what was missing was significant reflection of the new modernism in classical music, pioneered by American-based composers and finding continued expression at Darmstadt, but British culture still ran along very different lines from that of the continent in terms of art, theatre and literature as well. Aware of this isolation, Barnes sent music critic William Glock on a fact-finding trip around Europe in May 1947, a trip which was to yield unexpected fruit in the Sixties when Glock was a radical Controller of Music for the BBC.<sup>5</sup>

1947 marked the apogee of the post-war settlement for radio. There were renewed ambitions for the BBCSO, specifically stimulated by the arrival of the Third Programme, with 'two series of public concerts ... most impressive in terms of repertoire' (Kenyon 1981: 198). Within the 1946–1947 season, Kodály conducted his own *Concerto for Orchestra*, Walton directed his *First Symphony*, and there were performances of symphonies by Balakirev, Goossens and Martinů.

Already, things were changing in British musical life. The use of outside orchestras in the Proms from 1947 onwards was, in Alison Garnham's words, 'a decisive step away from the past', reflecting a growing awareness of a changed musical world beyond the BBC and indeed beyond Britain (in Doctor, ed. 2007: 144). London's cultural life enjoyed a surge, as a result of both the recovery from the war and the wider English cultural renaissance. There was an increasing number of concerts, and sales of gramophone records increased as they became more affordable.

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<sup>5</sup>See Chap. 4, p. 100.

Even at this moment of excellence, radio was about to lose its dominance. The televising of part of the 1947 *Last Night of the Proms* was very much an experiment, being the first television broadcast of an orchestral concert ever attempted in the UK, but it opened a window onto the new media landscape. The BBC's multi-channel approach to the broadcasting of classical music had already meant that the post-war Proms might appear on any one of the three national radio channels; now television was entering the field as well, 'bringing with it a host of new technical demands and yet another audience to stake its claim to the series' (Garnham et al. 2007: 156–157).

Change was on the march by the late Forties, arguably stimulated by the needs and inventiveness of the war years. In technology, the transistor had been devised in 1947 by Bardeen, Brattain and Shockley, and was to revolutionise radio receivers along with much more in the emerging field of electronics. In 1948, Norbert Wiener published *Cybernetics* and the first long-playing record was produced. Socially, in April the *Empire Windrush* arrived at Tilbury, bringing the first group of post-war Caribbean immigrants. Yet academically, 1948 was a year for codifying the old certainties in literature: T.S. Eliot published *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, F.R. Leavis completed *The Great Tradition*. In classical music, 1948 saw the institution of the Aldeburgh and Bath Festivals, confirming British attention on largely British music.

In 1948 also, BBC music was beset by shifts in its leadership, and started to lose the impetus of the previous years. The BBC Music Department was hit by a series of agonising changes among its directors. Victor Hely-Hutchinson, who had taken over the Music Department in 1944, died suddenly in 1947. He was succeeded briefly by Kenneth Wright and then by operatic tenor and musical administrator Stuart Wilson at the beginning of 1948. Wilson lasted only until 1950, before heading off to the Royal Opera House. He was succeeded by his deputy, Herbert Murrill, who in turn fell ill after only a few months in post and also died in office, leaving Kenneth Warr as Acting Head in 1952. Richard Howgill, who as Controller of Entertainment had overseen the Music Department through this period, was then appointed as its Head. He at last provided stability and continuity until Glock arrived in 1959.

Wilson's tenure in particular was not a happy one. He was a divisive figure, who had successfully sued the BBC for libel in the Thirties over a report about the quality of his singing.<sup>xxxiv</sup> He took the decision to remove Boult (to whom Wilson's first wife was then married)

from his role as Chief Conductor of the BBCSO, but without telling him in advance what he had in mind. Wilson then proceeded to fluff the appointment of Boult's successor, approaching and then alienating John Barbiroli with a suggestion of a shared role, while 'disgracefully ignoring' Boult's own impossible position (Kenyon 1981: 214). Raphael Kubelik was eventually offered the post, in due course declined, leaving Malcolm Sargent as Hobson's Choice for this key role in the BBC and in the UK's musical life.

The pattern of programmes did not greatly change in 1948, but what stands out from the sample week analysis is a dramatic falling away in the audiences for the Third Programme classical output. Listening had shaded down a little on the other networks too—and in daytime, so not as a result of competition from television—but on the Third Programme it seems little short of catastrophic. There was no measurable audience at all for the Third Programme classical music output on Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday or Saturday. The highest audience of the week was just 360,000. When the Third Programme repeated Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin* on Friday evening, which had been broadcast on the Home Service the previous Wednesday evening to the second largest classical music audience of the week, 2,160,000, no one could be measured as listening.<sup>6</sup> The sample week analysis shows no previous example of an audience blank for an entire evening, and only rarely for a single programme.

Despite BBC Research Department assertions of a potential audience for the Third Programme in 1946 of around 2.5 million, it was becoming clear outside the BBC that no equivalent audience was being reached.<sup>xxxv</sup> Carpenter (1996: 84) notes that 'by the summer of 1948 the press was beginning to get wind of the drastic drop in audiences'. It is likely that some of this was due to worsening reception, and there was no early solution to this until the revised frequency allocations under the Copenhagen Frequency Plan came into effect from 1950 onwards.<sup>xxxvi</sup> However, what seemed to be alienating listeners was the concept of the

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<sup>6</sup>Where the research findings reported in the Daily Listening Barometer (see Appendix B) failed to identify an audience of at least 0.1% of all adults for a programme, it was marked as being 'below measurable levels'. The audience might have been zero, or it might have been, say, 49,999 (subject to caveats about sample sizes and their extrapolation to 'actual' audience levels).

network as an ‘intellectual and aesthetic experiment’. This phrase, from that quintessential member of the Bloomsbury set, diarist and diplomat Harold Nicolson, was part of a restatement of the high-brow purpose and target which the elite had intended for the Third Programme. Nicolson went on to address what he described as ‘the problem of audience’ against a background that:

the Fellows of Balliol and All Souls, the editors of the weeklies, are very busy people; they rarely listen to the wireless.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Harman Grisewood had succeeded Barnes as Controller of the Third Programme, in 1948. His response to Nicolson was that some light music should be seeded into the Third Programme output (Carpenter 1996: 85–87). However, that was seeing the BBC’s classical music output only in narrow institutional terms. Such lighter classical music was already available—and widely listened to—on the Home Service and on the Light Programme. Arguably, the problem confronting the Third Programme was that as the decade progressed it became less one part of the whole of the BBC’s output, and more something which would be regarded in its own right according to the elite aspirations of those responsible for it. The initial inclusiveness of the BBC radio offer in 1947 was starting to fray at the edges.

That continued as the decade drew to its close. There was a further reduction in the amount of classical music on the Home Service in 1949, in the ambition of its programmes and in the audiences for them too. Only a few classical music programmes on the Home or the Light now attracted as many as a million listeners, with the median audience on both much lower than in previous years. The median audience for the Third Programme, which had been 750,000 in 1947,<sup>xxxviii</sup> was down to a median of barely more than 100,000 in 1949.

### ASSESSING THE FORTIES OUTPUT

Programme output broadened significantly in the years after 1945. The number of composers in the weeks sampled rose steadily from 39 to 62, as the multi-channel output found its feet. The effect of the introduction of the Third Programme was to increase by around a third the amount of classical music programming broadcast. These years established the pattern which was to continue throughout the period,

whereby the most played composers were from the centre of the canonic repertoire, with Beethoven and Mozart consistently dominant. The Light Programme was a significant source of classical music, sustaining mass audiences often in excess of the other channels. Overall, however, audience levels were declining partly as television got into its stride, partly in the face of the returning normality of post-war distractions and partly in response to the loss of popular ambition among the producers, among whom the wartime democratisation of cultural tastes was beginning to wear rather thin.

Haley evidently felt enough concern to commission three reports into the BBC's music output in November 1948.<sup>xxxix</sup> Those reports—by Julius Harrison on the Home Service, William McNaught on the Light Programme and Dyneley Hussey on the Third Programme—concerned themselves firmly with 'serious music', and provide a view from the music establishment of the position as the Forties were ending and the impetus of the post-war reorganisation had dissipated. Harrison was a distinguished composer and conductor in the tradition of Elgar, and had recently given up conducting through deafness. McNaught was editor of the *Musical Times*, while Hussey was a music critic and a regular contributor to *The Listener*.

Harrison's report shows a high regard for the Home Service music output. He saw no grounds for believing that any particular group of composers were neglected, including British composers, and judged the great majority of performances to be a satisfactory level. He observed that:

the problems which confront programme planners in the compilation and arrangement of programmes designed to satisfy both a majority and minority of listeners are nowhere more apparent than in the Home Service. Here the programmes must, like Janus, face both ways; music as an Art and as Entertainment must be provided in something like equal proportions and in contra-distinction to the more esoteric nature of what is heard in the Third Programme, or to the more frankly popular appeal defining the Light Programme.<sup>xl</sup>

His conclusion serves to highlight further the significance of the Home Service's role as a classical music provider:

there was so much that was worthy of high praise both in the standard of performance, the choice of items and the general presentation of the

programmes that the conclusion is reached that the Home Service programmes are providing the listening public with little short of as good and varied a selection of music as is possible in the existing circumstances within the framework of the Corporation and general policy.

In respect of the most popular network, on the other hand, McNaught felt that there was a prevailing notion that ‘as it is only the Light Programme there is no need to try hard’ in terms of its serious music output.<sup>xli</sup> He argued that there should be a particular repertoire for the Light Programme within a self-contained allocation of music, praising the approach of *Music in Miniature* in offering a wide and inclusive repertoire (including the programme’s use of single movements), distinct from the canon of the other two radio channels.

His views drew particular criticism from Head of Music Wilson, never one to shirk a disagreement. Wilson saw the Home Service and Light Programme as to a degree interchangeable in their deployment of the music from his department:

In respect of the lunch-time concerts, which form the bulk of the Light Programme’s output of serious music, the Light Programme label is irrelevant and largely fortuitous. At lunch-time, as on Saturday nights, the Light Programme and Home Service roles are reversed and the Home Service carries variety programmes. The sensible thing is, therefore, for the Light Programme to carry popular classical music ... the audience that listens to these concerts is, I imagine, the same as listened to the Proms and the studio concerts.<sup>xlii</sup>

Hussey wrote a report on the Third Programme very much from the perspective of those who ran it. He was concerned with the detail of programming far more than with its appropriateness or appeal to audiences. Thus, while feeling that:

the programme has admirably fulfilled its purpose and, no doubt, as time goes on such gaps as there are will gradually be filled.

He went on to note the comparative neglect of the operas of Gluck, the failure to explore thoroughly Haydn’s symphonies and the absence of the performance of Richard Strauss’ less well-known operas.<sup>xliii</sup> Arguably, the increasing isolation and rapidly fading relevance of the Third Programme was shown all too well by this narrow understanding of the wider potential for the channel, which had been so apparent just three years previously.

Taken together, these reports illustrate well the approach of the three networks—one trying to look both ways, one popular and one elite. They do so without reference to the declining audiences for all of such output on whichever station. They each offer specific recommendations regarding content, presentation and scheduling, but none takes a broader look at the pattern and structure of output, or its likely appeal to listeners. These ‘outsiders’ actually confirm the BBC at its most self-referential. With a diminishing amount of output and dwindling audiences, they presage and do little to prevent the Fifties becoming a disappointing decade for classical music radio.

From an historical perspective, the Forties contain many of the issues which were to dog the rest of the century: a spasmodic wish to democratise the services, then qualified and limited by an unwillingness among the elite to keep open the doors to a potential mass audience; concern about balancing the demands of the high-brow while addressing the middle-brow listener; and institutional uncertainties about the use of multiple channels. The assumptions of class were ever-present, and they undermined the perception of who might listen to classical music on the radio. Yet these years also featured one of the high points in the provision of classical music radio, the years around 1947 when the BBC got the balance right between these conflicts and therefore provided inclusive programmes which ranged across the spectrum of classical music, achieving popular appeal and intellectual approval. That this lasted only a short time is an outcome which would recur in later decades.

## NOTES

- i. Melba’s Concert. *The Times*, 29 June 1920, p. 14.
- ii. *Radio Times*, 28 September 1923, p. 18.
- iii. See *inter alia* R.S. Thatcher, BBC Deputy Director Music. Memorandum, 11 September 1939. WAC R27/3/1. Also R.S. Thatcher. Copyright music by alien composers, undated, probably July 1940. BBC WAC R27/3/1.
- iv. Noel Coward recorded the song in July 1943. ‘Don’t let’s be beastly to the Germans/When our victory is ultimately won,/It was just those nasty Nazis who persuaded them to fight/And their Beethoven and Bach are really far worse than their bite ...’ *The Guardian* claims that it was banned by the BBC ‘by public demand’: [www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/apr/12/artsfeatures.popandrock](http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/apr/12/artsfeatures.popandrock).
- v. Quoted in Kenyon (1981: 163).

- vi. R.S. Thatcher, Deputy Director Music. Copyright music by alien composers, undated, probably July 1940. BBC WAC R/27/3/1.
- vii. Arthur Bliss. BBC policy with regard to copyright music by composers of enemy nationality, 21 October 1942. BBC WAC R27/3/3. A later draft dated 23 November allows latitude to producers where particular music is needed to meet 'special dramatic needs'.
- viii. Quoted in Leese (2006: 114).
- ix. Quoted in Hennessy (1992: 309).
  - x. *Hansard* (1945) House of Commons, 12 June 1945. Col. 1482 W.
- xi. Anderton (2012: 46).
- xii. Anderton (2012: 46) quoting Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (1994: 217–219).
- xiii. *BBC Handbook* 1947, p. 43.
- xiv. K.A. Wright, Deputy Director of Music. Copyright music by alien composers, undated, probably February 1946. BBC WAC R/27/3/6.
- xv. Basil Nicholls, Senior Controller. Memo to A/C Ent, 26 June 1947. BBC WAC R27/3/7.
- xvi. *BBC Handbook* 1949 pp. 16 and 17. Strauss died on 8 September 1949.
- xvii. Sir William Haley. Memorandum from WJH to BBC senior managers, 13 September 1944. BBC WAC R 34/580.
- xviii. File note: Tory Reform Group Broadcasting Sub-committee, 8 March 1945. BBC WAC R 34/580.
- xix. Memorandum from Director General to BBC heads and others, 24 July 1945. BBC WAC R 34/420.
  - xx. *The Listener*, 26 July 1945, p. 92.
  - xxi. Music in the Forces. *The Times*, 23 March 1945, p. 6.
- xxii. Sir William Haley. Breaking new ground in radio. *The Listener*, 26 September 1946, p. i.
- xxiii. William McNaught. Music on the Light Programme, August 1949. BBC WAC R27/495/2.
- xxiv. Edward Clark. A Festival of Contemporary Music. *The Listener*, 4 July 1946, p. 29.
- xxv. Next Steps in Broadcasting. *The Times*, 29 June 1920, p. 14.
- xxvi. Address to the General Advisory Council, 20 October 1947, quoted in Briggs (1979: 80).
- xxvii. Programme C terms of reference (approved by Director General) for Coordinating Committee, 22 January 1946. BBC WAC R34/890/1.
- xxviii. George Barnes, Head Third Network. The Third Programme: draft for board, 18 June 1946. BBC WAC R34/420.
- xxix. George R. Barnes. The aims of the programme. *The Listener*, 26 September 1946, p. i.

- xxx. Sir William Haley. The Home Programme policy of the BBC 4 July 1946. BBC WAC R39/420.
- xxxi. Haley interviewed by Gillard for the BBC Oral History project, 6 July 1976. BBC WAC R143/60/1. Haley was interviewed by Gillard for the BBC Oral History project. Carpenter (1996: 9) dates this as 4 April 1978, since this was when Haley corrected the manuscript of the transcript. This quote is from the original transcript.
- xxxii. A year of the Third Programme. BBC Audience Research Special Report, 6 November 1947. BBC WAC R9/9/11.
- xxxiii. Undated, but reporting on a study into audience and appreciation data for October to December 1946. BBC WAC R9/9/11.
- xxxiv. Singer's libel action against the BBC. *The Times* Law Report, 20 June 1934, p. 4.
- xxxv. A year of the Third Programme. BBC Audience Research Special Report, 6 November 1947. BBC WAC R9/9/11.
- xxxvi. Changes in BBC wave-lengths *The Times*, 29 September 1948, p. 2.
- xxxvii. Harold Nicolson. Birthday of the Third Programme. *The Listener*, 7 October 1948, p. 526.
- xxxviii. A year of the Third Programme. BBC Audience Research Special Report, 6 November 1947. BBC WAC R9/9/11.
- xxxix. Memorandum from Director General (Haley) to DHB (Nicholls), 18 November 1948. BBC WAC R27/495/2.
  - xl. Steuart Wilson, Head Music. Music in the Light Programme, undated but probably August 1949. BBC WAC R27/495/2.
  - xli. William McNaught. Music on the Light Programme, August 1949. BBC WAC R27/495/2.
  - xl. Steuart Wilson, Head Music. Music in the Light Programme, undated but probably August 1949. BBC WAC R27/495/2.
  - xliii. Dyneley Hussey. Report on Music in the Third Programme, probably summer 1949. BBC WAC R27/495/2.

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