

# 9: The Sound of a Nation's Soul

---

## A. Lands Without Music?

### 1. Class title 1 (Stanhope Forbes: *The Village Philharmonic*, 1888)

I found this quotation somewhere, to the effect that Music is the Sound of a Nation's Soul, but I am damned if I can find it again. But it is still a good title. But before we get into discussing it, let me play you a couple of scraps of music. Apart from being played by the same orchestra under the same conductor, what do they have in common?

### 2. Mendelssohn and Dvorak scherzo excerpts

### 3. Royal Albert Hall and Carnegie Hall

Did you get my point? Both clips come from symphonies in which composers from continental Europe attempt to paint pictures of Britain or America: the *Scottish Symphony* (1842) by **Felix Mendelssohn** (1809–47) and the *New World Symphony* (1893) by **Antonin Dvorak** (1841–1904). Both clips come from the *Scherzo* movement, and both tunes are pentatonic (playable on the black notes), giving them a folklike quality similar to those that Mendelssohn and Dvorak might have heard in Scotland or America. The sepia engravings are of the halls in which the symphonies might have played: a hall in London whose name I don't know (not the Royal Albert Hall shown here, which was later) and Carnegie Hall in New York. For both countries developed a strong tradition of supporting music. But actually writing it, that was a different matter. Let's move back to the beginning of the century

### 4. Section title A (Lands without Music)

### 5. German critiques of English music

The phrase "The Land Without Music" is the title of a 1904 book about British culture by the German writer **Oskar Schmitz**, but the idea goes back at least to **Heinrich Heine** in 1840. Schmitz is just plain rude, but what interests me about Heine is his implication that, though we may have no natural facility for music, we have a passion for making it. I'll come back to that in a second. But first, to test Schmitz's statement, I took a timeline of British composers from the BBC and put their birthdates on a chart. Or rather, not their birthdates, but the year when each turned 25, as I thought it would be a better representation of their mature career.

### 6. Timeline chart 1

The names I put into boldface are my rather arbitrary selections of composers who have international rather than merely British status. Actually, the first four names on the list—British composers of sacred choral music—would be counted among the best of their time in the whole of Europe. But Schmitz does

have a point: between **Henry Purcell** (1659–95) and **Edward Elgar** (1857–1934) there is no British composer of international note—a gap of two centuries—although after that they come thick and fast.

### 7. Timeline chart 2

However, I have a couple of additions to this list. Though German by birth, **George Frideric Handel** (1785–1759) settled in London in 1811 and basically dominated English music for the remainder of his life. **Mendelssohn**, who made his first visit in 1829 and came back nine more times, was similarly influential, although he never settled in Britain; the music of English composers in the middle years of the century could easily be mistaken for his. Even so, you will notice a bunch of blank lines on my timeline; what goes into them?

### 8. Timeline chart 3

Though it may not have produced any world-class composers, nineteenth-century Britain was very far from being a musical desert. The snatch of music you heard at the beginning was the final movement of the final symphony by **Franz Josef Haydn** (1732–1809), *Symphony 104*, the *London Symphony*, actually the last of twelve commissioned by the London impresario **Johann Peter Salomon** and premiered in London. The first entry in green on the list is the **London Philharmonic Society**, founded in 1813, and a co-sponsor of **Beethoven's Choral Symphony**. And so it goes. The **Royal Academy of Music** in 1822, followed by two others later in the century. Orchestras in London and the provinces. New performance venues. And perhaps most significant of the lot, the publication of the *Grove's Dictionary of Music*, still a major international authority. By the end of the century, British musical education—for ordinary people not just for professionals—had reached a level that few other countries could match.

### 9. All four composers

Let's hear some music by some actual Britons—two of whom in fact are Irish, but at that date Ireland was part of the United Kingdom. I won't claim that the four I have selected are the most important or that these are their most important works. But they do cover the gamut in terms of medium and period, and I can present each of them in a different way.

### 10. John Field facts

Internationally, **John Field** (1782–1837) is probably the most significant, with the possible exception of Elgar. But this is because most of his career was spent in Russia and elsewhere in Continental Europe, and his music was greatly influential on **Chopin** and the liquid type of melody associated with the *bel canto* style. Most notably, he invented the *Nocturne*: a short piano piece that extends a dreamlike melody over a rippling accompaniment. Although there are numerous recordings of actual *nocturnes* out there, I have chosen a piece in a similar style that he did not publish in his lifetime, known only as the *andante inédit* (probably around 1835). The pianist is **Marc-André Hamelin**.

### 11. Field: *Andante inédit* (1835)

### 12. William Sterndale Bennett facts

My next two figures, **Sir William Sterndale Bennett** (1816–75) and **Sir Charles Villiers Stanford** (1852–1924), both rose to positions of great eminence in the British musical establishment. Their music is not bad, either, though there is little about it (at least until the *Irish Rhapsodies* of Stanford) to suggest a British rather than Continental origin. Bennett in fact lived for three years in Leipzig, where he became the pupil of **Mendelssohn** and close friend of **Schumann**. Much of his music tends to sound drier and more academic than these German Romantics, but there are exceptions—one of which is his *Symphony in G Minor*. When I first heard its opening on YouTube, I said “Wait a minute! They’ve labeled this wrong! It must be something by Mendelssohn!” But no, it is correctly labeled. I play it to make my point, that most mid-century British music was in effect an offshoot of German Romanticism. I have put it together with a painting of about the same date just to have something to look at—*Loch Leven and Glencoe* by **Sidney Richard Percy** (1821–86); I hope it doesn’t inappropriately color your interpretation.

13. **William Sterndale Bennett: *Symphony in G Minor* (1864), opening**

14. **Charles Villiers Stanford facts**

Though parallel to Bennett in many respects, **Charles Villiers Stanford’s** bio also has many differences. He too was a professor; he was apparently harsh on his students, but he produced some of the great ones of the next generation. He too went to Leipzig, but the time of Mendelssohn and Schumann was past; all he got from Germany was a determination to go his own way. His own way, however, came only at the very end of his career when, like his students **Vaughan Williams** and **Holst**, he turned to folk songs—in his case from his native Ireland—and at the beginning, when he produced some utterly beautiful church works, such as the Motet we shall hear now: *Beati quorum via*, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.”

15. **Charles Villiers Stanford: *Beati quorum via* (1888), complete**

16. **Edward Elgar facts**

Though also ending up a Knight of the Realm, **Sir Edward Elgar** (1857–1934) had a very different career. He grew up in the West of England and never attended a conservatory. He wanted to go to Leipzig, but his father could not afford it. So he began to work in his own part of the country, as a choirmaster, organist, conductor, and orchestral violinist. The fact that he could do so speaks highly of the richness of musical life in this part of England, especially centered around the great Cathedrals. His first truly international success was the *Enigma Variations* (1899), subtitled “To my friends pictured within”; it’s a series of brilliant character studies. I will show you two clips from the 1968 ballet by **Sir Frederick Ashton** (1904–88), who brings them all together in the garden of an English country house.

17. **Elgar: *Enigma Variations*, group portrait**

I’ll play the opening, then cut to the emotional center of the work, the “Nimrod” variation dedicated to Elgar’s close friend **Alfred Jaeger**. Unlike the other variations, this one is not about some personality trait so much as an undisclosed private incident between the two men. Apparently Elgar was given to crippling fits of self-doubt, and Jaeger, who was his publisher as well as close friend and most honest critic, helped him over one of them by citing the example of Beethoven—a reference to his *Pathétique Sonata* can be heard in the music. What is remarkable to me is that the number is hardly danced at all. It

begins with a tentative gesture by **Jaeger** (in the dark suit), who I think must be in love with the woman in the previous variation. Then **Elgar** comes in, and the two talk. **Lady Elgar**, the composer's wife, joins them, and for a moment the piece becomes an actual *pas-de-trois*, reaching a climax with the music, but then just stops. It reminds us that the deepest stories can often be told with the simplest of means.

18. Elgar: *Enigma Variations*, excerpts

19. Class title 2 (Herbert Statue)

## B. The American Musician

20. Section title B (Eakins: *Music*)

The painting is *Music* by **Thomas Eakins** (1844–1916), completed in 1904. What music might the man be playing? Here is one guess; the violinist is **Noah Bendix-Balgley**, with **Ohad Ben-Ari** at the piano.

21. Beach: *Romance for violin and piano* (1893), opening

22. Amy Beach facts

What did you think? This is music of polish and sophistication capable of holding its own with Schumann, Brahms, or Fauré. It was written, not merely by an American, but an American *woman*, **Amy Beach** (1867–1944), who eschewed the German training then considered essential but studied locally as a pianist and taught herself to compose. She published under her husband's name as *Mrs. H.H.A. Beach*. Only when he died did she go to Germany—now as an accomplished pianist and composer.

23. William Billings facts

Reputedly the first significant composer to be born in the American colonies was **William Billings** (1746–1800), one of whose hymns (*Chester*) we have already heard in the first class. Like most of the American composers in this class, he was almost entirely self-taught. But very prolific, producing six volumes of sacred music over the course of his career. A European composer might scoff at the relative simplicity of his harmonies, but they do have a rude vigor. And clearly he has heard some **Handel**. Many of his hymns start in churchlike fashion but then break into simple but vigorous counterpoint; they were known as **fuguing tunes**. Here is one from 1794, *Creation*, which might almost be Hamlet's "What a marvelous piece of work is Man." Billings almost always wrote the words too.

24. Billings: *Creation* (1794)

25. Louis Moreau Gottschalk facts

Many American musicians, as we have already seen with Amy Beach, attained virtuosity as performers long before they developed similar sophistication as composers. Such a musician was **Louis Moreau Gottschalk** (1829–69), who started as a child prodigy and basically composed to give himself the most spectacular music possible to play. Again, he was self-taught, and again he completely bypassed the musical establishment. The Paris Conservatoire would not have him, but he made a career anyway. Two

more important things about him: almost all that career was spent outside America; and his musical sources included Black music, Creole music, and dance styles from Latin America; he was the first American-born composer to think entirely outside the Anglo-Germanic box. Here is his four-minute piece *The Banjo* (1853), an astonishing piano rendition of African-American picking. The pianist is **Cyprien Katsaris**, who I think has slightly tightened Gottschalk's rather episodic connections.

26. **Gottschalk: *The Banjo* (1853)**

27. **William Henry Fry facts**

Gottschalk was a showman, but he was not alone. Much American music of the mid-century is more spectacular than structured. Consider the case of **William Henry Fry** (1813–64), whom I mentioned in an earlier class, but could not play. He was one of the first composers of symphonic music in America—and by “symphonic” I simply mean using a large orchestra. Indeed his *Niagara Symphony* required no less than 11 tympani to capture the thunder of the falls. Appropriately it was composed for a “Monster Concert” put on in 1854 by none less than **P.T. Barnum**, of circus fame! I’ve put a section of it with the huge 1857 painting of the falls by **Frederick Edwin Church** (1826–1900).

28. **Fry: *Niagara Symphony* (1854), with Church: *Niagara* (1857)**

29. **George Frederick Bristow facts**

**George Frederick Bristow** (1825–1898) is an exception to what I was saying about most American composers being untrained. His father was a professional musician, who taught him to play several instruments along with harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. While still in his teens, he joined the **NY Philharmonic** as a violinist and remained with them for 35 years, rising to the position of concertmaster. Meanwhile, he also conducted two choral societies and was active in establishing a music curriculum in public schools. So he was very much an establishment man. All the same, his five Symphonies all have extra-musical subjects. **Symphony #4** (1872), for the example, which he called the *Arcadian*, ends with a movement about **Westward Migration**, headed: “*Arrival at the New Home, Rustic Festivals, and Dancing.*” I have only time for a short sample, however, so let me give you the opening of the third movement, called “*Indian War Dance.*” The illustration is by **George Catlin** (1796–1872).

30. **Bristow: *Arcadian Symphony* (1872), with Catlin: *Bear Dance***

31. **Victor Herbert facts**

I started the hour with a snatch of **Dvorak’s *New World Symphony***, written while he was director of a conservatory in Manhattan. The principal cello teacher at his school was a man of Anglo-Irish birth and German training, **Victor Herbert** (1859–1924), who had emigrated to America a decade earlier, and was enjoying a career as cellist and conductor with many of the country’s major ensembles. After attending the premiere of Herbert’s *Cello Concerto #2* in 1894, Dvorak was inspired to write a concerto of his own. It became even more famous, but that does not detract from the sheer quality of Herbert’s work—which may surprise those who know him only as the later composer of Broadway operettas such as *Babes in Toyland* (1903) and *Naughty Marietta* (1910). Here is its opening, in a performance by Canadian cellist **Amanda Forstyth** with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

- 32. Herbert: *Cello Concerto #2* (1894), opening
- 33. Class title 2 (Herbert bust in Central Park)

## C. Theater and Parlor

- 34. Section title C (Theater and Parlor)

Up to now, we have been dealing with the concert hall. But **Victor Herbert** is best remembered today as the composer of operettas and **Tin Pan Alley** songs. And for most people in both countries, *these* were the forms in which they generally heard music: bought as sheet music and sung around the piano or on special outings to the musical theater. So let's go a short way beyond 1900 and hear the *March of the Toy Soldiers* from Herbert's *Babes in Toyland*, which premiered in 1903. Actually, let's go way beyond that and watch it in a clip from the 1961 movie from **Walt Disney**.

- 35. *Babes in Toyland*, title and Disney poster
- 36. Herbert: *Babes in Toyland*, *March of the Toy Soldiers* (Disney, 1961)
- 37. Jim Broadbent as W.S. Gilbert and Alan Corduner as Sir Arthur Sullivan in *Topsy Turvy*

I would be hard put to describe the plot of *Babes in Toyland*; it was basically a lot of fairy-tale characters strung together. In fact, few turn-of-the-century operettas had much of a plot; audiences went for the music and the stage spectacle. Twenty years before, the comic operas of **William Schwenk Gilbert** (1813–1911) and **Arthur Seymour Sullivan** (1842–1900) were all the rage on *both* sides of the Atlantic, and fantastic though their plots might be, these were very well put together indeed. Sir Arthur Sullivan, who was knighted for his services to English music, saw himself as a serious composer, and did not much like Gilbert—but he recognized an outstanding wordsmith and consummate man of the theater. The G&S operas (really musical plays) worked so well, not merely for their infectious music, but because they had words that meant something—often acute social satire. Gilbert loved setting up absurd situations and then using them so skewer contemporary issues. So in *The Gondoliers* (1889) the two title characters suddenly find themselves the joint rulers of the mythical country of **Baratrarria**, a kingdom that they immediately try to run on Republican principles. The target here is obvious: America. You can get much of the flavor from this scene with the arch-traditionalist **Don Alhambra**. Only this is a Canadian production from Stratford, Ontario, and (as often happens) many of the words have been changed to apply to contemporary *Canadian* politics. The audience seems to enjoy the jokes anyhow.

- 38. Gilbert and Sullivan: *The Gondoliers* (1889), “There was a King”
- 39. *Maritana* and *The Bohemian Girl*

Gilbert and Sullivan called their works “operas,” but in fact there were English-language works closer to what we understand as opera in the earlier part of the century. Two of the most popular—internationally, not merely in Britain—were by Irish composers: *Maritana* (1845) by **Vincent Wallace** (182–65) and *The Bohemian Girl* (1843, no connection to *La Bohème*) by **Michael Balfe** (1808–70); the book of *Piano Selections from the Great Operas* that my mother gave me as a child contains potpourris

of both of them, alongside works by Verdi and Wagner! I very much doubt, however, that either would work on the opera stage today; they are known exclusively for one or two solos that have broken out of context to become parlor songs in their own right. One such is “I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls” from *The Bohemian Girl*. Many illustrious singers tackle it on YouTube, but I have chosen a very simple performance with just a few instruments in a rural church hall in the part of Ireland where I was born, because its down-home quality feels closer to the essence of this rather lovely song. The singer is **Claudia Boyle**.

40. Balfe: *The Bohemian Girl* (1843), “I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls”

41. Foster and “I dream of Jeanie with the light brown hair”

I would go to say that, as a genre, the sentimental ballad is the most characteristic musical product of the entire Nineteenth Century, in both Britain *and* America. Clearly it speaks to some yearning in the hearts of people at the time. I spent three hours listening to different renderings of about a dozen on them—things like “Home, sweet home,” “Love’s old, sweet song,” and “When you and I were young, Maggie”—I’ll put a few on the website. But having to choose just one, I went for “I dream of Jeanie with the light brown hair,” written in 1854 by **Stephen C. Foster** (1826–64), because it is such a haunting melody, and is available in a good video sung by **Tom Roush**. I had always thought of it as a love song, but it is really a lament for a love that is lost.

42. Foster: “I dream of Jeanie with the light brown hair” (Tom Roush)

43. Foster and Jeanie (negative of previous image)

So what happened? Did she die, or was she simply the one that got away. The truth is that **Foster’s wife Jane** had left him after four years of marriage, and it looked like it was to be a permanent separation. Perhaps this was his way of dealing with it.

44. Plantation Melodies

One reason that I did not play more of these great sentimental songs is because I felt that at this stage we would need something more upbeat. And Foster can provide that too, with the selection from his *Plantation Songs* that I’ll play in a moment. We always associate Foster with the Antebellum South. *My Old Kentucky Home* is the state song of Kentucky. At Florida State University, where I taught when I first came over here, the undergraduate sopranos would dress as Southern Belles to sing in the statewide *I Dream of Jeanie* competition to obtain scholarships to help them through music school. Yet Foster was born in Pennsylvania and visited the South only once. I am not sure whether his *Plantation Songs* were original or based on tunes that he had heard—many of them are folk songs now. Anyway, here is a brief potpourri of three of them: “Ring, banjo, ring,” “Oh Susannah,” and “The Camptown Races.”

45. Foster medley, morphing to Section title D

## D. From Folk Roots

That statue of Foster used to be in Pittsburgh, but it was removed in 2018 by order of the council. The figure of the African American banjo-player at the composer's feet was thought to "glorify white appropriation of black culture and depict the vacantly smiling musician in a way that is at best condescending and at worst racist." Many of Foster's lyrics are racially offensive now, but probably would not have been then. At the same time, many of these songs have entered the folk music repertoire, and they could be said to perpetuate a notion of "the happy darkies singing as they work," which is both false and harmful. Still, it does open the door to the role of folk styles in the music of both countries, but especially America. This is a very rapid glimpse; I will take it up again in a later class.

### 46. Holst and Vaughan Williams

I mentioned that one important component of the English Renaissance at the turn of the century was the rediscovery of English folk song. These two students of Charles Villiers Stanford's, **Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872–1958) and **Gustav Holst** (1834–1934) would accompany each other on field trips to rural England—especially the Southwest—to persuade village folk to sing the old folk songs before they died out, and notate what they heard. At the very least, this resulted in a cornucopia of melodies that don't appear in the commercially available folk song collections (whereas several of Stephen Foster's did), such as this song, *High Germany*.

### 47. Traditional: *High Germany*

Both composers then incorporated these into instrumental pieces. It wasn't just that these found tunes were essentially new, they offered a break from the academic German style of symphonic development in which they were being trained, and in many cases involved harmonic systems that were older than the classical practice of the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Here is an extract from Vaughan Williams' *Folk Songs from Somerset* (1923); I put it with some tourist videos a couple of years ago.

### 48. Vaughan Williams: *Folk Songs from Somerset* (1923)

Nonetheless, when you see these collected melodies written down, they still appear fairly regular and well behaved. Another collector of the time, **Cecil Sharp** (1859–1924), whose work actually preceded that of Holst and Vaughan Williams, went over to America to hear what had happened to these old tunes in Appalachia, where they were not in the hands of conservatory-trained musicians. To hear difference, compare the openings of the traditional ballad *Barbara Allen*, first as sung in the neat European manner by countertenor **Andreas Scholl**, and then by an Appalachian singer, **Jean Ritchie**.

### 49. Traditional: *Barbara Allen* (Andreas Scholl)

### 50. Traditional: *Barbara Allen* (Jean Ritchie)

We know by comparison with what happened in other media that the interest in recapturing folk materials in Europe, which goes at least as far back as the Brothers Grimm at the start of the Nineteenth Century, also involves a certain amount of cleaning them up to make them more regular. So the



differences between Jean Ritchie’s version of *Barbara Allen* and Scholl’s come about for two reasons: she is singing an earlier version of the song, and she does so in a way that has been handed down from grandmother to mother to daughter. You can get a little more from this documentary on the origins of bluegrass music in the Appalachians; I hope you don’t get as bored as the narrator sounds!

51. *The Origins of Bluegrass, opening*

52. Chiwetel Ejiofor in *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013)

That is just the opening of a 20-minute documentary; I gave you a link on the website. Not only did I cut it short, I removed a section in which the narrator implied that the **Child Ballad books** contained the tunes and instrumentation. They didn’t, though somebody else collected the music later. And both words and music were not collected until the 1880s, long after these songs had become traditional. The video also mentioned the influence of African musical styles in the introduction of the banjo. In fact, African music—or more specifically African American slave music—was an even greater force that would shape American and world music in the next century. Listen to this sequence from the 2013 movie *Twelve Years a Slave*; it shows a funeral, at which the people sing the spiritual *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. I’d point out two things. One, that the whole thing is syncopated: “Roll, Jordan, roll” is not sung neatly on the beat, but the second syllable anticipates it. And two, the form of call and response: the older woman singing a phrase and the group responding; also note how, a little later, the calls begin to overlap the responses in a most exciting way.

53. *Twelve Years a Slave*, “Roll, Jordan, Roll”

I’ll come back to some at least of this in my later class on Leisure, when I hope to mention Ragtime and early Jazz. But for now let me jump to a modern group, **Tuba Skinny**, performing music that arose out of this tradition, in the cultural melting-pot that served as the incubator for it all: **New Orleans**. You can hear the same syncopated beat right from the beginning, and the efflorescence of solos from all the wind instruments is nothing but a huge extension of the call-and-response texture of the spiritual. The one woman in the group, **Shaye Cohn**, is also the band’s founder and leader.

54. *Tuba Skinny: Jubilee Stomp*

55. Class title 3 (To be continued...)