A History of Music in the British Isles

Volume 2

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by Laurence Bristow-Smith

The first volume of
A History of Music in the British Isles:
From Monks to Merchants

and

Harold Nicolson: Half-an-Eye on History

A History of Music in the British Isles

Volume 2

Empire and Afterwards

Laurence Bristow-Smith

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To
Peter Winnington
editor and friend for forty years

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Preface to Volume 2 of *A History of Music in the British Isles*

This volume continues the story begun in *From Monks to Merchants*.

Writing about music in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presents very different problems from writing about the music of earlier centuries. In the first place, there is so much more information. With Tallis and Byrd, with Purcell, even in the eighteenth century with Hook and Shield and Dibdin, I often had to hunt out the facts and piece them together to reconstruct the story. By the time I reached the Victorian era, the problem was the reverse. I had to sift through a mountain of facts, selecting and discarding in order to allow the story to emerge from what remained.

Then there is the problem that so much of the nineteenth and twentieth century is still with us – both physically and in terms of connected memory. Many of the monuments to musical life before the First World War are still standing and in use: Birmingham City Hall, the Royal Opera House, the Ulster Hall, the Colston Hall, the Albert Hall, the Wigmore Hall, the Cadogan Hall, the Usher Hall. For many people, venues such as these are part of their regular experience of listening to music on the radio or going to concerts. Sitting in my plush velvet seat, I always feel an extra sense of connection, thinking that Stanford or Parry, Wood or Beecham once conducted this same piece of music in this same hall. Of course, one can sit in Canterbury Cathedral and think that Tallis once sang there, but the feeling is less immediate.

That sense of connection with the (comparatively) recent past is enhanced by other, less physical, links. My grandfather drove the trams which took people to the Crystal Palace in the 1920s. My father watched it burn down in 1936. He saw Gus Elen perform and knew all the words to 'If It Wasn't for the 'Ouses in Between'. As an eleven- or twelve-year old, I saw Boult conduct. Boult had seen Richter and Nikisch conduct; he had known Holst and Vaughan Williams. I also saw Barbirolli, unshaven and in a scruffy tailcoat, conducting Elgar. Barbirolli had known Mackenzie and McEwen, and had himself been conducted by Elgar. That sense of a connection running back through time, a sort of apostolic succession, is important in music.

There is also the speed of change. As communications have improved and technology has developed, so music has changed ever more quickly. Musical styles and ideas which might in the past have taken fifty years to be worked through and gradually superseded can now become outdated within five or ten. That is not a criticism, just a recognition of modern culture.

At the same time, there has been a change in attitudes towards music; a change in how it is used, and what people think it is for. Music for its own sake is heard in live venues, on radio and television, on CDs, iPods and mp3 players. It is an essential component of major feature films and cheap TV sitcoms. It also there as background, as something to fill a space, in supermarkets and hotel lobbies, in television advertisements and when one is on the phone waiting to be connected to a call centre.

All these factors mean that the second volume of this work differs from the first. Popular music plays a much greater role in the story. There are more names of people and places, and more attention is paid to who knew who, when and where; there are more styles and genres to be defined and their place in the development of British music plotted; and, of necessity, there are more titles of songs, plays, films, and other works quoted as examples. As a consequence, and although it remains essentially chronological, the narrative has to move back and forwards in order to keep track of the increasingly numerous strands of musical life.

Given all this, and in particular given the speed at which the story of music in the British Isles unfolds after 1800, it is important to emphasise the point I made in the Introduction to Volume One, that terms such as 'conservative' and 'progressive', 'forward looking' and 'backward looking' are used to position works and composers in relation to the broad development of music in Britain and in Europe. They are purely descriptive, not judgemental.

Laurence Bristow-Smith
Glenholme, Kirkcudbright
2017

Abbreviations Used

ABC	Associated British Corporation (a commercial television company)
BBC	British Broadcasting Company Ltd (from October 1922); British Broadcasting Corporation (from 1st January 1927)
CEMA	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
ENSA	Entertainments National Service Association
GPO	General Post Office
ISCM	International Society for Contemporary Music
ITV	Independent Television
LPO	London Philharmonic Orchestra
LSO	London Symphony Orchestra
PRS	Performing Rights Society
RAM	Royal Academy of Music
RCM	Royal College of Music
RPO	Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

It is better to confront the issue of perceptions of British music during the nineteenth century at the beginning of the period rather than at the end. The most famous – or infamous – criticism came from the German writer, Oskar A.H. Schmitz, in 1914. His book, *Das Land ohne Musik: englische Gesellschaftprobleme* (*The Land without Music: English Social Problems*) asserted that 'the English are the only civilised nation without their own music (except street music).'[1] This was not the first such attack. Two other German writers on cultural matters, the activist Georg Weerth and the musicologist Carl Engel, both of whom had lived in England, had previously been equally dismissive of English musical awareness and ability. Even the poet Heinrich Heine, writing a newspaper article in 1840, gave it as his opinion that 'there is truly nothing on earth so terrible as English musical composition, except English painting.'[2] Why, one wonders, should such a perception have rooted itself so deeply in the German mind? And why did it concern them? The French and the Italians seem to have taken no comparable interest in the British musical soul. The answer is perhaps to be found in the huge divergence between the two musical cultures, best symbolised by the fact that in 1882 Germany saw the first performance of Wagner's *Parsifal*, whereas London in the same year saw the premiere of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the British looked upon Italy as the fount of musical inspiration. The madrigal, the concerto, opera – all originated in Italy. So, too, did the harpsichord, the violin and the piano. Over the course of the eighteenth century, perceptions began to change. The symphony was developed in Austria and Germany, and it was the symphony which, during the nineteenth century, came to be regarded (although not in Britain, and with Wagner, as always, an exception) as the supreme test of a composer's abilities. During the nineteenth century the German-speaking lands also produced a series of composers whose work utterly transformed classical music as we know it: Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Wagner, Bruckner, Brahms, Mahler. The British Isles produced no comparable figure and no comparable music.

This does not mean, however, that Britain was the musical desert of German imagining. In Volume One we saw how social conservatism (allied to the new, expanding, market economy) combined with musical conservatism (allied to the cult of Handel) to hold back change and innovation, except where new music with a proven record of popularity could be profitably imported from abroad. This situation had come about largely because of the vacuum left in British musical life – under William and Mary and the first three Georges – as the Court, the Chapel Royal and the Church of England gradually ceased to exercise the kind of leadership that had been their accepted role since Tudor times. We have seen also how various developments during the eighteenth century – the musical societies in provincial towns and cities, the Handel cult, glee singing and even Methodist-inspired hymn-singing – had began a process of democratising music, not only broadening its appeal, but also making it accessible to people from different levels of society, particularly among the new urban population.

What happened during the nineteenth century was that these various forces, and certain new ones, realigned themselves to bring about a transformation in British musical life. The nineteenth century, and the Victorian era in particular, was a time of almost continuous change – political, social and technological. It would be surprising if such a period had not also produced major changes in musical life, but they were not changes to match or parallel those in Germany or Austria or elsewhere. They went in an almost opposite direction. As the democratisation of music gathered speed and strength, it resulted in something like a popular revolution, which not only sparked off a wave of musical creativity in new areas and new genres, but also turned the middle and lower classes – the main consumers of music – into the arbiters of taste. What they wanted prevailed, and if that meant the novelty and vulgarity of music hall, the wit and spectacle of the burlesque, or the feminine allure of the ballet, rather than the expressive grandeur of Beethoven or Brahms, then so be it. Those who had traditionally controlled and directed British musical life might retain some residual influence, or they might behave as if nothing had happened, but with hindsight we can see that what they were facing was the arrival of a kind of multi-channel mass culture. From a German perspective, which saw high culture as all-important and discounted 'street music', the result was evidently deplorable, the equivalent of no music. Taking a different viewpoint, we can see much of what happened as innovative and

exploratory, as a burst of creativity that marked the emergence of popular music as a significant cultural and economic force in British life – a position which, since that time, has strengthened with every new generation.

Critics and commentators, and even the concert-going public, have long regarded the work of nineteenth-century British composers – at least until the beginning of the so-called English Musical Renaissance at the end of the century – with a mixture of disappointment and exasperation: the 'could do better' of a potentially clever pupil's school report. There is certainly justification for this, but, as we shall see, the period did have many redeeming features. If there was no great music, there was much that remains worth listening to and exploring, and there were occasional moments of glory. Times were changing rapidly and composers naturally reflected those changes in their music, but that, of course, did not mean that the problems facing British music disappeared. The assumption that British music was necessarily second rate had become deeply entrenched in the national psyche and handicapped many who might have gone on to achieve more than they did. Some musicians accepted it as a fact and looked to Germany for a remedy. Others attempted to fight back. Still others seem to have tried, consciously or otherwise, to prepare for a time when British music could regain a degree of self-confidence.

Yet this is not to say that classical music was not popular; it was more popular than ever. Audiences grew – particularly for foreign music and foreign musicians. Well-meaning societies were established, dedicated to the promotion of music through lectures and through the commissioning of new works (although often from foreign composers). The first permanent orchestras came into being. Choral societies were established the length and breadth of the United Kingdom (with an emphasis, of course, on the oratorio). Brass bands became a feature of industrial towns. Music began to be taught in schools. The Tonic Sol-Fa System was invented to help people learn to sing. Very little of the music involved was new or challenging, but it was music, and it was reaching an unprecedented number of people. Many of those composers who have been criticised, fairly or otherwise, for not creating a 'new' British music were also energetic educators, committed, in their various and sometimes eccentric ways, to spreading knowledge and awareness of music as widely as possible. In contrast to Germany, where high culture ruled, British music became the handmaiden not of romantic idealism, but of adult education and local choral societies.

In 1800, however, all this was in the future. British music began the

century in a condition which can best be described as fragmented and uncertain. Germany was the leading musical power in Europe; fallout from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars was affecting Britain in particular; but the single most influential individual was an Italian, at least by birth, although he spent at least as much of his life in England as did Handel, and his work has consequently to be seen in a British context.

Muzio Clementi (1752–1832) was born in Rome, the son of a silversmith. A child prodigy, he had composed several large-scale works by the age of fourteen, including a Mass that was performed in Rome to great acclaim. It may well have been this Mass that drew him to the attention of an English visitor, Peter Beckford, a passionate hunter and writer on hunting matters, and also a patron of the arts.[3] After some persuasion, Clementi's father agreed to allow the boy to go to England for a period of seven years, during which Beckford would fund his musical education. By the end of that time, spent mainly at Beckford's estate, Steepleton Iwerne, in Dorset, Clementi was ready to launch himself on the London musical scene. He became harpsichordist to the Italian Opera at the King's Theatre and gave virtuoso piano recitals. He rapidly established a reputation that spread beyond the confines of the British Isles and, in 1780, having received a number of invitations, set off on a European tour that lasted three years. In Vienna, he met Haydn, and, at the instigation of Emperor Joseph II, became involved in a musical duel with Mozart. Quite what happened we do not know. Clementi was always warm in his praise of Mozart, while Mozart, four years younger and perhaps feeling a little threatened, condemned Clementi's playing as mechanical and lacking in taste and feeling. Nonetheless, it was Mozart who borrowed from Clementi: the initial theme of Clementi's Sonata in B flat major, opus 24, no. 2, reappeared ten years later in the overture to *The Magic Flute*.

It seems that Clementi had already decided not to return to his native Italy, and from 1783 onwards he was settled in London, leading a busy life as a composer, conductor, performer, teacher and, later, businessman. In 1786, his Sonata in D, opus 16 ('*La Chasse*') appeared under the imprint of the music publishers and piano-makers Longman and Broderip. Clementi maintained a connection with the company, perhaps giving performances on their instruments, until it went bankrupt in 1798. At that point, he teamed up with James Longman, who was actually an organ-builder, bought the assets of the defunct company, and set up Longman, Clementi & Co, which later became simply Clementi & Co. The firm went through

various changes of personnel, but Clementi remained a partner until 1831, the year before his death. He possessed considerable business acumen: during a second and even longer European tour, which lasted from 1802 to 1810, he negotiated the publication of a number of works by Beethoven, which proved extremely profitable. But the main reason for the tour, which took in Paris, Vienna, Berlin and Saint Petersburg, was to sell instruments, chiefly pianos – for which Clementi's talents made him a natural salesman (although, as we shall see, he had a equally talented assistant) – but also harpsichords, organs and harps.

The piano was changing. Johannes Zumpe's square pianos were rapidly being superseded by John Broadwood's invention, the grand piano, first seen in 1781. Broadwood soon went further, inventing and patenting the sustain and the soft pedals, and by 1810 extending the keyboard range to six octaves. All this made the piano much more flexible and responsive than the harpsichord, which gradually fell out of fashion with both composers and performers. The year 1795, when the grand piano replaced the harpsichord for the performance of the King's birthday ode, probably represents the tipping point in the relative fortunes of the two instruments. Clementi, combining a practical and technical understanding of the new pianos with a performer's instincts, was at the forefront of these changes. In the 1760s (as noted in Volume One, Chapter 46), Johann Christian Bach proclaimed that his sonatas could be played on the piano as well as the harpsichord. By the end of the century, such references to the harpsichord were rapidly disappearing. Clementi was the first to appreciate the expressive, even poetic, qualities of the new pianos and to apply them to the piano sonata. His Six Piano Sonatas, opus 2 – and particularly no. 2 in the set, often referred to as 'Clementi's Octave Lesson' – may well be the first true piano sonatas in that they appear to have been written with little or no consideration for performance on the harpsichord.

Clementi was a busy, but not prolific, composer. All together, he left some one hundred and fifty pieces for the piano – or for the piano and other instruments, mainly violin, cello, and flute. His real achievement, which had an impact on the development of classical music across the whole of Europe, was to demonstrate how what was now technically possible on the instrument could be applied in terms of style and form. Beethoven recognised this when he expressed his admiration for Clementi's piano sonatas – although, surprisingly, it was Broadwood, not Clementi, who in 1817 sent Beethoven a grand piano as a gift. Beethoven

also praised Clementi's exercises and studies for students of the instrument. Works such as *Six Progressive Sonatinas* (1797), *Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Pianoforte*, opus 42 (1801), and *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1817), were the first of their kind.

As one might expect from someone who knew Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, Clementi was also a composer of symphonies. These were works by which he set great store and they were popular in their day, but not as popular as those of Haydn, which is perhaps why he kept revising them, with the result that they were not published in his lifetime. Most of the symphonies were lost, the manuscripts possibly destroyed by Clementi himself, but musicologists have painstakingly reconstructed six of them from the fragments that remain, and they are certainly interesting works, with more than a touch of Haydn about them. The four later symphonies, reconstructed by the Italian musicologist, Pietro Spada, mix Haydn with an early romantic feel. They have scale, fluency and melody, but there is a lack of tension and sometimes direction. From the evidence that we have, based on what has been pieced together, it is clear that his symphonies were never going to rival his works for the piano in terms of intrinsic musical value or longer-term influence.

Clementi was also much sought after as a teacher: his methods and personality inspired a generation of composers and pianists across Europe, and a list of his pupils includes some of the best-known names in early nineteenth-century music. The Austrian Johann Nepomuk Hummel, who had previously been taught by Mozart, was one. Friedrich Kalkbrenner, who had been born in Germany but lived and worked in France, was another. During the 1820s, these two competed with each other to be recognised as Europe's foremost piano virtuoso. Yet another was Ignaz Moscheles, whom we have previously met as a distinguished visitor to the Glee Club and who will reappear as the teacher of many prominent nineteenth-century musicians, including Mendelssohn. He, too, was a piano virtuoso comparable with Kalkbrenner and Hummel. Then there was the prolific Czech composer, Carl Czerny, who taught Liszt, and developed what he learned from Clementi and Beethoven to the point where, through his own teaching, he became regarded as the father of modern piano technique. Nor should one forget the most successful opera composer of the century, Giacomo Meyerbeer.

Two of Clementi's British students also deserve mention. Johann Baptist Cramer (1771–1858), the son of William Cramer (see Volume One, Chapter

50), was actually born in Mannheim, but came to London at the age of four and made his career in Britain. He was another piano virtuoso, applauded by British audiences as 'Glorious John'.[4] The sheer number of such figures suddenly appearing is a testament both to the impact the new instruments were having in the world of classical music, and also to Clementi's influence. Beethoven, who saw a good deal of Cramer in Vienna in the winter of 1799/1800, considered him to be the finest technical pianist of the age. The two men were much the same age – Beethoven just a year older – and became firm friends. Cramer, perhaps taking his cue from Clementi, began to reduce his playing commitments after the age of forty and went into music publishing, first with Chappell & Co, and then, in 1824, setting up J. B. Cramer & Co, which continued as an independent company until 1964. Again like Clementi, Cramer managed to persuade Beethoven to sign a contract for the publication of a number of his works – among them the Piano Concerto no. 5. It is Cramer who is widely credited as having come up with the title *The Emperor*. Cramer's own compositions – and there were many, including two hundred or more piano sonatas and nine piano concertos – were popular enough while he remained a well-known figure, but soon slid into obscurity. From a modern perspective, they seem somewhat flat, somehow falling between the elegance of the Classical period and the passion of the Romantic. The one major exception is his *Studio per il Pianoforte*, opus 50. This comprises a total of eighty-four studies, published in four volumes (Books I and II, 1804; Books III and IV, 1810), which are still widely played by students today. Beethoven was sufficiently impressed to annotate the first volume for his nephew, Karl.

Cramer's career describes a pattern, even a template which, as we progress through the nineteenth century, we shall see repeated many times. A composer receives an excellent musical education; he is well connected; he is a more than competent, even an exceptional, instrumentalist. He travels in Europe to gain experience before returning to pursue a career in Britain. His talents propel him to public notice and a degree of celebrity; they provide him with a comfortable income, or, in some cases, a substantial fortune. He plays a role in promoting music for the benefit of the wider public (Cramer was one of the founders of the Philharmonic Society). He receives public recognition (in Cramer's case, not the knighthood that would become common later in the century, but an appointment to the board of the Royal Academy of Music). He also composes a considerable quantity of music, which attracts positive critical attention, if not actual

acclaim, but which somehow fails to achieve the necessary flights of imagination or inspiration to propel it into the front rank. Of course, as we shall see, this pattern had many variations, some of them extreme, but it was there. Britain was definitely not a land without music, but it was a land where, for some reason, the highest flights of musical imagination were lacking.

Having identified a pattern, we must immediately draw attention to a major exception in the person of Clementi's second student, John Field (1782–1837), one of the greatest musicians ever to come out of Ireland. His father, Robert Field, was a professional violinist who played in the various orchestras that served Dublin's theatres. He saw his son's talent and was prepared to invest in it. He sent him for lessons to Tommaso Giordani (*c.*1730–1806), another of those wandering Italian opera composers who eventually settled in Dublin. At the age of ten, the young Field was performing in public concerts at Dublin's Rotunda Assembly Rooms. At the age of eleven, by which time the family had moved to London, he signed up for a formal, seven-year apprenticeship with Clementi – something which cost Robert Field, who was now a violinist with the orchestra at the King's Theatre, the not inconsiderable sum of one hundred guineas. Clementi was quick to see Field's abilities and within months had him playing in public at a benefit concert at the London Tavern in Bishopsgate. When Clementi went into business, Field became useful as a sales assistant, playing the pianos which Clementi sought to charm potential customers into buying. Some reports suggest that Clementi was a particularly demanding, even cruel master, but Field must have formed some kind of bond with the older composer, for when his apprenticeship formally ended in 1800, he continued to work for Clementi, making and demonstrating pianos. By now, he was performing in public regularly, giving programmes which included works by Bach, Handel and, of course, Clementi, as well as his own compositions, and meeting with growing appreciation. The high point of his early career came in 1801, when he performed his own piano concerto during a concert in Covent Garden to enthusiastic applause. He was still only nineteen.

The following year, Clementi set off on his eight-year European tour, the aim of which was business rather than performance. Field went with him in his role as sales assistant, but also gave successful concerts in Paris, Vienna and Innsbruck, which boosted his reputation. By the end of 1802, they had reached Saint Petersburg, where Clementi opened a piano show-

room. Again, there are suggestions that Clementi did not always treat the young Field well. The German composer, Louis Spohr, who was in Saint Petersburg at the time, described Field as melancholy, shy and, speaking only English. This soon changed. In 1804, Clementi left Saint Petersburg, returning by slow stages to England where he remained for the rest of his career, eventually retiring to Evesham in Worcestershire. Field stayed on in the Russian capital and his career took off. He found a patron in the figure of General Markloffsky; he learned French, Russian and German; and he established a reputation for himself both as a concert virtuoso, and as a teacher, particularly of Russian aristocrats to whom he appeared an exotic figure. He was popular. He was making money. And he was soon the most celebrated pianist in Russia – a position he retained for over twenty years. His private life, however, was less happy. He started to drink too much, a habit which permanently damaged his health; and, while he survived a number of romantic scrapes with Russian ladies, his marriage, in 1810, to Adelaide Percheron de Mouchy, a French pianist and actress who had been his student, lasted only a few years, mainly because of his drinking.

Field was never a prolific composer, but what he did write has been hugely influential. His big works – the seven piano concertos – are often cited as an important stage in the development of the Romantic concerto, but, in reality, they are something of a mixed bag. Three of them – nos. 2, 3 and 7 – stand some way above the others. Even here, Field's sense of construction is suspect, although the structural failings are often obscured by his highly effective orchestration. He was far more at home working on a smaller scale and for solo piano. He wrote fantasies, *études*, and waltzes, but it is his sixteen nocturnes that are his claim to fame.[5] These are delicate, reflective pieces of great beauty and deceptive simplicity; they take Clementi's realisation of the poetic potential of the piano to a new and higher plane. Haydn had used the term 'nocturne' or '*notturno*' to describe a lyrical serenade for chamber orchestra, but it was Field who developed the genre and created the association with the piano. It is often stated, quite rightly, that without Field's nocturnes we would not have those of Chopin or Liszt, yet it would be wrong to see them as in some sense preparatory pieces, making sense only because they lead to something else. All sixteen are finished works in their own right, works of immense value and musical insight, which, had no one else ever written another nocturne, would still be regarded as masterpieces and would still justify the existence of the genre.

Field stayed in Russia, living first in Saint Petersburg and then – after the break-up of his marriage – in Moscow. He returned to London only once, at the request of the Philharmonic Society, arriving in 1831 and giving a concert early the following year. He played his Piano Concerto no. 4, which received a warm though not overwhelming reception, but the visit was overshadowed by his own ill health and by the death of Clementi, at the age of eighty-one. Field was one of the chief mourners at his funeral. He travelled on to Paris, Brussels, Toulouse, Marseilles, Milan and Naples, giving concerts to enthusiastic audiences, but in Naples his health gave way and he had an operation for cancer. He lay in a hospital there for nine months until a Russian family rescued him. He returned to Moscow by way of Vienna, where he stayed with Carl Czerny and gave three recitals. By the end of 1835, he was back in Moscow, where he revised some of his work and, the following year, played at a musical soirée organised by the German composer and pianist, Charles Mayer, who had been his student. It was his last public appearance. He died and was buried in Moscow in January 1837.

Field's career is the reverse of what we have come to expect. He was an export at a time when Britain was almost exclusively a musical importer. Italy, Austria and Germany were full of young British musicians learning whatever they could from whoever would teach them, before returning home to develop their careers. Field benefitted from his apprenticeship and employment with Clementi, but after leaving London seems to have had no instruction from anybody, preferring to rely on his own resources. Yet he built a European reputation, something which Purcell did not achieve and which no other British composer would manage until Elgar at the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, his development of the nocturne as a genre left a small but distinct mark on the European classical tradition in a way few composers of any nationality can match. And he achieved all this not in his native Ireland, nor in Britain, but in Russia.

55 Songs and Dances of the Napoleonic Wars

When Clementi died, he was given a public funeral in Westminster Abbey. He was not a musical giant, but he was widely respected, and his sonatas and his extension of what the piano could achieve had at least pushed at

musical boundaries. Those British composers active during the early years of the nineteenth century – Dibdin, Hook, Shield, Kelly, Attwood, Samuel Wesley, Crotch – were all interesting, individual, even eccentric figures, but they did not have the same stature or authority. This is not to denigrate their achievement, but rather to reflect upon the nature of British audiences and critical opinion at the time. With Clementi, sheer longevity may well have played a part. For half-a-century he had been a significant presence on the British musical landscape. Like Handel before him and Mendelssohn later, he had become one of those foreign musicians accepted and adopted by the British public, but such sentiments were, in the end, only another aspect of British conservatism.

The twelve symphonies Haydn wrote to be premiered during his visits to London in the 1790s had aroused interest in the symphony as a musical form. While that interest fell away after his departure, Haydn was still popular and still regarded as Europe's leading composer. For British audiences, however, the oratorio remained the holy grail of composition, so when his great oratorio, *The Creation*, with an English libretto, received its London premiere at Covent Garden in March 1800, it might have been expected to take the city by storm. That it did not reflects, again, the conservatism of British audiences and the dead weight of Handel's reputation. *The Creation* was good, they said, but not as good as Handel. More performances followed, at the King's Theatre and at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester, but *The Creation* never achieved wide popularity; and Haydn's second great oratorio, *The Seasons*, premiered in Vienna in 1801, was simply ignored. Perhaps this was because, in an increasingly correct moral climate, such profane matters were considered unsuitable for the great, sacred oratorio form; or perhaps Haydn was already beginning to slip into the obscurity that would be his lot for much of the nineteenth century. Other great classical works were given their first British performances around the same time. Mozart's *Requiem*, first heard at Covent Garden in April 1802, was described as an 'anthem' to avoid the Catholic and potentially alienating word 'Mass'. It was 'well performed', said the *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* for 21 February, but was 'in a style of musical composition to which English ears are less accustomed than to that of Handel.'[1] Insularity was now added to conservatism. Foreign musicians might be better than British ones, but only if they composed in the accepted manner. At the other end of the musical spectrum, however, insularity was proving a source of strength and inspiration.