Historiography and Invisible Musics: Domestic Chamber Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain
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In memory of Meredith McFarlane

In his *Music and Morals* (London, [1871]), a volume of essays and reflections that went through sixteen editions during the late Victorian era, the writer and clergyman Hugh Reginald Haweis bequeathed to the modern reader a vivid, if tantalizing, glimpse of a supposedly rare type of private music making in nineteenth-century Britain. Haweis, himself an amateur violinist and chamber-music enthusiast, was probably speaking from personal experience:

We find ourselves in a quiet, cheerful room at the back of a good house; it is morning; there are only four people present; they are all intent upon playing; they can all play, and there is no one present to molest with praise or blame. Two violins, viola, and violoncello, and the quartet is complete. [. . .] Four hours of it in the morning might seem enough; but that is nothing to the quartet player. After lunch those four men will begin again, and work away till dusk. Then they will go out for a turn in the park or by the sea before dinner, and will very likely set to again after dinner, and play from nine till twelve o’clock.¹

This article is an expanded version of a paper first given as the keynote address to the North American British Music Studies Association Conference (Colchester, VT, 2006), and subsequently in revised form at the Seventy-Third Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society (Quebec City, 2007), and in colloquium presentations at the CUNY Graduate Center (2007), University of Iowa (2008), University of London, Institute of Historical Research (2008), Washington University, St. Louis (2009), University of Georgia (2009), and Hillsdale College, Michigan (2010). Among the many scholars who shared material, commented insightfully on the paper’s content, or offered suggestions for further research (some of which has remained outside the scope of this article) were Allan Atlas, Jane Block, Rachel Cowgill, Leanne Langley, Jeffrey Magee, Charles McGuire, Nick Morgan, Leo Treitler, William Weber, Phyllis Weliver, David Wright; the late John Lowerson and Meredith McFarlane; and the anonymous readers for this *Journal*. I also benefited from help with translations from Carol Buss (German), Andrea Solya (Hungarian), and John Wagstaff (German).

¹ Haweis, *Music and Morals*. The quotation is taken from a lengthy passage (446–48) in the American edition of 1872, which is well worth reading in full. See Appendix A to this essay (items 1.12 and 1.13) for longer extracts.
The passage merits the music historian’s attention for three compelling reasons. The first is that although it is unusual to find direct testimony concerning domestic string-quartet playing in Britain in nineteenth-century books or other printed materials, Haweis’s observations are echoed or amplified in many less conventional sources, as this essay will seek to demonstrate. Second, what Haweis tells us cuts against the grain of the historiography of “serious” chamber music in the nineteenth century. Such music is defined for the purposes of this discussion as genres employing the formal conventions of the sonata: piano trio, “duo” sonata, string quartet, and so forth—the repertoire for small instrumental ensemble which, in the course of the nineteenth century, came to be characterized as both cerebral and synonymous with the very term “chamber music.” The dedication to playing chamber music for recreation is well evoked by Haweis’s memoir—here in the milieu of a house in Britain. And yet, conventional wisdom holds that ad hoc music making of this ilk had largely disappeared from the British home by the early 1800s, along with the indigenous composition of serious chamber works (the link is significant, as we shall see). In its place, the story goes, sat parlor pianos, lightweight sheet music, and sentimental songs—the sorts of things found in stereotypical depictions of Victorian music making, whether in works of fiction or visual media, and generally associated with women and the rituals of courtship. What is more, standard histories typically point to the German-speaking lands as the locus of serious chamber-music culture at this time. Why the historiography should have been shaped in this way will be considered in due course.

Finally, Haweis’s suggestive cameo invites us to reconsider the private sphere through a case study of nineteenth-century Britain. Sometimes presumed impossible to study by dint of its very nature and the concomitant limitations of the material record, the study of the private sphere is an emerging field in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century musicology. Research in this area now begins to emerge from the margins of conventional scholarship, and in so doing, challenges the conventional historiography of chamber music in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

2. Thus omitting any domestic music for solo performer, since interplay between parts came to be considered an “essential element” of what constituted chamber music; see the entry “Chamber Music” in the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 146.

3. My use of the terms “private” and “public” to connote types of social space and activity owes a good deal to the categories established by Jürgen Habermas in his exploration of the development of bourgeois society in eighteenth-century Europe: *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. My use of these terms has been further informed by Ruth A. Solie’s insightful discussion of his theories with respect to domestic music making in *Music in Other Words*, 122–26. In this essay I use “private sphere” (or “private domain”) to indicate domestic social life: a realm characterized by informality and intimacy, albeit a way of living that was not based exclusively on the family unit, and that could extend to friendship circles that attached to households. Into this world participatory chamber music fits with ease. What I describe as “private sources” or “private evidence” are documents created in this domain and which were never intended to go beyond it.

In contrast, the term “public sphere” (or “public domain”) is used to indicate the larger, more formal, social world in which ideas were circulated and discussed collectively, and opinions formed. In terms of musical culture, this meant the formation of widely accepted ideas about music, particularly through commercial concert giving and concert going, which was a new phenomenon in the late eighteenth century, and in which chamber music often featured. The term “public concert” is used below to indicate performances that were open to ticket-buying or -holding audiences and that were advertised and discussed critically in the press. “Public record” is used
dearth of concrete evidence, musical practice in private domains is increasingly demanding our attention as historical musicology broadens its purview toward contextual examination of music in a range of times, places, and communities, and more specifically toward a new understanding of the amateur, the significance of domestic space, and the role of women therein. Home music making is being shown to have meaningful histories in all corners of the world, and a range of new work has appeared that deals with both familiar and unfamiliar genres, themes, and geographic locations, and that offers new perspectives even as it demonstrates how much ground remains to be explored.

This essay seeks to establish what sort of serious domestic chamber-music tradition existed in Britain during the nineteenth century, and to consider what such music making meant in people’s lives. I deliberately emphasize the culture of the string quartet (the heartland of the chamber repertoire) as a means of challenging the view that the chamber-music tradition was negligible. I also use the wealth of primary source material presented in the service of that argument to assess the genesis and persistence of cultural ideologies about chamber-music activity in Britain, and to consider a number of interrelated issues about the contextualization of evidence and the shaping of history, some of which transcend the geographic focus of this study. These issues include:

4. Definitions of “amateur” and “professional” are also problematic. In this essay, a professional is understood as someone who made music for a living, which in nineteenth-century terms often meant a portmanteau career pieced together from teaching, performing, composing, copying, and so on (and possibly including some nonmusic jobs). An amateur is, by contrast, understood to be someone who cultivated music not for money, but for pleasure, usually out of sheer love for music, and often with great intensity. It was not the case that all amateurs were inferior musicians to professionals, although some of them undoubtedly had limited skills and artistic sensitivities; moreover, tensions between, and also within, the two groups were legion. See the discussion in Gillett, “Ambivalent Friendships,” 321–40.

5. The search for meanings behind the representation of domestic music in literature and painting has been a particularly fruitful avenue for historical work. See, for instance, Richard Leppert’s landmark analysis of how visual imagery contributed to the construction of gendered ideas about music making in English upper-class private life in his Music and Image; Ruth Solie’s thought-provoking reconsideration of women at the Victorian piano in “‘Girlie’ at the Parlor Piano,” chap. 3 in her Music in Other Words; and Regula Hohl Trillini’s exploration of the gendered discourse of domestic music across several centuries of poetry, fiction, and drama in Gaze of the Listener. Notably, Solie’s challenge to musicologists to address the “blanks in our understanding of music’s history” (p. 2) spurred much of my own investigation.
how and why the history of chamber music in Britain has been traditionally constructed in broad-based surveys of the genre; why the idea of a negligible British music-making culture took root so strongly in literature emanating from Britain itself; why the evidence for the private tradition was prone to be “invisible,” even during the nineteenth century; and how the nationalizing of the chamber-music phenomenon as German has obscured much of its wider actuality. (As it happens, traditions in other regions of the world seem to have been similarly locked out, with contextual research into performance cultures in Eastern Europe and the United States hinting at other significant, but overlooked, activities.6) Along with a reassessment of the native tradition of chamber-music composition, I suggest how we might, in the future, go about writing a history of musical activity in the private sphere, no matter how seemingly invisible: namely, I review the types of evidence that survive for this particular mode of music making; propose ways in which such material might be interpreted, including the role of “the historical imagination,” to use R. G. Collingwood’s celebrated term;7 and essay an overview of what a revised history of chamber music in Britain might look like. As for the last of these inquiries, one of the most striking findings emerges from the recovery of women as significant contributors to string-quartet culture in Britain during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For, as the cultural unacceptability for women to learn string instruments finally crumbled around 1870 and it was no longer socially inappropriate for women to play them, many middle- and upper-class women took up the violin, viola, and cello and eventually found themselves making chamber music.8 Intersecting with this gendered dimension of the chamber-music scene were other longstanding anxieties about music’s capacity to compromise male identity, which further affected not only how chamber music was practiced but also how it left its trace in the historical record. In sum, what follows seeks not only to reconsider chamber-music activity in Britain and how it has been depicted, but also to make a fresh contribution to the broader historiography of music in the private sphere in the nineteenth century.

6. For instance, on Silesia see Unverricht, “Privates Quartettspiel in Schlesien von 1780 bis 1850”; and on Hungary see Legány, “Kamaramuzsikálás Magyarországon 1800–tól 1830–ig.”

7. Collingwood, *Idea of History*. The book, which was first published in 1946, three years after the author’s death, remained influential through the twentieth century. It came to the attention of musicians in the 1960s, through the writing of Arthur Mendel, and was revisited by Joseph Kerman in his attack on positivism in *Musicology*, 43–45 and 56–58. The revised edition of Collingwood’s book includes the texts of his lectures of 1926–28.

Britain and Chamber-Music Historiography

The standard histories of chamber music, as I have already intimated, present a bleak and often skewed picture of serious ensemble music in nineteenth-century Britain. The literature is not large, not least since the first histories date only from the 1930s and 1940s, and it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that a corpus of such work (often sections of larger studies) could be said to have coalesced. It includes studies of multiple national traditions by authors such as Alec Hyatt King (1948), Michael Tilmouth (1980), and John Baron (1998); writings purely about Britain by Thomas F. Dunhill (1929), David Cox (1957), and Geoffrey Bush (1981); and histories of particular genres, including those by Paul Griffiths (1983) and Basil Smallman (1994). On the whole, coverage of British traditions has been provided by native writers, but there are a few significant contributions by German scholars that also demand attention. This is because some ideas about British chamber music can be traced back through German scholarship. What is more, a handful of suggestions, from both British and German histories, have persisted with extraordinary vigor. Integral here, as will become apparent, is the debt British scholarship owes both to the German musicological tradition and to earlier writing about music by the Victorians themselves.

Also significant are matters of approach. In most studies, composition has been the focus, with performance receiving only passing mention. So until musicology’s recent turn toward issues of practice, context, and canonization, the tendency was toward histories of genres, composers, and works, with stylistic discussion of nineteenth-century developments favoring pieces in the standard, largely Austro-German, repertoire. At its extreme, this tendency

9. General histories of chamber music with significant discussion of nineteenth-century Britain include: Kilburn, Chamber Music and Its Masters in the Past and in the Present (1932); King, Chamber Music (1948); Ulrich, Chamber Music (1948); Wirth, “Kammermusik” (1958); Fiske, Chamber Music (1969); Tilmouth, “Chamber Music” (1980); Arnold and Griffiths, “Chamber Music” (1983); Schwindt, “Kammermusik” (1996); Baron, Intimate Music (1998); Bashford, “Chamber Music” (2001); and Hefling, Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music (2004).

10. Particularly comments made in Dunhill, “British Chamber Music” (1929); Kilburn, Chamber Music (1932); and Meyer, English Chamber Music (1946).
resulted in British chamber music dropping out of the narrative altogether. For instance, Helmut Wirth’s article “Kammermusik” in the first edition of *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1958), after outlining British contributions to sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and early eighteenth-century repertoires, ignored Britain altogether in its nineteenth- and twentieth-century sections; Denis Arnold, in the *New Oxford Companion to Music* of 1983, maintained that chamber music “scarcely existed outside Germany” in the Romantic period, thus marginalizing Italy and Russia as well as Britain; and as recently as 2004, Stephen E. Heffling’s edited volume of essays on the repertoire, *Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music*, omitted coverage of any British activity, while nonetheless including French and Czech traditions. Arguably more typical in this sort of literature is a peripheral discussion of a handful of nineteenth-century British works, using the trope of a “reborn” tradition (the so-called English Musical Renaissance) that pulled British chamber music out of the doldrums—an idea found as early as the 1920s. The breakthrough is usually seen as beginning with pieces such as Hubert Parry’s and Charles Stanford’s piano trios and Stanford’s string quartets (many of them inherently Brahmsian in style), and later crystallizing around distinctive pieces written for a series of chamber-composition competitions, which the businessman and chamber-music aficionado Walter Willson Cobbett instituted in 1905 for works inspired by the seventeenth-century viol fancy or fantasy; of these, phantasy pieces by Frank Bridge and John Ireland are the best known. A more nuanced view, giving serious recognition to William Sterndale Bennett (especially his piano trio, cello and piano duo, and piano sextet) and other composers from the generations before Parry, and mostly emanating from Nicholas Temperley’s seminal research in the 1950s, has found a place in more recent histories of British chamber music. Thus, Bennett’s music is asserted to be more than a pale imitation of Mendelssohn’s—a work such as the cello

11. For the quotation, see Arnold and Griffiths, “Chamber Music,” 347. This bias is also evident in Ulrich’s treatment of the nineteenth century in *Chamber Music*, although he included discussion of some American twentieth-century chamber music.

12. Notably in Antcliffe, “Recent Rise”; and Dunhill, “British Chamber Music”; also from 1932 in Kilburn, *Chamber Music*; and even in studies from the 1990s (e.g., Smallman, *Piano Trio*; and Baron, *Intimate Music*). See especially Cox, who in 1957 described the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the “gloomiest period of our country’s musical history,” suggesting there was “little music of lasting value,” excepting perhaps some quartets by Samuel and Charles Wesley (“English Chamber Music,” 334). It was a time of “cultural numbness,” which he explained as a by-product of industrialization. For more on the figures of speech used to describe the “English Musical Renaissance” generally, see Temperley, “Xenophilia in British Musical History,” 5–8.

13. Prizewinners included William Hurlstone and Frank Bridge (1905) for phantasies for string quartet; and John Ireland and Frank Bridge (1907) for phantasies for piano trio. Cobbett also commissioned phantasies: a piano quartet from Bridge (1910) and a string quintet from Vaughan Williams (1912); see Field, “Phantasy.” See also Hodges, *W. W. Cobbett’s Phantasy*. Elgar’s string quartet, which stands apart from the phantasy genre, was composed in 1914.


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duo is upheld for its passionate lyricism and masterly design—and originality is detected in G. A. Macfarren's string quartets.15

In contrast to the abundance of repertoire histories, there is just one substantial history of private chamber music practice across several eras and locales: Walter Salmen's Haus- und Kammermusik (1969), an iconographic study of domestic music between 1600 and 1900.16 In this book Salmen discusses several images of serious music making in nineteenth-century Germany, but gives no illustration of musical life in Britain at the same period, even though he supplies a little evidence of domestic activity in other "also-ran" countries such as Denmark, Russia (both demonstrating earnest chamber-music making), Sweden, and the United States (with salonesque overtones). With such a selection of material comes the implicit suggestion that these activities were not found to any extent in Victorian Britain, and the endorsement of assumptions that the Germans were the "people of music."17 This view, incidentally, continues to be reinforced in general music history texts, which almost always illustrate nineteenth-century chamber music with pictures of German activity: one of the most reproduced images is a watercolor by Johann Carl Arnold of an intimate quartet evening at the Berlin house of the Romantic writer Bettina von Arnim, in which the first violinist is the young Joseph Joachim (see Fig. 1). Behind and above the musicians hovers the spirit of Goethe (with whom she had a long friendship) and other icons of high culture.18

15. Admittedly some earlier writers such as Dunhill acknowledged the contribution of Bennett and others of his generation, but Temperley ("Instrumental Music") was the first to study the music in depth, and to argue for its quality. To a limited extent, some recent general histories (Smallman, Piano Trio; and Stowell, "Traditional and Progressive") have taken this British repertoire on board. For a contextualized view of chamber composition in the 1830s and 1840s, see McVeigh, "Society of British Musicians (1834–1865) and the Campaign for Native Talent," 164–66.

16. The volume, to my knowledge, is the only broad-based book-length history limited to the private sphere. In its wake came several focused case studies: for instance, Nicolai Petrat's discussion of the social and ideological function of Hausmusik in Germany ("Musizierpraxis und Ideologie"); and a range of research in the Festschrift for Salmen edited by Fink et al., Musica Privata.

17. Only Salmen's fig. 93 in Haus- und Kammermusik (female at the piano, engraving from A. H. Payne in Leipzig) might have an English provenance. For discussion of how the construct of German musicality came about, see Applegate and Potter, "Germans as the 'People of Music.' "

18. Goethe, it may be recalled, described the string quartet as four rational people conversing: see the letter from Goethe to C. F. Zelter, dated 9 Nov. 1829, in Bodley, Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues, 445. The elderly Von Arnim, who designed the Goethe memorial behind the quartet, is positioned prominently, listening closely.

Arnold's painting is reproduced in color, with commentary, in Salmen, Haus- und Kammermusik, 152–53. It is also used to illustrate the "Kammermusik" article by Wirth in the first edition of Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, and in Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music. An image by the English watercolorist Mary Ellen Best of a string quartet, this time in a middle-class Frankfurt home in the early 1840s and featuring her German husband Anthony Sarg and three of his friends, is used in Ringer, Early Romantic Era.
Back in the domain of repertoire-focused histories of chamber music, domestic musical culture, if treated, has been a secondary concern, a sort of contextual backdrop that situates music making in private as an extension of the national creative tradition, with the apparent absence or fragility of the latter—as in Britain—nearly always implying the nonexistence of the former. (Contrast Germany, which had the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, and *ipso facto* boasted an abundance of amateur quartet playing.) Michael Tilmouth in the *New Grove* of 1980 described how the
composition and playing of serious chamber music flourished in nineteenth-century Germany, but saw Italy, France, and Britain as backwaters for most of the period, and depicted a dearth of indigenous creativity in Britain until Stanford’s generation, positioning Bennett as a relatively unimportant exception. Unlike a few earlier writers such as Alec Hyatt King, who in 1948 had linked the compositional renaissance with a shift in practical music making and had portrayed a “notable revival of amateur chamber playing” in Britain led by Parry and Stanford ca. 1880, Tilmouth ignored domestic musical culture altogether and stressed instead the British contribution to the public chamber concert (a significant phenomenon through the century, with roots in the 1830s)—the inference being that the Victorians listened to string quartets performed by professional players, but did not play them. Indeed, many histories of chamber music emphasize the emergence of public chamber concerts and professional ensembles during the nineteenth century and the fact that the technical demands of newly composed repertoire required highly trained players.

In much of Tilmouth’s narrative, we can see the influence of English Chamber Music (1946) by the émigré Ernst H. Meyer. Meyer’s history examines creativity and amateur performance of English instrumental ensemble music up to 1600 (viol fantasias in particular), but it ends with a chapter called “Aftermath” that identifies a collapse of English chamber-music composition beginning in the 1690s and, by extension, of domestic music making. Meyer, who placed considerable emphasis on social structures, saw the collapse as arising from changing attitudes toward music in Britain—attitudes that became permanent in the eighteenth century, and persisted until late in the nineteenth. The commodification of music through (new) public concerts in the later 1700s plays a big part in his analysis, and he relegates “the part that the public had to play in English musical life” to “passive listening” to instrumental music, with “the creative as well as the performing part” being “left to visitors from other countries.”

What is noteworthy is that in the 1950s Stanley Sadie and Nicholas Temperley effectively challenged this viewpoint by uncovering many eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British chamber works and giving evidence of links between composition and domestic music making that lasted much longer than Meyer was suggesting, producing a corrective to Meyer’s
narrative in work specifically about Britain.\textsuperscript{22} Yet while this revisionist line was taken up by those working in the field, its passage into the more mainstream music histories, including (paradoxically) Tilmouth’s article in Sadie’s \textit{New Grove Dictionary}, was slow; nor was this research taken on board in the revised second edition of Meyer’s book, which was published in 1982. Moreover, while Sadie’s and Temperley’s research suggested that the domestic tradition had been lively through the eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth, the assertion remained that string-quartet parties all but fizzled out after the 1840s, in Tempeley’s words “no doubt . . . swamped by the all-pervading influence of the piano.”\textsuperscript{23} This contention extended the period of domestic activity proposed by Meyer, but it did not overturn the essential idea. Thus in 1981 Geoffrey Bush suggested in the \textit{Athlone [later Blackwell] History of Music in Britain} (in the volume edited by Temperley) that quartet playing was a sporadic occurrence in nineteenth-century British households, something “maintained here and there.”\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Toward a New History: Evidence, Interpretation, Scope}

Understanding the nature of musical activity in the private sphere, even in the nineteenth century—that “golden age of private life” when “privacy as an idea was elaborated with great sophistication,” to quote the French historian Michelle Perrot—is fraught with difficulties, not least because of the partial survival, and impenetrability, of source material.\textsuperscript{25} This has not deterred some historians of British music, particularly those working on the cusp of literary studies, from exploring the topic. The result has been much insightful research into the function and symbolism of the piano in Victorian domestic life and the culture of “girlhood” that draws on the widespread (public) fictional and visual representation of young women at the keyboard.\textsuperscript{26} However, other forms of \textit{ad hoc} private music making—especially in male society—left weaker cultural marks and have received less attention. Traditional interpretations of the data have assumed that a relative dearth of documentation for serious chamber music in the public record—in published memoirs, novels, and paintings—must evince a lack of significant practical activity.\textsuperscript{27} As we shall see,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Sadie, “British Chamber Music, 1720–1790.” See also idem, “Music in the Home II.”
\item \textsuperscript{23} Temperley, “Domestic Music in England,” 35.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Bush, “Chamber Music,” 381.
\item \textsuperscript{25} See Perrot, “Introduction,” 2–3.
\item \textsuperscript{26} The literature on women and music in Victorian fiction, which is large and includes such work as Fuller and Losseff, \textit{Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction}; and Clapp-Itnyre, \textit{Angelic Airs, Subversive Songs}, can be surveyed in Trillini, \textit{Gaze of the Listener}. Among other things, Trillini explicates the centrality of women in the middle-class home, the feminization of domestic musical performance, and the way music and women tend to signify one another in Victorian literature.
\item \textsuperscript{27} See Temperley, “Domestic Music,” 35; and Bush, “Chamber Music,” 381.
\end{itemize}
in an argument that owes a good deal to Richard Leppert’s reading of the limited public evidence for male domestic music making in eighteenth-century England in his 1988 book *Music and Image*, there may have been compelling cultural reasons for participants in serious chamber music in the nineteenth century to have been reticent in public about their leisure pursuits.\(^{28}\) Meanwhile, a real challenge to the received wisdom comes in the form of the striking amount of hitherto untapped data from the private sphere that further supports a contrary picture.\(^{29}\) Much of this new source material is scattered in unusual places. It turns up in the public record, for example in newspapers and nonmusic magazines, and also lies dormant in private sources, for instance in unpublished letters, diaries, auction catalogs, and amateur drawings.

Of course, as encouraging as this new bank of evidence is to the music historian, the materials still require critical evaluation. Private documents may seem, to quote Perrot, “the most direct and fertile of sources” by which we can reconstruct domestic life, but the data we have is still fragmentary, and its private voice may, as she puts it, “conceal as much as it reveals.”\(^{30}\) Specifically, chamber music in Britain was at root a practice requiring high competency, and one carried on in seclusion for the intimate edification of the participants. By its very nature, the new evidence is far from exhaustive, there being little reason why anyone at the time would have bothered to capture what was going on behind closed doors in the first place, much less at any length or with the intention of preserving it for posterity. And that is before we factor in any of the reasons why a type of music making that was not strongly sanctioned culturally, nor central to domestic life in the way the solo parlor piano was, did not leave much of a mark on the historical record.

Quantifying the intensity of the domestic tradition in the manner of some recent histories of public musical life will thus always remain an impossibility.\(^{31}\)

28. See Leppert, *Music and Image* (esp. 3–5, 107–8, and 111–29), in particular the argument that visual art tends to represent what were culturally sanctioned modes of activity, and that the absence of such evidence may indicate more about ideology than it does about practice. Significant here is the gendered disdain that English society had for gentlemen making music with any degree of seriousness or skill. In this respect it is not surprising that public statements about (or representations of) men playing string quartets—that most serious of musical endeavors—are largely lacking. As Leppert demonstrates, representing a gentleman at music produced a conflict for the artist, who typically addressed the gender ambiguities by downplaying the significance of the musical element and inserting compensatory markers of maleness into paintings that would have a public afterlife.


30. Perrot, “Introduction,” 3, 4. She also says: “Nothing is less spontaneous than a letter, nothing less transparent than an autobiography,” but she adds, “nevertheless, the subtle stratagems of camouflage and display bring us at least to the gateway of the fortress.”

As for the nature of this private music making, the few players who did put something on the record, privately, tend to say no more than whom they played with, whether it was a lawyer from an industrial town in the north of England, or a London banker; in short, they rarely talk about the music. But even this is barely surprising, since the actual mode of communication was sounds not words, and many musicians probably preferred playing to verbalizing. The confession by the celebrated Catholic theologian, writer, and amateur musician John Henry Newman that a “good bout at Beethoven’s Quartets” had obliged him “to lay down the instrument and literally cry out with delight” is the exception, not the norm (see App. A, 2.15). Where we do find traces of the private tradition, they surely open a tiny window on what once took place and are more important for being indicative of wider cultural practice. In fact, what we are dealing with here is a largely invisible but significant musical tradition, not unlike the domestic activities that anthropologist Ruth Finnegan alludes to in The Hidden Musicians, her book about unrecognized practices of music making in a British town (Milton Keynes) in the early 1980s.32

In putting together and interpreting these partial pieces of evidence from the private sphere, R. G. Collingwood’s notion of the “historical imagination” is remarkably à propos. Collingwood saw the job of the historian as comprising firstly, the selection of evidence (whether primary sources or secondary literature); secondly, the critical evaluation of that evidence (including due skepticism that texts ever contain simple truths); and thirdly, the use of “a priori imagination” to bridge the inevitable gaps within that evidence—a process that he also termed “constructive history.”33 The use of the term “imagination” here is unfortunate, in that it conjures up the fictitious or make-believe, a criticism Collingwood was at pains to forestall. What he intended was a “web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of [one’s] authorities”;34 and it was crucial that there was enough data and authoritative statements to begin with, and that the imaginative threads were constructed with care, logic, and constant reference back to the data.

In what follows below, part of the web of imaginative construction hangs on the contention that there is now adequate evidence to be able to narrow the gaps in the history of British chamber music, and that the evidence suggests a much stronger culture of composing and playing chamber music than has traditionally been assumed. It also hangs on the notion that for a host of reasons linked to issues of gender, class, and national identity (evident both in the primary data and in secondary studies of chamber music—all functioning as Collingwood’s “authorities”), this activity became doomed to historio-

34. Ibid., 242.
graphical invisibility. Put another way, it seems that ideologies of the time and later scholarly writing have obscured actual, historical practice. As we shall see, British composers produced far more quartets, piano trios, piano quartets, and so on across the century than has been widely acknowledged; most of these works achieved a few public performances; and, most significantly, chamber repertoire centering on the Viennese Classics (if not on British chamber works) was played in private, for pleasure, and often with great ardor in many middle-class and high-society British households, initially mostly by men, but later, as gender boundaries were renegotiated, by women too.

The time frame for my study is the “long” nineteenth century, ca. 1800–ca. 1914, and the discussion is limited mostly to an upper-class or relatively affluent middle-class social arena, because this sort of music making was typically bound up with wealth and leisure. Both time and money needed to be spent in considerable quantities on instruments, music, lessons, and practice if adequate standards of execution were to be achieved. Indeed, the investment necessary to attain moderate mastery of a string instrument constrained the potential size of the chamber-music community, since acquiring the skills required to tackle even straightforward repertoire was no mean achievement. So this article is not suggesting that every Victorian parlor was alive with the sound of Haydn string quartets; nor does it aim to undermine the indisputable prevalence of the piano in the home—the “family orchestra” as it was dubbed. String-quartet playing and the like surely never constituted more than a minority activity in Britain, restricted to people with fairly advanced instrumental skills and musical sensibilities. But there did exist a subculture that had more coherence and significance than the standard histories assume, and one that has been repeatedly written off through unhelpful comparisons with what was said to be more widespread activity in Germany.

The principal focus in what follows is the playing of ensemble chamber music in private in the home, informally for its own sake, perhaps with one or two people casually listening in, but not intended as formal performance: it is a type of musicking (to borrow Christopher Small’s term) that centers on the act of musical participation and the special social and artistic experience it generates. I generally avoid the word performance in this context, because of the implication that music making is intentionally presentational: i.e., that it

35. Leppert’s emphasis is emphatically on ideology, as opposed to practice. Ian Woodfield, in his *Music of the Raj*, attempts to rectify the balance: while pointing out that “troubling questions emerge at [the] critical interface between ideology and real life” (xi), he argues that this was in fact the “great age of the enthusiastic male amateur” (x–xii).

36. Despite the pioneering reassessment of this repertoire by Temperley in “Instrumental Music.”

37. Small, *Musicking*, 9, defines the verb “to music” as meaning to “take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.” In this article, the emphasis is much less on listening, and the discussion eschews musicking that involves a pre-arranged audience.
unfolds before an audience and with the aim of providing an unbroken rendition of the music in question. For this reason, the private concert—typically music played in the home before a small audience—sits on the periphery of this discussion, even though it was an important social and musical phenomenon that interlocks with the culture at hand. In actual fact, domestic music making presents us with a continuum of activities ranging from private musicking for its own sake to the formally organized private subscription concert, with ad hoc “performing” at a small social gathering fitting somewhere in between. In addition, distinguishing what constitutes an informal private concert can be difficult, with boundaries liable to be blurred, particularly when domestic music took place with a few listening bystanders, or when it developed spontaneously into a “play-through” to other members of a household or social gathering. Events that were got up specially or with some formality, say with hired-in professional musicians playing to house guests, I generally set aside.

As far as repertoire is concerned, my data has been gathered primarily in connection with the serious genres of ensemble chamber music defined above, while accepting that, in practice, generic boundaries might well have been blurred in the course of a session of music making, with players shifting, say, from string quartets proper to quartet arrangements of symphonies or operatic excerpts, or even songs accompanied by piano. Finally, although the majority of the discussion is concerned with chamber-music making, the frequent elision in the historiography of national creative traditions with practical activities is striking enough to demand that indigenous repertoire also be reexamined in the light of newly recovered source material.

A Revisionist Picture of Domestic Activity

A selection of the material that inspired this study is transcribed in Appendix A (beginning p. 335), where it is presented chronologically within themed sections. The sources range widely by type, time period, and geography, and there are a fair number of them—certainly too many to write off as exceptions

38. As a contradiction in terms, domestic performance is thus avoided (even though the phrase occurs frequently in the literature). I use music making to denote playing chamber music in private. (Performance is reserved for events intentionally with audience, e.g., concerts.) The distinction between presentation and participation is useful here, and has been used to good effect in current ethnomusicology by Thomas Turino in his study of music and dance, Music as Social Life, 26. Turino distinguishes between presentational performance (“situations where one group of people . . . prepare and provide music for another group”) and participatory performance (“a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles”), although in the case of the latter, the “primary goal” is to maximize the number of people involved in a performance capacity—a definition that works for social dance but cannot easily be extended to the type of private music making examined here.

39. This type of private concert is discussed in Gillett, “Ambivalent Friendships.”

40. The evidence was compiled in a somewhat serendipitous manner over several years, and was the by-product of my long-term research project on chamber music in the public sphere.
that prove the rule of insignificant levels of activity. Much of the evidence consists of first-hand accounts of domestic music making and is drawn from both manuscript testimony and published personal memoir. A lot of this material stems from a group of observers who, though small in number, encountered or played with amateur musicians in an extraordinarily wide range of places and social settings. The richest and most diverse source of information is John Ella (1802–1888), an important promoter of chamber music. His Musical Union was a high-caliber London concert institution, at which eminent foreign artists such as Alfredo Piatti, Clara Schumann, Henry Vieuxtemps, and Theodor Leschetizky regularly performed. In his earlier life as a working violinist, Ella established an extensive network of wealthy amateur musicians across Britain, and these families formed the core of his concert audience. Ella’s manuscript diaries and scrapbooks documenting the first half of his career give a vivid account of his own chamber musicking, with both professionals and amateurs, and are a significant source for us (though only a small sample from them is presented in the Appendix); they make up part of the extensive John Ella Collection, which was recently deposited at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Other significant witnesses include William Gardiner, George Haddock, Walter Willson Cobbett, and the aforementioned Rev. Haweis; all their testimonies are in printed form. William Gardiner was a stocking manufacturer in Leicester and a music enthusiast whom Ella knew in his youth; his memoir, *Music and Friends* (1838) provides several scraps of information about chance encounters with chamber music in a range of locations in and around Leicester, but also further afield. George Haddock was born into a family of professional musicians in Leeds, with plenty of connections in the amateur music scene there, some of which are recounted in the autobiography of his early life (1906). Cobbett, a Londoner, was an avid amateur chamber player. He invested his own money in the production of a two-volume encyclopedia of chamber music (1929) that is infused with useful personal memories.

Additional data about the private sphere emerges from documents more obviously associated with public life: from advertisements, articles, or serialized fiction in magazines and newspapers, or from concert reviews or similar. For example, a program note for a chamber concert of 1851 makes clear how well piano-trio repertoire is known to its audience (in this case a group containing a high proportion of women): “We shall spare ourselves the labour of analysing a Trio [Beethoven, Piano Trio, Op. 1, no. 3] so well known to amateurs, by merely directing attention to the subjects and harmonies quoted” (see App. A, 8.3). A classified advertisement in *The Strad* suggests the seriousness with which playing chamber music was taken: “GOOD AMATEUR VIOLINIST wishes to meet another for duet practice. Particulars address Violin, 7, George Street, Manchester Square, W. [London]” (see App. A, 8.7). And a London newspaper review of one of the very first public

concerts devoted to chamber music dispels the mystery surrounding the strength of audience demand: “[London] now contains a large and rapidly increasing body of amateurs, of both sexes, who are conversant with the higher branches of instrumental music, and to whom it must be a source of great pleasure to hear the most exquisite works of the greatest masters. To those who are themselves performers, such concerts as these are full of instruction.”

The last extract is particularly important to our discussion, because it links the domestic tradition to the remarkably quick upsurge and sustained development of chamber concerts in Britain, which began in the mid-1830s, outstripping initiatives in most other European cities. Initially there were flurries of short subscription series of mixed-genre performances, or one-off “benefit” events, but before long the chamber concert and its distinctive programming became institutionalized, both in London and in other British cities, with organizations such as the Musical Union (London, 1845–81), the Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts (London, 1859–1904), and Halle’s Classical Chamber Concerts (Manchester, 1849–61). Later on came concert halls specifically for chamber music, such as the Bechstein (later Wigmore) Hall in London, founded in 1901, an increase in the number of permanent string-quartet ensembles, and recitals focused on one genre. The point here is a simple but trenchant one: that this public culture could not have developed so strongly and quickly if its audience had not been steeped in the amateur experience of chamber-music playing. As a matter of fact, this observation meshes nicely with the idea of the private sphere operating as the driver for the development of modern public life, as theorized by Jürgen Habermas. Furthermore, public and private cultures continued to coexist in a mutually beneficial manner. The quotation from the London newspaper above alludes to the strong, latent amateur demand for professionally performed chamber music, depicting listeners who might diligently attempt works heard in concerts back at home, armed with fresh musical insights (“to those who are themselves performers, such concerts as these are full of instruction” [see App. A, 8.2]). A similar scenario is sketched in a magazine short story of 1894, in which an amateur violinist attempts portions of works heard at chamber concerts at St. James’s Hall (presumably a reference to the Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts): when he and his wife were “quite alone,” they played the slow movement of Beethoven’s “Kreutzer” Sonata for violin and piano, for instance (see App. A, 2.22). As will be demonstrated below, the vibrancy and

42. *Morning Chronicle* (9 Nov. 1835); fuller quotation in App. A, 8.2.


44. See the discussion in Solie, *Music in Other Words*, 124–25, in particular the idea that the public and private spheres were not polar opposites, and that the home was the “ideological well-spring of the public world.”
proliferation of chamber concerts not only sustained domestic music culture in Britain, but also contributed to its growth.

So what, then, were the attributes of musical culture in British homes? For most of the century—at least until the 1870s when the cultural taboo on women playing string instruments began to relax—the evidence repeatedly presents two standard scenarios. The first is string-quartet or -quintet parties among groups of either male amateurs or male professionals, and quite often a mixture of the two. Such a blend of amateurs and professionals was surely what happened on the occasion in 1836 when John Ella, then a London-based professional violinist, visited the northern city of Liverpool, dined with one Mr. Rawdon and played chamber music with him and other guests. “Our host played well on the Viola,” said Ella, who almost certainly led the ensemble (see App. A, 2.8). Having a skilled professional in the leader’s chair was one of the ways that the amateur culture prospered. In the case of an amateur of consummate wealth such as the Duke of Cambridge (Adolphus Frederick; an uncle to Queen Victoria and a skilled violinist), this custom could mean three professionals being summoned to play quartets with an enthusiast. George Smart, a London musician who was keen to record opportunities for professional advancement, noted being “sent for” to play the viola in a quartet with the Duke in 1839; Henry Blagrove and Charles Lucas, also on the professional circuit, and higher-caliber players than Smart, were the other instrumentalists (see App. A, 1.8; see also 1.7). Of course, some amateurs got by without help: W. W. Cobbett remembered playing “almost exclusively with amateurs” in the 1860s (see App. A, 2.17).

The second scenario is one in which a female pianist joined the men for violoncello sonatas, piano trios, piano quartets, and so forth. Sophy Horsley, daughter of the British composer William Horsley (1774–1858), related one epic afternoon and evening of ad hoc music making at the family house in west London in 1834. During the proceedings, which were punctuated by dinner, the players (mostly professional musicians and their families) got through a range of repertoire, including a chamber arrangement of a Haydn symphony and a “dirge” by Horsley. Sophy records the event in some detail and indicates that she played the piano part in a Mendelssohn piano quartet—twice—and that her mother accompanied the violinist Joseph Mountain in a Mozart violin sonata (see App. A, 2.7).

Sometimes it is possible to determine whether the other people present were casual eavesdroppers or invited listeners. John Henry Newman, for example, wrote to his sister Jemima in 1867, exclaiming with some pride that “Mrs Wootten and Mr Neville were, I find, listening to our play[ing of Beethoven’s violin sonatas]” and noting that they had admired Jemima’s pianism (see App. A, 2.16). A Musical Times appreciation of the professional violinist Alfred Gibson (1849–1924) reported how as a child Gibson went as “a listener” (with his father) to regular Sunday string-quartet parties given by the proprietor of the Shakespeare Hotel in Nottingham, which suggests these
were prearranged events (see App. A, 2.14). Likewise, in the Horsley cameo above, the afternoon’s ad hoc music seems to have metamorphosed into renditions given before specially invited, after-dinner guests (effectively a type of private concert). A similar circumstance obtained at a Nottinghamshire parsonage, where quartets were regularly played in private in the morning, and concerts given in the evening to groups of invitees, the earlier sessions thus functioning as rehearsal time (see App. A, 3.1).

As regards repertoire, the evidence speaks to a range of genres in circulation, from violin sonatas to septets and octets, and to a diversity of composers. Kalkbrenner, Wranitzky, and Pleyel are among the names that may surprise the reader. Hard testimony of the music played can be found both in the anecdotal material and the descriptions of amateurs’ music libraries, such as those belonging to one Dr. Harrison of Chowbent and the ardent amateur violinist the Earl of Falmouth (see App. A, 3.2 and 6.2). The latter’s collection ran into hundreds of volumes and included chamber music with piano (duets, trios, quartets, quintets and sextets), string quartets and quintets, and sextets, and septets for strings and winds. Yet across all genres, the most frequently attempted works are by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven—the same Austro-German chamber music that was at the core of the developing public concert repertoire—and string quartets loom especially large. The Leicester stocking manufacturer William Gardiner remembered obtaining the “Bonaparte” (Pleyel) edition of Haydn’s quartets in 1802 (see App. A, 2.1); and W. W. Cobbett, writing of his chamber-music life in 1860s London, reckoned he had “very vivid memories of snug evenings passed in the rooms of suburban villas[,] making acquaintance for the first time with the thirty ‘berühmte’ of Haydn, the great ten of Mozart, and the six op.18 of Beethoven” (see App. A, 2.17).

It is worth saying too that, for all its technical and interpretative difficulties, Beethoven’s chamber music seems to have exerted considerable magnetism over amateurs. In addition to the fictional rendition of the “Kreutzer” sonata mentioned earlier, one finds several real-life attempts at Beethoven's piano trios, violin sonatas, and string quartets, with the exception of the late opuses (127, 130, 131, 132, 135). These Gardiner described as requiring “the penetration of the angel Gabriel to understand” (see App. A, 2.5). Also featured in the evidence are piano chamber works by Mendelssohn and Schumann (where a highly able pianist was to be had), as well as Boccherini’s string quintets and Georges Onslow’s string quartets and quintets, repertoire that had a strong profile with amateurs. Cobbett picked out Boccherini in his reminisc-

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45. The subsequent story about the child brilliantly reading the first violin part of Beethoven’s String Quartet, Op. 18, no. 4, is surely apocryphal, but the contextual information seems solid.

46. The “thirty ‘berühmte’ ” is a reference to the main set of Haydn string quartets in use. See Scott, “Haydn’s ‘83,” 212.
cences of chamber-music life in suburban London: “My earliest recollection is of a visit in company with my old friend Thomas [. . .] Lintott to the house occupied by his two brothers, both ’cellists, in the late ’sixties. They [. . .] allowed me, to my great delight, to take part in some Boccherini quintets” (see App. A, 2.17).

And the Duke of Cambridge’s music library, according to the published catalog for its auction after his death (1850), contained a good number of parts for Onslow’s chamber music. Among them were Onslow’s piano trios and string quartets, Opp. 46 and 47, reflecting the music’s popularity in the concert repertoire at the time (see App. A, 6.3).47 Temporary though that public popularity may have been, Onslow’s works seem to have survived in the domestic sphere. As late as 1892 someone was placing a small advertisement in the violin press in the hope of obtaining some of this music: “Wanted.—Onslow’s String Quartets and Quintets [. . .] Middleton, Dr. Johnson’s Passage, Birmingham” (see App. A, 6.6).

British music, most of which (as we shall see) was not in print, seems to have received private airings only in social groups peopled by professional musicians. For example, in the 1860s, at the house of W. F. Donkin, Oxford’s Savilian Professor of Astronomy and a proficient amateur violinist, the composer F. A. G. Ouseley and others in his circle (John Stainer, Hubert Parry) were able to witness a rendition of one of Ouseley’s quartets by the professor’s family, for whom it had been written (see App. A, 4.2).48

Meanwhile, although women were excluded from participating in string quartets until the last quarter of the century, there were ways, other than listening, that they could engage with the music. Piano transcriptions of the core quartet literature, often à quatre mains, moved into wide circulation as the decades elapsed and were a means by which women could get some hands-on experience of this repertoire. The painter Henry Holiday had a large library of piano transcriptions of chamber and orchestral works, and he regularly played them with his wife, relishing the enhanced enjoyment when they subsequently heard the works in concerts (see App. A, 6.5). Also, as Allan Atlas has demonstrated, the English concertina, fashionable with women, had a family of instruments that was marketed as being suitable for playing classical string quartets. Customized arrangements were not necessary, a point made by Richard Blagrove’s concertina tutor of 1864: “Tenor and Bass Concertinas are also manufactured[,] qualified for performing music originally intended for the Viola and Violoncello [and] affording Ladies the peculiar advantage of enabling them to perform quartetts written for two violins, viola and violoncello.”49

47. On the changing position of Onslow’s music in the concert repertoire, see Bashford, Pursuit of High Culture, 187, 361.
48. On the Donkins, see Dibble, C. Hubert H. Parry, 42, 49.
Indeed, when it came to acquiring chamber-music parts, it would seem that string (or even concertina) quartet ensembles were sustainable on fairly limited resources. This suggestion is pertinent in the face of arguments that the British market for chamber music parts was small and insignificant in comparison with (a) the undeniably huge volume of drawing room ballads, piano pieces, and songs that were printed and purchased in Britain, and (b) markets for chamber music in Germany—a line of reasoning that seems to support the notion of a negligible British tradition. But of course one set of string-quartet parts might contain up to fifteen or so works; and only one set needed to be obtained among four (or more) players. Indeed, given the relative expense of such music, much repertoire was surely passed on through the generations, sold second-hand after an amateur’s death, and loaned around within localities.\(^{50}\)

In terms of wider geography, chamber-music making appears to have been spread across the country: examples crop up not only in established cultural centers such as London and Edinburgh, but in the growing industrial towns and cities in the Midlands (Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham) and the north of England (Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds), as well as in market towns (Barnstaple in Devon, to the far southwest), the old university cities (Oxford and Cambridge), and small settlements, typically on the outskirts of urban areas (Chowbent, near Manchester; Clifton, west of Bristol). Then there are several grand country houses, among them Hatfield Hall, Wakefield (in Yorkshire), Burleigh Hall, Loughborough (in Leicestershire), and Moccas Court on the River Wye in Herefordshire, near the Welsh borders. Quite often music making took place in isolated communities, away from the main commercial centers of public culture, or where lifestyles were relatively self-contained and people needed to make their own entertainment. There is more to seek out here; but string-quartet playing and the like seems to have been particularly practiced in parsonages, in the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge universities, in expatriate communities abroad, and in the country houses of the aristocracy and gentry during the summer and autumn months when the London season had abated and the fashionable world had returned to its provincial estates. All are corners of musical Britain neglected by traditional narratives for the nineteenth century, although the occurrence of activities amid social institutions with older histories of supporting music (the Church of England, the universities, and the aristocracy) should not go unnoticed, either.

William Gardiner talked of a whole week’s chamber music in Southwell parsonage near Nottingham (see App. A, 3.1; see also 3.2). Elsewhere in the evidence we find the clergymen H. R. Haweis and Edward Goddard (another keen music lover), whose tastes for chamber music may well have been formed

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50. On library sales, see App. A, 6.2 and 6.3. Research into print runs, commercial sales, and library borrowing—so far not tackled by contextual historians—might, if adequate information survives, yield interesting insights here, perhaps even quantitative data.
during university days. In this respect, Oxford and Cambridge are likely to have been important breeding grounds for chamber musicians. Charles Stanford reported a “devoted four [who] used to practise [string quartets] assiduously, often into the small hours of the morning, in rooms in the great court tower” of Trinity College, Cambridge, in the 1870s (see App. A, 4.4). Haweis told similar tales from the 1850s of the keyboard being pounded in piano quartets or quintets, which went on “till past midnight,” thus defying the 10pm curfew on music making, itself indicative of the strength of the activity (see App. A, 4.1). All such gatherings were exclusively male, the piano part perhaps being taken by a skilled college organist, as on the occasion Hubert Parry noted in his diary: “At [James] Taylors [organist of New College, Oxford]. Quartetts. […] We had Duos and quartetts and solos and songs. They played for me Mendelssohn’s Quartett No. 1 for Pianforte [sic], Violin, Viola, and Cello” (see App. A, 4.3; see also 2.19, 4.1, and 4.5). Further afield, John Ella, arriving in Rome in 1842, came across the resident British community there and became involved in their chamber music parties (including those of Rev. Goddard); he even composed a piece for piano quintet during his stay (see App. A, 5.1 and 5.2). In other British outposts abroad one also imagines that chamber music flourished: it seems possible, for instance, that the activity Ian Woodfield detected in late eighteenth-century British India persisted into the nineteenth. More research is needed. As for chamber music in country houses, much of the (ample) evidence is highly evocative. Cobbett said he “could fill pages with recollections of weeks spent at country houses where chamber music was played on rainy days, morning, noon, and night” (see App. A, 1.14), while Haweis wrote:

In musical country houses it is not uncommon to have a quartet party staying in the house; and then woe to the unmusical! The best quartet work is no doubt done in the morning; but the quartet is irrepressible; it may break out at all times, and any where—suddenly on the lawn, in summer; in the dining room, after dinner; in very hot weather, in some sonorous housekeeper’s room; even in the pantry, all over the drawing-room, in the library, on the balcony, or up stairs in any of the bedrooms. (See App. A, 1.13)

This depiction of intensive chamber music among guests in summertime is consistent with the information in Ella’s private diaries, which indicates that serious musicking was a regular recreation in many country houses and functioned alongside the better-known gentlefolk pursuits of hunting, shooting, and fishing. Clearly, however, as with outdoor events, not all guests participated or were necessarily sympathetic: “[W]oe to the unmusical!” writes Haweis, who further suggests, to almost comic effect, that a quartet might find it difficult to secure a suitable place in which to play. Ella himself exposed the largely hidden aspect of this music making when he wrote publicly that

had he never experienced life in the grand country houses he would have “re-
ained ignorant . . . of the practical virtues and musical accomplishments
of the aristocracy and wealthy families of England” and would never have
founded the Musical Union (see App. A, 1.6).

Chronologically, the evidence reveals chamber-music activity right across
the century, not limited to the first half of it, nor obviously dwindling after the
1830s and 1840s to be rekindled at the century’s end, as research has hitherto
suggested. One of the standard explanations for a “decline” after ca. 1840 is
that the advent of public chamber concerts displaced much serious participa-
tory home music making and provided a passive, rather than active, outlet for
string-quartet enthusiasts.52 Other reasoning has laid the blame on the smother-
ing influence of the parlor piano, the ubiquity of which is impossible to
deny.53 Admittedly, in broad historical terms the period from 1750 to ca.
1914 embodied a shift from participatory music in the home toward apprecia-
tion in the concert hall, and thereafter came another shift to appreciation at
home through the media of radio and recorded sound. But recent research
has begun to understand this process as both gradual and complex, involving a
symbiotic relationship between public and domestic spheres.54 Simply put, the
survival of a certain amount of serious ensemble music making in the home
surely owed a lot to the coexistence of chamber music in the concert hall and,
later, on disc. These public outlets seem to have helped keep interest in do-
mestic playing alive and further renewed the constituency of amateur players.

Similarly, old arguments that the technical demands of repertoire from
Beethoven onwards contributed to the decline of the amateur tradition are be-
ing modified.55 Limited skill did not necessarily prevent players from attempt-
ing simpler movements or playing difficult ones at slower speeds. After all,
much of Beethoven’s chamber music remained within the aspirations of ama-
teur players, and a professional musician on first violin was often the key to
getting a group through harder string quartets in Britain. Furthermore, one

52. This view emanates from Meyer, *English Chamber Music*, as at 251.
53. Meyer also sees pianos replacing ensemble chamber music, particularly string quartets, in
the home (ibid., 250). The twin “concert-piano” argument is developed with greater sophistica-
tion, albeit with reference mostly to Austro-Germany, by Leon Botstein in “Listening through
Reading.” Botstein sees two parallel strands of change in musical life: firstly, a developing profes-
sional and institutionalized concert culture that was replacing the amateur-led tradition of group
music making; and secondly a shift in the nature and structure of music education and music liter-
acy. He links the latter to the ubiquity of piano playing in the home and a resultant move away
from the aural command of pitch, which string playing and teaching had hitherto encouraged, to-
wards an instrument (the piano) that required no significant ear training for pitch. Declining stan-
dards in music literacy among amateurs and concert listeners were, he argues, the result.
54. These themes are taken up in Bashford, *Pursuit of High Culture*.
55. There is a nexus of arguments here, on which Tilmouth (“Chamber Music”) expounds:
that the style of Beethoven’s music from Opus 59 onwards was conceived increasingly for the
concert hall; that only skilled professional players could cope with the technical demands of most
nineteenth-century chamber music; and that amateurs were thus “discouraged” from attempting
the music of their own time, relying instead on late eighteenth-century repertoire.
of the reasons the idea of a “decline” in amateur chamber music in the mid-nineteenth century may have taken root so strongly may simply be that, with numbers of concert listeners and drawing-room pianists growing rapidly, devoted amateurs (particularly string players) decreased only as a proportion of the musically inclined population. While the rhetoric of decline invoked in the literature suggests a quantifiable decrease in the numbers of amateur players, whether their numbers fell back in real terms is difficult to gauge. What we can say definitively is that activity was certainly not extinguished, and we should not rule out the possibility that actual numbers held steady or even increased, yet looked smaller in relation to other types of music making. Also, it is worth remembering that “rise” and “fall” (or “growth” and “decline”) are problematic conceits in historical writing, despite their repeated occurrence in both the secondary literature and primary sources that discuss chamber music. Writers often overemphasize what they see as a new or important phenomenon not only by constructing it as growing rapidly, but also as following on from a trough of inactivity.

That said, there does seem to have been a notable surge of activity from the 1880s into the early twentieth century—activity that we can now see within a continuing culture of competent playing and listening. A chamber-music manual of 1923 recalled the period from between ca. 1860 and ca. 1900 as one during which there had been a wide, growing interest in domestic music making, partly stimulated by public concert life: “[P]arties of amateurs, who met for Chamber Music[,] were scattered all over London and the larger towns, especially in Yorkshire and Lancashire” (see App. A, 8.4). By emphasizing Yorkshire and Lancashire (the home of many manufacturing cities, such as Manchester, Leeds, and Bradford), the writer suggests that urbanization and industrialization fostered amateur chamber-music activity among new populations through the development of public cultural life. More compelling as evidence is the start-up of a host of magazines such as The Strad: A Monthly Journal for Professionals and Amateurs of All Stringed Instruments Played with the Bow, the founding of which in 1890 was predicated on a new, significant demand for news and comment on string playing. In 1894 it noted the dramatic increase in the number of people carrying fiddle cases around London, most of whom (it claimed) were amateurs. Other titles include The Violin Monthly Magazine for All Lovers of the Instrument (1889–94); The Violin Times: A Monthly Journal for Professional and Amateur Violinists and Quartett Players (1893–1907—note the specific inclusion of “quartett players”); Strings: The Fiddler’s Magazine (1894–98); The Cremona (1906–11); and The Violin and String World (1908–32). Sprinkled in the “small advertisement” columns are further indications of the subculture: a Dr. Bramwell of Tynemouth, Northumberland seeking a good-toned old viola, suitable for playing quartets; and a string quartet in Brixton, south London, advertising

for an amateur second violinist and viola player: “For terms and particulars apply to above address” (see App. A, 8.8 and 8.10). Also worth noting are some attempts at institutionalizing amateur practice and the appreciation of chamber music. At Oxford University in 1884 a student club, the Oxford University Musical Union, was founded to those ends; 109 men signed up at the start. In the fashionable West End of London in 1902 an amateur Strings Club was established for the “practice and performance of chamber music” with seventy founding members. The organizers were three women: Gwynne Kimpton, Frances Marshall, and May Burgess.57

How this evidence of increasing activity sits with the slant of the historiography is instructive. In 1920 Antcliffe proselytized about the new and “really great school of Chamber Music composers” generated by Cobbett’s competitions, which he contextualized with reference to an upsurge of amateur playing that was said to have been under way since the 1880s, itself partly stimulated by growth of public chamber concerts across Britain.58 In 1948 King took a related tack, describing an “ever-growing wave of chamber playing”; he saw the growth in practice as mostly interlocking with the renaissance in composition, and gave much credit to the labors of Parry and Stanford in both respects.59 As recently as 1998, John Baron made the passing, unsubstantiated comment that there had “apparently” been “a considerable amateur sub-society” of chamber musicians in England in the second half of the nineteenth century, though he offered no explanation as to where the culture had come from.60 Cause and effect are never easily diagnosed, and a full examination of the reasons for the upsurge is beyond the scope of this essay. However, the growth was surely affected by the arrival of large numbers of new string players in the amateur ranks, particularly women, a trend that was backed by a growth in the supply of instruments and institutions supporting instruction. Added in, as Antcliffe suggested, was a proliferating public concert culture for chamber music, which may well have played a part in stoking interest in playing string instruments and forming ensembles among already accomplished amateurs for musicking at home, especially in urban areas. In like manner, concerts may have triggered the broadening of the social spectrum: in London, the Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts, and especially the South Place Sunday Popular Concerts, on the edge of significant working-

57. Ten Years of University Music in Oxford. The activities included concerts given by members to members; but there were also classes taught by professional musicians, and a borrowing library. For the quotation about the Strings Club, see App. A, 8.9 (the Alpine Club, referred to there, was located in Savile Row, in the West End of London, from 1895 to 1937).

58. See Antcliffe, “Recent Rise,” 12–14. In Antcliffe’s view, the increased availability of public chamber-music concerts given by the best professional players had been fuelled by a jingoistic desire among British professional musicians in the years around the Great War “not to allow themselves to be beaten” by eminent German musicians (13). Wars, it seems, could be fought through the rhetoric of culture, as much as with arms.


60. Baron, Intimate Music, 341–42.
class districts in the East End, were opening up chamber music to people ever further down the social scale.\textsuperscript{61}

In fact, the growth and gradual widening of the social groups that played chamber music began early in the nineteenth century. Much of the evidence from the early decades depicts music taking place in the houses of the aristocracy and gentry, with the quasi formality of the situation typically glimpsed through the eyes of a professional musician who had been invited along to stiffen the ensemble. Increasingly, however, as the century progresses, we find the middle classes—men from both the old elite professions of law, medicine, and divinity, and the new aspirant business class—as deeply involved as the aristocracy. A solicitor and a judge (“a most enthusiastic violoncellist”) were members of one quartet party in Leeds in the 1840s recalled by the young George Haddock (who later became a professional musician [see App. A, 1.10]). What is more, there are examples of new money melding with old, as when, in the first quarter of the century, the Leicester hosiery manufacturer William Gardiner was invited to Dalby Hall, seat of a local aristocrat, to play sextets (see App. A, 1.1); or later, when Cobbett, cofounder of the Scandinavian Belting Company (1879), which manufactured woven belting for industrial machinery, recalled the many weeks he had spent at country houses playing chamber music (see App. A, 1.14). Perhaps because they prided themselves on successful upward socioeconomic mobility, men such as Gardiner and Cobbett were more than willing to write publicly about these experiences. A corollary of this seeming increase in bourgeois participation is that evidence regarding the second half of the century is more centered on middle-class environments, with home life, family formation, and cozy intimacy to the fore.

Figure 2, an amateur artist’s representation of a septet party in a grand house in the northern market town of Halifax, made in the 1830s,\textsuperscript{62} brings out the social formality of the early nineteenth-century setting: note the straight lines in the painting, the outdoor coats and hats, and instrumentalists distanced from one another around a large square wooden table in a large, high-ceilinged chamber (probably an entrance hall with a gallery). This image seems to depict the grand world George Haddock described when he noted being set down at the “gates of Outwood Hall” near Wakefield for pre-arranged quartet meetings, to which local players were invited (see App. A, 1.10).\textsuperscript{63} Quite what the social dynamics of these events were like is, of course, open to question. Still, the sense of social formality that pervades such accounts is in sharp contrast with the impression, at the end of the century, of

\textsuperscript{61} Traced in Bartley, “Chamber Music Concerts in Suburban London, 1895–1915.”

\textsuperscript{62} Given the instrumentation (flute, violins, ? viola(s), and cellos) it seems likely the musicians are playing a chamber arrangement of an opera or symphony—publications of which were in circulation around this time.

\textsuperscript{63} Outwood Hall was the home of the wealthy Judge Marshall, who had at least three houses, two of them country residences.
chamber-music making epitomizing bourgeois homeliness—what Cobbett remembered as “snug” quartet evenings “passed in the rooms of suburban [London] villas” (see App. A, 2.17), or the playing of violin sonatas by mother and daughter after the household’s morning rituals, as Henry Holiday described as the norm in his home in the decades around 1900: “Our home-life has been of the simplest. An early breakfast (8 o’clock), followed by the most unflinching housekeeping on my wife’s part, and a constitutional on my own, after which I to my studio, she to her piano or her embroidery, and Winifred to her violin, varied by their practising duets together” (see App. A, 2.20).

Pre-Raphaelite artist Arthur Hughes’s painting *The Home Quartette* (1883), which depicts Mrs. Vernon Lushington, wife of a London barrister, and their daughters playing what we might assume to be a piano quartet, also accentuates domestic warmth and social connection in its attention to detail (see Fig. 3).64 Here note the circles and curves in the carpet, windows, the fall of the women’s dresses, the jewelry, and so on, and the richness and detail of the fabrics of the clothing and interior décor. Likewise, Hughes’s positioning of the figures emphasizes the social relationships, with the sisters grouped to-

64. On the Lushingtons as a musical family, see Mirwald and Vogeler, “Life Devoted to Music.”

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Figure 2  George Kershaw, *Savile Green Septite Party*, oil on canvas, [1836]. Bankfield Museum, Halifax. Used by kind permission of Calderdale MBC Museums.
together, a little apart from Mrs. Lushington, and yet with the mother’s and daughters’ heads inclining toward one another, drawing attention to the family bond. Of course, the stylization of the image brings with it a lack of musical verisimilitude—notably the absence of music stands, and string parts strewn haphazardly and at too great a distance from the daughters; but the casualness of the scene nonetheless serves to highlight the informal aspect.

Further, Hughes’s painting trumpets the other significant shift in the period, since the ensemble is entirely female. That it became socially acceptable for women to learn and play instruments of the violin family is a topic that has been opened up by cultural historian Paula Gillett. Underpinning this about-face in the status quo were shifting attitudes toward women’s roles in society and increasing opportunities for women to participate in educational and cultural activities that had hitherto been out of bounds. But other factors also imposed, and Gillett supposes there was a need to secure a respectable domestic instrument for women from the upper social classes as a reaction to pianos becoming affordable by families further down the social scale.\footnote{Gillett, \textit{Musical Women}, 99–100.} Among her

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{home-quartette-mrs-vernon-lushington-and-children}
\end{figure}
arguments, the most compelling for our purposes is the idea that women’s exposure to chamber music in the concert hall created a strong desire to take up string instruments, which was further fuelled by the strong cultural expectations that women make music in the home. Violin playing became popular with them around this time, she argues, because it allowed them to diversify their domestic musical activities by playing the string parts in chamber music. Examples here might include the passage in a short story in *The Girl’s Own Paper* of 1892, which describes a musical family suggesting an evening’s string-quartet playing to a young female house guest, Mary. She takes the second violin part in a session of quartets by Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert (“Death and the Maiden”), initially with apprehension, because she has never played with other instruments, though she is ultimately transported with delight. Indeed, with women no longer limited to playing the piano in ensemble works, the possibilities for them to interact with men through music were changed. Opportunities extended beyond their mutual participation in string quartets. In the novel *Robert Elsmere* (1888) by Mrs. Humphry Ward, the female character Rose gives an impassioned performance of a Beethoven violin sonata in an informal concert, accompanied by a male pianist—a striking transgression of the common convention of men at the violin and women at the piano (see App. A, 7.3).

At the same time, and with Hughes’s painting in mind, one might argue that the taking up of string instruments by women increased the potential for strengthening family bonds and reinforcing the ideology of domesticity in times when the social limitations placed on “respectable” women entering the workplace were starting to loosen. Conversely, however: when, around the turn of the century, women started to train professionally as violinists in significant numbers and yet were largely unable to break into the workplace of the

66. Ibid., 98–99. Gillett sees the trend as being stoked particularly by the Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts, in which the violinist Wilma Norman-Neruda (Lady Hallé), who led quartets, served as a role model. Gillett’s other main argument (101–3) concerns the creation of a special aura around the female violinist, which related to a new, positive fascination with the supernatural, into which the older, negative associations of the instrument with the devil now played.

67. App. A, 2.21 [abridged version of story].

68. The male violinist–female accompanist pairing is depicted in Elizabeth Sheppard’s novel *Charles Auchester* of 1853 (App. A, 7.1); and in real-life testimony (App. A, 1.4).

69. On changes in job opportunities for women and attitudes toward women working, see Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work*, 194–202; and Jordan, *Women’s Movement and Women’s Employment in Nineteenth Century Britain*. Although the idea that work (including musical work) was inappropriate for middle-class women was changing, some families surely continued to view it as undesirable for their daughters. Music, in particular, would have seemed a precarious livelihood, given that the music market was oversupplied. Teaching was the most likely career destination, but the number of teachers was growing at an extraordinary rate; also, pay and status were poor. On this and other issues connected with music teaching for women, see Gillett, *Musical Women*, 207–12. For those who preferred “angels” to remain “in the house” (to invoke Coventry Patmore’s popular and much-discussed narrative poem, *The Angel in the House*, of 1854–62), music making would be encouraged as a purely domestic pursuit.
Domestic Chamber Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain

professional orchestra, chamber music emerged as an alternative outlet for public performance. In this respect, expertise in chamber playing proved emancipatory. A number of women formed all-female professional string quartets, the Nora Clench Quartet, the Edith Robinson Quartet, and the Emily Shinner Quartet being among those prominent on the concert circuit. Other skilled women violinists taught (teaching being the more acceptable professional destination), and played chamber music socially. Winifred Holiday, the artist’s daughter, having studied the violin at the Royal College of Music and later in Germany, formed her own string quartet, which gave informal concerts at her parents’ London house, sometimes with sought-after instrumentalists, such as pianists Leonard Borwick and Fanny Davies (see App. A, 7.4).

One crucial motivation for playing chamber music at home was the satisfaction—musical, intellectual, and especially social—that was derived from participation. That much has long been acknowledged, but the role of chamber music in defining social groups within nineteenth-century British society, notably its ability to enhance family relationships and friendships, has not been explored in depth. There is more work to be done here, since the store of evidence is again suggestive. In the 1820s, for instance, the banker George Grote and his wife Harriet, a celebrated woman of intellect and friend to Mendelssohn, played duets for two cellos (an early example of a female cellist [see App. A, 2.3]). Henry Holiday and his wife read through piano duets, often transcriptions of concert repertoire, almost every evening (see App. A, 6.5). Cobbett waxed lyrical about the cordial welcomes he had had in “bachelor days from friends who were at once musically and hospitably inclined, and of the families with whom in married days I exchanged visits from week to week, from year to year, for [. . .] the playing of ensemble music both with piano and strings” (see App. A, 2.18). Moreover, mothers were encouraged to organize children to play the four instruments of the string quartet as a way to enrich family life, and such ensembles played into the growing ideology of the nuclear middle-class family and the idealization of sibling bonds. In the mid-1870s it might have still been left to the male children to take up the cello.

70. On the professional training of women as violinists, and opportunities for them to perform professionally, see Ehrlich, Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century, 156–61; and Gillett, Musical Women, 189–93. Several women were employed in piano trios that provided background music in tea shops, restaurants and department stores: see Kent, View from the Bandstand, 21.

71. This basic point is in Baron (Intimate Music, 304: “a marvelous means for a family to be together as a family”), and elaborated in connection with German nation building. He goes on to make the argument, based on ideas by W. H. Riehl, that a “decline in the German social order after the Franco-Prussian War was attributed . . . to a decline in family music-making at the end of the 19th century.” Applegate and Potter, however, see the same period as one in which there was a “surge of interest in music-making in the home” (“Germans,” 18).

(“The brothers will take to the violoncello if the sisters will only learn the violin and viola, and then what a feast of music is opened as soon as a moderate progress is made,” wrote Leisure Hour [see App. A, 8.5]), but by 1890, the Woman’s World paper was advising that a family of girls likewise take up the instruments of a string quartet, for the “pleasure of playing together” (see App. A, 8.6).

That the social element was a significant aspect of chamber-music culture is reinforced by the fact that our main witnesses most typically documented with whom they played rather than what music they played, producing a list of pretty unknown characters: the Captain Dawsons, Dr. Tates, Professor Donkins, Mr. Scotts, Mr. Maudes, and Mrs. Lockharts, whom history has otherwise forgotten. Chamber music thus emerges as just as strong a force for social connectivity outside the family as within it. Friendship bonds were made among men, and later with (and among) women too. Professional musicians as well as amateurs benefited. We know, for instance, that chamber-music evenings among London professionals “out of hours,” for pleasure, were common (though, incidentally, these occasions could double as effective “note-learning” time for those who played chamber music for money, whether in public concerts or for private soirées in wealthy households).73 In similar fashion, visiting foreign performers could use chamber music as a means to connect with local musicians across the cultural and linguistic divide. Haddock told of such occasions at his family home in the 1820s and 1830s:

At that time all the great players who visited Leeds were sure to be guests of my father, at whose house a portion of every day was spent in playing chamber-music [. . .]. My brother [Thomas, cellist] frequently joined Paganini, de Beriot, and other great violinists in quartets, and later had the honour of meeting Mendelssohn and playing with him his fine duet-sonatas for piano and violoncello. (App. A, 2.4)

Serious-minded devotion to musicking was a sine qua non, and among amateurs it played an important role in defining the chamber-music aficionado and distinguishing him or her from pretenders. Telling too is how the composer Alexander Mackenzie remembered his father justifying the playing of chamber music on Sundays in Edinburgh (ca. 1847–56):

Keen musicians and busy men, the surreptitious pleasures of ensemble playing could only be indulged in on Sunday mornings during church hours in some friendly back drawing-room. Such desecrations of the Sabbath being liable to be visited by the rigour of the law, the ire of landladies and neighbours, the fearful joy of quartet playing had frequently to be snatched in our house. On one occasion a sharp-eared policeman interrupted the harmony. “But this

73. There are many examples of this in John Ella’s diaries (as documented in Bashford, “Public Chamber-Music Concerts,” 77–82).
is sacred music,” said my father, showing him a quartet by Haydn. (App. A, 2.11)74

Mackenzie’s contention that Haydn’s quartets constituted sacred music and that playing them was entirely admissible within the mid-Victorian context of Sabbatarianism (the strict, religious observance of Sunday) was a clever riposte; it also fitted comfortably with the broader trend toward the sacralization of art music in British culture. A similar instance comes from Thomas Alsager, financial writer on The Times of London and celebrated advocate and sacralizer of Beethoven’s chamber music, who held Sunday morning quartet parties “in the inmost recess” of his central London house in the 1830s presumably to avoid censure (see App. A, 2.6). Further, the sacral-social appeal of chamber music lurks behind many a literary depiction. The 1892 short story from The Girl’s Own Paper is a case in point: “[A]s they laid aside Haydn for the loftier efforts of Beethoven and Schubert, the deep charm of the music laid hold of their spirits, and they strove to realise to the best of their power the true effect. They went on and on with untiring zeal, and that insatiable enjoyment of their united performance which is a common characteristic of the average amateur.” (See App. A, 2.21)

Lest the social dimension of chamber musicking should take on an unnaturally rosy glow, we should accept that there may well have been a gap between ideology and practice,75 and that in reality emotional and social tensions within families and social groups may have been either created or exacerbated during music making, particularly if one of the players was not up to the mark. What is interesting is that while amateurs seem to have been unwilling to commit negative thoughts about family members or friends to a diary, professionals were more ready to be candid, particularly regarding collaborations with amateurs, a state of affairs that may be explained by the myriad social and economic tensions that underpinned the status of working as a professional musician in Britain.76

Just when the growth in chamber-music activity that began in the late nineteenth century leveled off, or started to fall back, is not clear. The closure of the London violin-making firm of George Withers & Sons in the early 1930s, for instance, prompted newspapers to run stories about the constricting market for string instruments and the demise of the amateur musician. The Daily Telegraph (24 February 1932) reported Walter Withers (coproprietor) as

74. The sacralization of chamber music is a principal theme in Bashford, Pursuit of High Culture.
75. Nelson, Family Ties, 115–19, discusses the tension between the Victorian ideal of loving siblings within a happy family and the reality of sibling estrangement. She highlights the fact that sibling relationships among the landed classes could be fraught with jealousy.
76. Discussed in Gillett, “Ambivalent Friendships,” 325–27. For history and context on the strained relations between professionals and aristocratic amateurs, see McVeigh, Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn, 203–4.
saying that the day of the amateur musician was passing: “[F]ew people now take the pains necessary to master an instrument like the violin.” The *Daily Mail* (30 April 1932) preferred to see “‘tinned’ music” as killing off Withers’s business, noting that “young people do not learn music as their parents and grandparents did.”

But not all evidence points in this direction, and the question is highly problematic, its full treatment lying beyond the scope of this article. However, it seems that at some stage retrenchment occurred, a high point in amateur chamber musicking possibly coming somewhere around the 1930s or 1940s. Indeed, it might not be going too far to say that by ca. 1950 the frequent playing of chamber music was being construed as something unusual—of another era, and in some eyes quaint, and thus inherently Victorian.

**A Revisionist Picture of the Creative Tradition**

As we have seen, most of the chamber music that appears to have been played in the British home was Continental (usually Austro-German), with works by native composers being restricted to households that were linked to professional musicians’ social networks. At first blush this may seem unsurprising: an easy reflection of the meagerness of British composition, even allowing for the upsurge in output from the 1880s and its sympathetic treatment in recent histories of British chamber music. So the reader would be forgiven for thinking that the opportunities for revising the reportorial aspects of the historiography are slender. In turn, one might reckon that British composers’ most memorable contribution to the repertory played in private came in the shape of the

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77. Reports cited in Whone, *Edward Withers Ltd*, 60. Whether the situation at Withers was borne out elsewhere needs further research, as do the explanations for declining instrument purchase, which can barely function as a transparent index of chamber-music making and might simply indicate a plateau once most people had instruments. Conversely, a 1939 review of a newly published manual on string-quartet playing (Watson, Review of Aulich and Heimeran, *The Well-Tempered String Quartet*, 204) argued that “the public interest in quartet playing in England is probably greater than it has ever been. Amateur quartet playing has multiplied greatly, as is indicated by the marked increase of viola players, most of whom may be assumed to exist for chamber music only.” The situation is further complicated by apparently rising figures for student learning and proficiency examinations during the later twentieth century; some of this matter is touched on in Harvey, *Violin Family and Its Makers in the British Isles*, 163, 284–85.

78. A pertinent example of this construction of chamber music as Victorian is to be found in the British “Ealing Comedy” film of 1955 *The Ladykillers*. Set in London in the aftermath of World War II, it features an amateur string quintet party (actually criminals masquerading as musicians) in the house of an elderly lady, Mrs. Wilberforce. In a scene early on in the film, Mrs. Wilberforce—whose manners and habitat are quintessentially Victorian—reminisces about hearing the minuet from Boccherini’s String Quintet in E Major being played on her twenty-first birthday in 1901, the day Queen Victoria passed away. Throughout the film the playing of chamber music is constructed as symbolizing the “old culture,” in sharp opposition to the modernity of its capture and reproduction through recorded sound technology (the criminals do not make music; they use the phonograph as their “cover”).
vocal glee: the unaccompanied part song for male voices, often with bawdy lyrics. But yet again, there is more to this state of affairs than meets the eye: in truth, British composers produced substantially more instrumental chamber music than is typically acknowledged. However, it was probably played more in public than in private; and most of the works are no longer extant, their significance having been obscured by composer- and work-centric approaches to music history, in which the physical survival of notated music has been the critical point of departure.

Just as a new understanding of domestic activity can come from fresh approaches to finding and analyzing source material, so a more nuanced picture of British creativity emerges from considering recent work in concert history that aims to produce a “thick description” of public performance culture in nineteenth-century Britain. This reconstructive history is admittedly ambitious, time-consuming, and in its infancy; conclusions currently rest on slices of activity only. However, despite these limitations, cross sections of concert data reveal a good deal about the scale and nature of repertoires. One such snapshot is given in Appendix B (beginning p. 347), which documents native chamber music publicly performed in fifteen seasons of commercial concerts in London, 1835–50. The list is long—nearly 100 works—and presents music by thirty-seven composers (including a few women), most of whose names are probably familiar only to specialists in Victorian music. Among them are all-round professional London musicians such as Henry J. Westrop (1812–1879), Charles E. Stephens (1821–1892), and Kate Loder (1825–1904), whose interest in writing chamber music was seemingly motivated by their experience as players. As far as we know, their formal procedures and style of chamber writing owed much to Austro-German (often Mozartian) models. The table also shows a variety of genres, ranging from cello sonata to double quartet. About a third of the works listed are string quartets (thirty-seven in all), underlining the quartet’s status as the consummate test of compositional ability, while the dominance of chamber music with piano (taking up nearly two-thirds of the list, and including thirty-three piano trios) reflects the increasing centrality of the piano in concert life and the home.

79. An eighteenth-century genre, the glee continued to be produced and performed, often in male social clubs, during the nineteenth century; see Johnson, “Glee” 9:942; also Robins, *Catch and Glee Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*, chap. 8.
80. The first empirical research into the performance of chamber music in Britain was done by Temperley (“Instrumental Music”). It was followed by a number of doctoral dissertations and published studies. These include: Bashford, “Public Chamber-Music Concerts”; Gick, “Chamber Music Concerts in Manchester 1838–44”; Bartley, “Chamber Music Concerts”; Bashford, *Pursuit of High Culture*; and Bell, “Chamber Music in the Home.”
81. This is a conservative estimate. The list actually includes several works that cannot be identified unequivocally, which may or may not duplicate others that are recorded here, bringing the potential total to 119.
The opportunities for the public performance of chamber music were, for logistic and economic reasons, greater than for orchestral music, which may explain something about the rash of compositions presented here. Of course it could be argued that there is favorable distortion at work, given that the fifteen-year period coincides with the heyday of the Society of British Musicians (1834–65), which acted as something of a stimulus for chamber composition. However, another focused study of London chamber concerts, albeit at the end of the century, suggests similar patterns to those noted here. In any case, the restriction of Appendix B to public performances necessarily excludes music that was presented outside the commercial concert world. Works by the dilettante composer John Lodge Ellerton (1801–1873) may be a case in point: Ellerton wrote a good deal of chamber music for the amateur market, a few items of which were possibly in circulation around this time. Surviving unpublished quartets by Henry Bishop (1816) and T. A. Walmsley (three: 1831, 1832, and 1840) may also have been receiving play-throughs in the domestic circles of professional musicians. Furthermore, there may have been additional chamber music circulating in manuscript that is no longer extant, as well as works played (either in private or public) in centers other than London.

More significant is how few works were assimilated into the concert repertoire: the typical outcome for most British works in terms of frequency of public performance, 1835–50, was two or three renditions at best, with many pieces never getting past a premiere. Bennett’s piano trio and sextet, E. J. Loder’s

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83. Bartley, “Chamber Music Concerts” 1:224–25 and 2:6–25, analyzes the proportion of music by British composers in the concert repertoire in suburban London over twenty years (1895–1915). He notes 262 performances of British chamber works: the work of eighty-four composers, mostly contemporary figures. How many works are represented by the 262 performances is not made explicit, but most pieces were heard only once or twice. A handful of works fared better, including Stanford’s Piano Quintet, Op. 25 (10 performances); Bennett’s Piano Trio, Op. 26 (5); and Walford Davies’s “Prospice” Quartet for Baritone and String Quartet (4). The data suggest a variety of genres, many of them for piano and strings; a few female composers also appear, such as Amy Grimston, Susan Spain-Dunk, and Edith Swayne.

That the number of works documented has increased by comparison with the period 1835–50 is to be expected given that British chamber-music composition was flowering by the century’s end. It should also be remembered that Bartley’s data omits concerts in central London, which would surely add to the totals. Whether or not chamber-music production was maintained between 1850 and the 1890s remains to be demonstrated, but it seems likely.

84. Ellerton apparently wrote fifty-four string quartets (twenty-one of which were published between 1849 and 1874), plus other chamber works; see [Cobbett], “Ellerton, John Lodge.” Only a few of the manuscript works are dated, according to Steve Jones, an expert on Ellerton (private communication); there is a piano trio (1845), which probably comes before most of the string quartets, some of which bear dates through the 1850s.

85. Findings on provincial chamber-music repertoire in the eighteenth century suggest that some British chamber music was likely performed in concerts in the regions but not in London. See McFarlane, “String Quartet in Eighteenth-Century Provincial Concert Life,” esp. 142.
fourth string quartet, and G. A. Macfarren’s third string quartet stand apart, topping the rankings in numbers of performances: eleven, eight, six, and six respectively. In addition, few native chamber works found their way into print. Only twenty-seven of the listed works, by ten composers—Bennett, Nicholas Bochsa, C. E. Horsley, E. J. Loder, G. A. Macfarren, W. C. Macfarren, Charles Neate, Cipriani Potter, Stephens, and Westrop—seem to have been issued for sale during the nineteenth century, presumably a reflection of British music publishers’ celebrated reluctance to issue works with slow rates of financial return. This perception of the repertoire’s poor commercial viability seems to have stemmed from the chamber-music market appearing limited in comparison with that for other types of music such as drawing-room ballads, as well as the low esteem in which the national cultural product was held. To secure publication of their music, most composers looked to the Continent to find a business willing to take the risk on a string quartet or similar, a state of affairs that was vexing for all, as Stanford’s correspondence, decades later, attests. Indeed, the table shows a few composers issuing their music through German publishing houses. The upshot of these circumstances, however, was a peculiar “Catch 22” situation that impacted the dissemination and reputation of British chamber music in both public and private domains. Most public performances used manuscript parts, clearly a limiting factor for wider geographic uptake in concerts and absorption into the stock of frequently performed pieces. Meanwhile, the domestic market relied on commercially available publications, which mostly reflected what had become firmly assimilated into the concert repertoire and eschewed native compositions.

Appendix B further reveals that the majority (nearly 70 percent) of the chamber music that once existed in manuscript seems not to have survived. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, the statistic calls for investigation into the cultural values surrounding the collecting and preservation of music.

86. Temperley, “Xenophilia,” 4 and 9–16, documents this British failure of confidence in its own music and the traditional explanations given for it, and offers his own assessment of the role played by the interlocking aspects of class, social emulation, and cosmopolitanism.

87. Reported in Dibble, “Edward Dannreuther and the Orme Square Phenomenon,” 292–93 (and 293n53). According to Michael Hurd, by the 1890s the firm of Novello was publishing a small number of British chamber works. Imprint statements often indicate these were issued “as author’s property” (probably meaning that some of the cost was borne by the composer); see Hurd, Vincent Novello—And Company, 89–90. Inspection of copies (e.g., quartets by H. W. Hadow and J. H. Mee) shows some of them were published at the request of the Oxford University Musical Union (on which see discussion above, p. 314). Similar difficulties in obtaining publication pertained for American composers of chamber music; see Betz, “Introduction,” xiii.

88. Or at least awaits rediscovery and dissemination. For example, the symphonies of Alice Mary Smith (1839–1884), which had been retained by her family and passed to descendants, came to light in the late twentieth century, are now held by the Royal Academy of Music in London, and have been published in modern edition (see the notes by Graham-Jones, in Smith, Symphonies). According to Bush (“Chamber Music,” 389), Smith also wrote three string quartets and four piano quartets, the manuscripts for which he had inspected at the time he wrote his essay; their rehabilitation has yet to happen.
The fact that a set of G. A. Macfarren’s chamber-music manuscripts is archived in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, is surely explained by his tenure as University Professor; most British composers had no such institutional affiliation.) Further, if the new data helps us understand why British chamber music has been marginalized by music history, it also reminds us that lack of extant physical evidence in the form of dots on the page, and especially scores or parts in libraries, does not necessarily indicate a historical lack of compositional activity. At the same time, the sheer amount of chamber repertoire heard in concerts suggests a desire among British composers to write music of the highest ambition and to be taken as seriously as their European counterparts. The programming of chamber works by Mozart, Beethoven, et al., for comparison with the new works heard alongside them at the Society of British Musicians’ chamber concerts in the 1840s is testament to such aspiration. Indeed, with more than 100 works documented, the picture is highly indicative: and hardly the basis on which to deny a creative tradition, regardless of how overtly “national” or original the music was in style.

Culture, Evidence, and the Making of History

Given the suggestiveness of the evidence discussed above, the reader probably wonders why such a negative view of British chamber-music life should have persisted for so long and so trenchantly in the historiography. There may also be some nagging doubts about the revisionist history I have proposed, particularly in connection with the domestic tradition. One might well ask if there are no primary sources that support the view of a paucity of chamber-music making in nineteenth-century Britain. And why, if what I have suggested is true, are there not more representations of serious chamber music in novels, paintings, and so on? After all, pianos were played in private and that activity is pervasively documented in the artifacts of the period, whereas examples of amateur string-quartet playing are rare. It is at this point that “historical imagination” becomes a beneficial tool, encouraging us to use additional “authoritative” data to create that “web of imaginative construction” across the gaps in the evidence, and further, to help us understand why the historiographical picture took shape as it has. We can start by looking at the cultural contexts of both the surviving source material and the historiography. I have already mapped the sidelining of nineteenth-century Britain in the secondary literature on chamber music and noted simplistic correlations between assumed creative output and domestic activity, but there is more to be said with regard

89. The press commended this aspect. See, for example, Morning Herald, 22 March 1844: “The admission of foreign works of excellence into the programmes has been and is of great service; it does not injure the opportunity of the British artist to get the public hearing he craves, while the constant presence of first-rate chamber models must necessarily improve his taste and encourage his emulation.”
to the enduring characterization of the chamber-music phenomenon as inherently German. It should also be understood that the Victorians themselves played a significant role in propagating this limited view of their own culture.

Among the additional primary evidence to be taken into account we find a handful of assessments by Victorians that promote a dismal picture of their own domestic music making. Significantly, most of what was said on this topic was uttered in public, and often with contrasts drawn, even at this stage, with Germany. People who spoke out were wont to indicate that German-speaking lands had a rich domestic quartet tradition that was more extensive than Britain’s, and to suggest it was consistently conducted at a higher standard. William Sterndale Bennett, for example, remembered in a lecture the delightful hours he had spent in German families making music. “German homes are musical,” he said in 1855, “good music and good performance is the rule in Germany, in England it is the exception.”

If it seems strange that Bennett should be so negative about Britain, we should remember that the purpose of his lecture was to argue for improvements in the nation’s music making, and that pointing up how foreigners did things better than the British, while downplaying British musical achievements and manipulating feelings of national pride, was a much-used rhetorical device in the Victorian period. And not only in Britain: the technique was used on both sides of the Channel. Berlioz, for one, used similar strategies. In the case of Britain, perhaps it was because music purportedly posed such a problem that the rhetoric of national rivalry could be brought to bear so effectively: the nation’s output of music and musicians, unlike British commerce, industry, science, design, and literature, did not demonstrate unequivocally that the country was a world leader. For example, John Ella, hoping to attract new members to his chamber concert society, goaded subscribers with the idea that every city in Europe and every village in Germany could muster a good concert audience from amateur chamber musicians, unlike England. Contributing to such a stance was the

91. At a time when Berlioz was growing increasingly disaffected with the opportunities he found in Paris, he wrote glowingly of English musical life in dispatches to the *Journal des Débats* (1851); these reports are translated in Ganz, *Berlioz in London*, 90–94 and passim.
92. *Record of the Musical Union* (1850): no. 8, supplement, p. 33; see also no. 3, p. 10: “Such performances as occasionally take place at the Musical Union in London, before three hundred persons, would attract, in a small town in Germany, as many thousands!”

Another example of Britain’s so-called feeble domestic tradition is said (by Bush, “Chamber Music,” 381) to be Hullah’s *Music in the House*, a manual of domestic advice that appeared in Macmillan’s “Art at Home” series. The booklet contains a passing call for an increase in domestic quartet playing and the taking up of string instruments, amid an essay that otherwise focuses on piano and vocal music. Whether this proves much about the broader culture of string-quartet playing is doubtful, since Hullah’s interests were primarily in vocal music (especially choral singing), and the book was aimed at the lower middle class, a group not yet widely involved with playing string instruments. On the booklet’s readership, see Ferry, “...information for the ignorant and aid for the advancing...,” 134–35.
interest of the Victorians in German learning and culture in general, and their fascination with German musical achievements and opportunities in particular. These elements became increasingly pronounced from the middle of the century, when the circulation of populations increased, both through German immigration into British cities and tourism by educated middle-class Britons in Europe. Manchester, Liverpool, and Bradford developed significant merchant-class communities, with German-Jewish immigrants becoming well known for their serious musical interests, including chamber music. There was also the legacy of the music-loving Prince Albert, from the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. His marriage to Victoria had reinforced the plentiful German connections in the royal family, and his encouragement of art, science, and industry—notably in the Great Exhibition of 1851, which led to the building of the educational and cultural complex in South Kensington, London—gave further impetus to the idea of Germany as a civilizing influence.93 In music circles it was widely acknowledged that German conservatoires, especially those at Leipzig and Frankfurt, offered a superior education to what might be obtained at the lackluster Royal Academy of Music, and ambitious British musicians who could afford to do so traveled abroad to study.94 Several fêted chamber players on the professional concert circuit were German visitors or émigrés: examples include the pianist and conductor Charles Hallé, who arrived in 1848 and settled in Manchester; the great violinist Joseph Joachim, who led many ensembles; and Clara Schumann, who toured relentlessly after her husband’s death, frequently essaying his piano quartet and quintet. And perhaps most significant of all, the Austro-German instrumental repertoire, especially the Viennese classics, which had long dominated much of British musical life, particularly at chamber-music concerts, was becoming unquestionably canonic.95 By the 1880s, according to King, there was an entrenched “public prejudice and apathy” toward British chamber-music composition that was “rooted in the conviction that only German composers could write good quartets.”96

In truth, how the Victorians’ view of German chamber-music making compared with the actuality of the situation abroad is open to question; as yet we do not have the in-depth cultural histories of German music making that would address the matter squarely. It may be that by the mid-nineteenth cen-

93. For background, see Ashton, Little Germany.
94. On the limitations of the Royal Academy, see Ehrlich, Music Profession, 79–99. Among composers who studied in Germany were William Sterndale Bennett, Arthur Sullivan, Ethel Smyth, and Charles Stanford; among performers were Leonard Borwick and Fanny Davies (both pianists), and Emily Shinner (violinist). On subsequent attempts to reform conservatoire education in Britain, see Wright, “South Kensington Music Schools and the Development of the British Conservatoire in the Late Nineteenth Century.”
95. These ideas are the subject of Weber’s Great Transformation of Musical Taste, which surveys repertoire change between 1750 and 1875, principally in London, Paris, Vienna, Leipzig, and Boston.
96. King, Chamber Music, 66.
tury the zenith of German chamber-music life already lay in the past, and that, as the writer W. H. Riehl suggested in 1859, the piano was becoming the norm in the home, usurping the hallowed position of the string quartet. That did not, apparently, prevent Germans from constructing a honeyed view of their national musical identity as regards chamber music when it suited them. According to Nicolai Petrat, the specialized music press tended to publish romanticized (fictional) stories of home music making, typically in rural settings. In a tale that appeared in the *Musikalisches Conversationsblatt* in 1835, a traveler on his way to Vienna (who is later revealed to be Beethoven), stops at a country house:

After the meal had ended, the man of the house opened up an old piano, and his three sons took down their instruments from the wall, and each sat down at a music stand while the mother and daughter went about their womanly work. After a short while spent tuning, the evening’s musical conversation commenced.

The work that they played now seemed to interest them to a high degree. They gave themselves completely up to it; and by their correctness and the precision of the performance, as well as by the expressions on their faces, one could see that they were deeply moved by what they were playing.

There is notable similarity here with Wagner’s more famous idealized country evening in his essay “On German Music” of 1840:

Go and listen one winter-night in that little cabin: there sit a father and his three sons, at a small round table; two play the violin, a third the viola, the father the ’cello; what you hear so lovingly and deeply played, is a quartet composed by that little man who is beating time. [...] You will be dissolved to tears; for it will search your heart, and you will know what German Music is, will feel what is the German spirit.

The extent to which Wagner’s vignette was known in German-speaking music circles in Britain at midcentury is unclear. However, his essay was published in English translation in the 1890s and so may well have affected the

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97. See, for instance, the testimony of W. H. Riehl in “Sechster Brief: Geige und Klavier,” in *Culturstudien aus drei Jahrhunderten*, 360–67. Riehl recounts his childhood memories of his father regularly playing quartets in the home, and of his falling asleep listening to Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven quartets (362), and contrasts this situation regretfully with the present day, in which the piano has become the norm in home music making. See also Botstein, “Listening through Reading.”

98. Original German cited in Petrat, “Musizierpraxis,” 499. The story is August Gathy’s “Ein Quartettabend.” See also Petrat’s evidence for concerns that home music making in Germany in the 1830s and 1840s was losing its serious character and being taken over by vapid and easy repertoire.

nascent historiography of chamber music in the early twentieth century. At the same time, one might ruefully consider whether, stripped of its chauvinism, Wagner’s depiction of men lovingly playing string quartets on a winter’s night in a little cabin is so very different from Cobbett’s memory of his snug, fraternal quartet evenings in suburban London villas in the 1860s.

As similar as the two may be, the idealization of German chamber-music culture persisted at Britain’s expense.100 During the first half of the twentieth century, and despite the fact that “national” traditions of musical scholarship were developing, the growing discipline of musicology in most countries (including, but not only, Britain) still took many of its bearings from Germany. And German scholarship, the tenor of which was already bound up with broader cultural desires to define and assert German superiority, emphasized its own national musical achievements, positioning chamber music centrally within that framework, with Beethoven’s late string quartets representing the apex of human endeavor.101 Such thinking trickled easily into general history books and music appreciation literature in all languages. The potency of this nationalizing agenda is further explained by a cultural environment outside of the Reich that celebrated—and had done since the mid-nineteenth century—a mostly Austro-German chamber repertoire in the recital hall, and later on through recorded sound. So by the mid-twentieth century, the notion that Germany was the only country that really “did” home chamber music in the nineteenth century was well enshrined and reinforced the idea of German musical superiority.102 In Britain, it was helped along by a generation that, by the admission of one of its number, had been “brought up to believe that all Germans are musical, [and] that every little German is born with a fiddle under his chin.” This quotation comes from a 1939 review of Bruno Aulich and Ernst Heimeran’s Das stillvergnügte Streichquartett (1936), which had been published in translation as The Well-Tempered String Quartet: A Book of

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100. It may be useful to note that Katharine Ellis, in Interpreting the Musical Past, has observed similar attitudes of cultural inferiority to Germany on the part of the French, particularly with regard to the revival of early music (see 250–55).

101. The tendency for German scholarship to be overly concerned with its own musical past began in the nineteenth century and was still rife in the early twentieth, when most German musicology was dedicated to promoting the works of the Austro-German “masters”; see Applegate and Potter, “Germans,” 14, and esp. 19. On the broader use of music and culture to build a sense of collective national identity in the period after unification (1871 onwards), and to assert national superiority (especially after World War I), see ibid., 12–24. Their discussion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attributes much, in the forging of collective identity, to choral singing and to the construction of the Lied as the quintessential German genre. Home music making (Hausmusik) is highlighted only in passing, and instrumental chamber music is—curiously—not mentioned.

102. According to Applegate and Potter (ibid., 21), instrumental music making in the home proliferated in Germany in the fragile post–World War I period, with the state recognizing and promoting music as an aid to building community. As they put it, “[T]his postwar saturation of German society with musical activity only reinforced the Germans’ reputation as the ‘people of music.’ ”
Counsel and Entertainment for All Lovers of Music in the Home. The author of the review was the chamber-music writer J. Arthur Watson. For all the obvious anti-German propaganda coursing through an essay published in the run-up to Britain entering World War II, the passage is worth reproducing in full, because of the questions it raises about German musicality:

To those of us who were brought up to believe that all Germans are musical, that every little German is born with a fiddle under his chin, and that thoroughness is an exclusively German quality, it may be something of a shock to learn that the authors, living in musical Munich itself, had to advertise for their quartet (in the whole circle of the advertisers’ friends there was not one who played on an instrument); that the quartet used to meet, not merely without previous individual practice of the works to be played, but actually without having determined what they were to be; that neither the second fiddle nor the viola ever practiced, and that the cello regarded his part in terms of “bits of fat”—an odious expression, but less odious than the frame of mind implied, which is the antithesis of the self-effacing spirit of quartet playing.

The almost laughable representation of lackluster chamber playing, and the suggestion that getting a quartet together was difficult, certainly counters the idea that serious chamber music was a way of life in German society. It is hard to know whether domestic chamber-music culture in Munich was atypical for German cities at this time, whether it was in a temporary lull because of Germany’s military endeavors, or whether Aulich and Heimeran’s experience was anomalous.

Whatever the truth may be, the saintly image of German chamber-music making was almost universally enshrined, as we have seen. Yet this alone does not completely explain the tendency of the British to downplay their own traditions. Indigenous factors stemming from the Victorians themselves also contributed and extended beyond cultural inferiority towards Germany in terms of musical and intellectual pursuits, to include issues of class, masculinity, and professionalism, to be discussed below. All these elements were bound up with existing anxieties concerning British national identity and music, and they kept the German-British polarity alive. They too need to be drawn into our “web of imaginative construction.”

Of course, it is true that the pursuit of any type of music in Britain was dogged by these problematic connotations, but chamber music, with its

103. The review was published in Music and Letters 20 (1939): 204–6. The handbook was translated into English by D. Millar Craig, who added some English chamber works to the repertoire list in the book’s appendix. At the time the review was published and presumably written, Hitler was increasing his demands on territories in eastern Europe; a few months later, Germany would invade Poland, the event that triggered Britain’s declaration of hostilities and the onset of World War II. The review’s anti-German rhetoric echoes Antcliffe’s stance a generation earlier, in the aftermath of the First World War.

cerebral overtones and expressive intensity, presented an extreme case. Tellingly, too, this particular knot of issues helps to explain why there is so little evidence in the public historical record for the domestic chamber-music tradition, especially the playing of string quartets. Moreover, it helps us understand why the view of a moribund culture is scarcely contradicted in the public source material, and why that view filtered seamlessly into the early twentieth-century historiography.

My contention here is that in public many amateurs—notably men (since they were the ones who had the public voice)—talked down their participation in a serious domestic tradition, or were at least highly reluctant to talk it up. I say this because the Victorians typically frowned on the overzealous pursuit of music and instrumental study by men in polite society, an attitude with continuity from the previous century. Making music in earnest, with too much enthusiasm, was widely deemed to compromise a man’s masculinity and was thus considered intensely problematic and threatening. It generated potent cultural anxiety, something that has been observed repeatedly in Victorian culture by scholars such as Cyril Ehrlich, David Golby, and, more recently, Regula Hohl Trillini in her study of literary representations of domestic music. The background here is that the figure of the effeminate gentleman musician (especially the string player) was much debated in the eighteenth century, when it provoked comment about the appropriateness of musical practice by well-to-do amateurs. Now, criticisms showed some signs of relaxation by the nineteenth century, particularly as the amateur string-quartet scene came increasingly to be populated by middle-class men, a few of whom, like William Gardiner, seem to have been willing to write publicly about their musicking. But despite these positive developments, old anxieties about the feminizing power of music proved remarkably enduring in higher society, and they were probably also manifest further down the class scale, given how strong were the habits of social emulation. Lord Berners remembered the 1890s as times when the pursuit of music was scorned for being

105. This view was summed up by Lord Chesterfield in his celebrated gibe about gentlemen “piping and fiddling.” For discussion see Woodfield, Music of the Raj, 128; and Rohr, Careers of British Musicians, 19. Chesterfield made the comment in a letter of 1749.


107. On the general discouragement of gentlemen making music in the eighteenth century, and the idea that music was something a young man should not do too well, see Leppert, Music and Image, 24–27 and 107–11; and also Woodfield, Music of the Raj, 127–30.

108. Signs of change in the eighteenth century are typically denoted by Lord Mornington (d. 1781; the father of the Duke of Wellington), the first nobleman not to fear being ridiculed for carrying a violin case down a London street (Leppert, Music and Image, 25). On the rate of change in attitudes in the nineteenth century, see Trillini, Gaze of the Listener, 115–19 and 177–78. Despite shifts in gender norms, “overtones of effeminacy and immaturity clung to male music lovers for a long time” (177).
neither manly nor gentlemanly. At the Oxfordshire public boys’ school Radley College, the playing of instruments was encouraged “provided it did not interfere with cricket and other manly and muscular diversions.” As for ensemble music making per se, as late as the 1920s Walter Willson Cobbett remarked that an enthusiasm for chamber music (indeed for anything other than sport) was simply “not an English trait,” adding that it was liable to be considered not “‘good form’ in society.” Contextualized thus, it becomes easier to see why fictional depictions of string-quartet playing and the like tend toward ridicule. The passage in Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* (1848), introducing a London office employee named Morfin, aptly captures the tone of these caricatures. Morfin was “a great musical amateur in his way—after business; and had a paternal affection for his violoncello, which was once in every week transported from Islington, his place of abode, to a certain club-room hard by the Bank, where quartettes of the most tormenting and excruciating nature were executed every Wednesday evening by a private party” (see App. A, 2.12).

These stereotypes seem to have been reinforced by several interlocking constructs. Most obviously, music making was deemed a prime social accomplishment for women (not men) in domestic life, as indicated by the ubiquitous cultural symbol of women at the keyboard, particularly in novels. This is what Ruth Solie and others have written of as “girling at the piano.” Music was also, because of its emotional dimension, identified as a “feminine form of expression,” a quality that was underpinned by Victorian anxieties about its potential to arouse too much passion. In this respect, the emotional intensity of much chamber music was surely problematic. A further issue stemmed from the fact that respectable men made music only as amateurs, and not to too high a standard. In sharp contrast, professional string playing was, until

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109. Berners, *Distant Prospect*, 18. Berners diagnosed this viewpoint as coming from “Victorian standards of male education” and the desire to promote manliness and gentility.

110. Golby, *Instrumental Teaching*, 262n100. In English usage, the term “public school” refers to an independent boarding school (for fee-paying pupils), not funded by public taxes. Eton College and Rugby School are good examples. On chamber music in such contexts, see Goddard, “Public School Chamber Music.”

111. [Cobbett], “Chamber Music Life, The” 1:254.

112. See also the humorous depiction, “Amateur Quartet.” Trillini, in *Gaze of the Listener*, 116, further notes that “the total feminization of musical performance . . . is simply a given, inescapable in fiction, too, where male music lovers and amateur players are invariably off-key: foreign, evil, effeminate, childish or any combination of these.”

113. Solie, *Music in Other Words*, 86, borrowing from Judith Butler’s work on gender and performativity. (Solie refers to a lecture given by Butler at Smith College in January 1994.)

114. The association between music and femininity has a long history; see, *inter alia*, Austern, “‘Alluring the Auditorie to Effeminaicie’”; and for the cultural context in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Rohr, *Careers of British Musicians*, 15–21. Victorian fears about music’s subversive potential to stimulate emotions are discussed in Trillini, *Gaze of the Listener*, 112–15.
the end of the century, a job typically left to men from the lower-middle classes, one beset by perceptions of artisanship, dubious social standing, and cultural inferiority that—apparently—did not afflict Continental musicians to the same extent.\textsuperscript{115} Plus, there was what Linda Colley, in her study of the late eighteenth century, has described as the British conception of themselves “as an essentially ‘masculine’ culture—bluff, forthright, rational, down-to-earth”—a construct that persisted into the nineteenth: all in all, an interesting intersection of issues of class, gender, professional status, and national identity.\textsuperscript{116} The advent of the well-heeled female violinist in the 1870s and 1880s, whether amateur or would-be professional, seems to have done little to change this complex of gender associations, and may even have exacerbated matters for respectable men who enjoyed serious music making at home, since string instruments were now more overtly associated with the feminine. In posed photographs women string players are almost always softly dressed in white.

Distaste for men’s musicking in amateur ensembles was further heightened by the stain of intellectualism that had come to color chamber music, although it may have been fading in some quarters. In 1868 John Ella, addressing and intentionally flattering his concert audience (which included a substantial number of upper-class men), made a valiant attempt to suggest that at long last, cultivating the intellect through music was becoming more accepted as consistent with manliness in Britain. However, his communication was plagued by nervous contradictions, for he had to admit it was largely women from the leisured classes, along with the clergy, who cultivated and gave public support to music.\textsuperscript{117} Incidentally, promoting the intellectual aspect of chamber music at public concerts from the midcentury, as Ella did through the provision of analytical program notes, may have been motivated by a desire to counter such anxieties by deliberately emphasizing the rational and even scientific dimension of string quartets and other chamber music. Science, it should be remembered, became a pursuit of increasing importance for men in the Victorian period. However, Ella’s goals would have been particularly hard won in the aristocratic circles he targeted, since upper-class

\textsuperscript{115} The history of the professional instrumentalist in the nineteenth century is one of a complex struggle to piece together a living and achieve higher professional status and social standing. See Rohr, \textit{Careers of British Musicians}, 22–39, and Ehrlich, \textit{Music Profession}, passim, esp. 142–56.

\textsuperscript{116} Colley, \textit{Britons}, 252.

\textsuperscript{117} See “English Dilettantism” in the 1868 \textit{Record of the Musical Union}. Ella was surely trying to encourage more young men to join the organization. Elsewhere he spoke more frankly: “In a country where music is scarcely recognized as an important element in the accomplishments of young men of condition, and its encouragement is dependent chiefly on the female sex and the clergy, the musician naturally finds fewer of the sterner sex able to appreciate his art in England than on the continent;” see “Silken Cord” in the 1866 \textit{Record of the Musical Union}. Trillini, in \textit{Gaze of the Listener}, 118, observes that clergymen, too, tend to be feminized in Victorian fiction.
society deemed unmanly not just chamber music, but the cultivation of the intellect itself.\textsuperscript{118}

Not that such ideologies suppressed activity. As we have seen, some men played chamber music in private with great conviction, and even to what seemed like high standards for the time. Perhaps too, for certain men, more positive attitudes toward the cerebral nature of chamber music may have encouraged them to ignore any negative associations. Nevertheless, it seems that in the stratum of society where men had the requisite wealth, leisure time, and interest to play string quartets and the like, the cultivation of chamber music was typically played down in public, caricatured, hidden from view, or even denied.\textsuperscript{119} The implication is that it was far simpler to keep quiet about such private passions and not to speak about or represent them publicly, particularly when standards of execution were low, which they must have been in some instances. That might partly explain the disjunction between the relatively buried, mostly privately hewn evidence for a healthy chamber-music tradition in Britain and the striking public insistence that Britain lacked precisely such a tradition. Of course, an activity that was private and culturally destined to be minimized and hidden from view probably seems, on first acquaintance, like a music historian’s nightmare. And yet its partial recovery, if handled with an appropriate helping of “historical imagination,” is extremely exciting. For it not only invites revision of historical givens: it dares us to think about the gaps in music historiography and why they might be there.

\textbf{Appendix A} \textbf{Domestic Chamber-Music Making in Nineteenth-Century Britain}

This Appendix presents a selection of evidence, categorized thematically and arranged in each section in order of the apparent date of the activity discussed therein.

1. Activity in grand houses (typically among aristocracy and gentry)

1.1. 1793–1823. “Dalby Hall [Leicestershire] was the scene of many musical parties through the following thirty years [i.e., 1793–1823] [. . .]. Upon our midsummer visits, the sestett party repaired to the neighbouring woods, and in the cool shade

\textsuperscript{118.} The cultivation of the mind had also been an area from which women had traditionally been barred, but attitudes and expectations were shifting, and the cerebral appreciation of (and later participation in) chamber music among women became increasingly acceptable. See Bashford, \textit{Pursuit of High Culture}, 351–52.

\textsuperscript{119.} In this respect see Trillini, \textit{Gaze of the Listener}, 116, quoting a speech by Arthur Sullivan in 1888, which highlighted “a curious affectation of [musical] ignorance on the part of many men of position” on the governing boards of musical institutions: they “deprecate any knowledge of music with a smug satisfaction like a man disowning poor relations.”
we awakened the echoes by the strains of Haydn and Mozart, and the deep harmonies of Beethoven.” (William Gardiner, *Music and Friends*, 1838, vol. 1, p. 114)

1.2. ca.? 1814–19. “It was [ . . . ] at Dolby [Dalby] Hall that I first heard Beethoven’s trios, Haydn’s and Mozart’s sonatas.” (John Ella, in *Record of the Musical Union*, 1859, p. 22, writing of his first experiences of chamber music in Leicestershire, before 1819; Ella was born in 1802)

1.3. ca.? 1814–19. “Walked on the Ashby Road—& saw on the Hill, Burleigh Hall [near Loughborough, Leicestershire], where I once passed some agreeable days, in my youth[,] fiddling with old Miss & Dr. Tate—Trios by Kalkbrenner[—. ]” (John Ella, private diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 122, entry for 8 Nov 1853; writing of the years before 1819)

1.4. ca. 1830–60s. “Francis Maude. Hatfield Hall near Wakefield [Yorkshire] [ . . . ] Patron of Music, known to all Musicians. His daughter—Susan—a most excellent Pianist with whom, for many years I had occasion to Play Sonatas & [sic] of Beethoven &c[.]” (John Ella, notes in scrapbook, ?1860s; Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 81, p. 63)

1.5. ca. 1831–35. “Until the death of this amiable lover of music, Sir Geo: Cornewall Bart [1835], I never failed to visit Moccas-Court [Herefordshire], when in England for any vacation—Sir George played the Violoncello & with his Sisters Miss Cornwell—Viscountess Hereford—Mrs. Frankland Lewis—Mrs. Peploe and Lady Duff-Gordon, & their surroundings I have passed many days of real enjoyment—[ . . . ]” (John Ella, scrapbook, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 81, p. 63: entry dated 1864)

1.6. ca. 1831–45. “Had we never seen life in country houses, we should have remained ignorant to this day of the practical virtues and musical accomplishments of the aristocracy and wealthy families of England, who cultivate the fine arts for their hours of relaxation. This experience, in early professional life, ultimately led to the formation of the Musical Union.” (John Ella, in *Record of the Musical Union*, 1859, p. 30, speaking of the period up to 1845)

1.7. 1838. “His R. H. the Duke of Cambridge honored me at 3 with his Company & brought his Fiddles & Viola & Cello—he played second Fiddle to Lord Boscawen, Major Legge Cello, I, the Viola to Haydn’s Quartet in B. flat No. 79. [Op. 76, no. 5]—the Duke played Quintet in D, also variations in A by Mozart[.]” (John Ella, private diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 107, entry for 2 April 1838; location unspecified, possibly at the home of Major Legge, in Blackheath)

1.8. 1839. “Cambridge House—Piccadilly [London]—The Duke of Cambridge sent for me to a Quartet Party at 1/2 past 9—to play the Viola in Quartets with H.R.H[.] Messrs Blagrove and Lucas (I believe was the Cello)—as I played the Viola in a Quartet at the Duke’s residence in Hanover in 18[–], His R.H. pronounced me to be a good player (rather News to me[. ] Blagrove told me to be on the watch for if H.R.H. did not play a passage to his own satisfaction, he repeated it without giving any notice to the other 3 Performers[—. ]” (George Smart, “Events in the Life of George Smart from 1776,” British Library, London, Add MS 41772, fol. 98v, entry for 20 Jan 1839)

1.9. 1839. [Dinner at Blackheath, Kent, chez Major Legge.] “Played Beethoven’s Trio C minor.” (John Ella, private diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 108, entry for 21 Jan 1839)
1.10. 1843–45. “In addition to quartet practice that I had been obtaining with my brother, was that which I now experienced with various amateurs of great ability. The late Judge Marshall—father of Mr. T. Marshall, the present Registrar of the Leeds County Court—was a most enthusiastic violoncellist. [...] The first of his quartet meetings which I attended at this time [before 1845] were held at his house in Park Square, Leeds, but, later, weekly meetings were at Outwood Hall, his residence near Wakefield [Yorkshire]. I used to start on this journey by the coach leaving the ‘Old George’ in Briggate, which set me down at the gates of Outwood Hall. The three amateur members who, with me, comprised the quartet party were: second violin, Mr. Charles Arthur Tennant, a solicitor of Dewsbury and a pupil of mine; viola, Mr. T. Foljambe; and the Judge himself used to take the violoncello. “[T]hese meetings were held every week unless the Judge had removed to his house in Grasmere [Westmorland; the Lake District], in which case the invitations were issued for a full week, and for that length of time, each day was filled by the playing of quartets alternately with that of quoits.” ([George Haddock], Some Early Musical Recollections of G. Haddock, 1906, pp. 49–50)

1.11. 1843–45. “Another house where the playing of quartets was ardently entertained was Wood Hall, near Howden—the home of the Menzies family. George, a son of Robert Menzies, Esq., was another pupil of mine, and, when the meetings were held at his house, he used to take the second violin part[.]” ([George Haddock], Some Early Musical Recollections of G. Haddock, 1906, p. 50, probably describing the early 1840s)

1.12. 1860s. “We find ourselves in a quiet, cheerful room at the back of a good house; it is morning; there are only four people present; they are all intent upon playing; they can all play, and there is no one present to molest with praise or blame. Two violins, viola, and violoncello, and the quartet is complete. The first violin is a gifted amateur, the second violin is a thoughtful gentleman, perhaps an art critic, not a brilliant player, but steady, and never tired. Viola is a rather testy, but thoroughly good-natured professional, who never can quite get over the fact of somebody else playing first fiddle, and occasionally has to be called to order for putting in little bits which belong to some one of the other instruments. Violoncello is a good amateur, or perhaps a semi-professional, who plays a little of every instrument under the sun. [...] “Four hours of it in the morning might seem enough; but that is nothing to the quartet player. After lunch those four men will begin again, and work away till dusk. Then they will go out for a turn in the park or by the sea before dinner, and will very likely set to again after dinner, and play from nine till twelve o’clock.” (H. R. Haweis, Music and Morals, [1871], pp. 446–47, 448; Haweis was born in 1838; this probably describes the 1860s)

1.13. 1860s. “In musical country houses it is not uncommon to have a quartet party staying in the house; and then woe to the unmusical! The best quartet work is no doubt done in the morning; but the quartet is irrepressible; it may break out at all times, and any where—suddenly on the lawn, in summer; in the dining-room, after dinner; in very hot weather, in some sonorous housekeeper’s room; even in the pantry, all over the drawing-room, in the library, on the balcony, or up stairs in any of the bedrooms.” (H. R. Haweis, Music and Morals, [1871], p. 448; probably describing the 1860s)
1.14. ?1870s onwards. “I could fill pages with recollections of weeks spent at country houses where chamber music was played on rainy days, morning, noon, and  night[.]” ([Walter Willson Cobbett], “Chamber Music Life, The,” in Cobbett’s Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music, 1929, vol. 1, p. 259; Cobbett was born in 1847; this probably describes the 1870s onwards)

2. Activity in middle-class milieux

2.1. “In our early quartett parties [in Leicester], we performed a few sets of Haydn, one of Pleyel, and four or five of Wranisky [sic]. It was not till the year 1802 that I procured the Bonaparte edition of Haydn’s quartetts in Paris. [. . .] In these early parties was my friend, Captain Dawson, a gentleman of great taste in the fine arts, and passionately fond of music.” (William Gardiner, Music and Friends, 1838, vol. 1, pp. 322–23)

2.2. ?ca. 1802. “On my first visit to Liverpool I was attracted by a good-looking music-shop, kept by Mr. Hime [. . .]. Mr. Hime, finding that I was a stranger who had some little knowledge of the art, said he was going to have a quartett party in the evening, and would be glad to see me. I was flattered by the invitation, and waited upon him.” (William Gardiner, Music and Friends, 1838, vol. 1, pp. 210–11)

2.3. 1820s. “He [George Grote, London banker] cultivated his musical talent, too, for many years after his marriage [1820], although towards the year 1830 he ceased to attend to his violoncello, finding too many other claims on his time and attention to permit of his practising on this instrument. Up to this period, however, he and his wife [Harriet Grote] used to play duets on two violoncellos, as well as pianoforte duets with his accompaniment.” (Mrs. Grote, The Personal Life of George Grote, 1873, p. 41)

2.4. 1820s–30s. “[I]n my young days, there were, at least, a dozen houses of our first and most influential families [in Leeds] at which weekly quartet meetings were held, these being the principal recreations for the winter months. [. . .] At that time [1820s–30s] all the great players who visited Leeds were sure to be guests of my father, at whose house a portion of every day was spent in playing chamber-music [. . .]. My brother [Thomas, cellist] frequently joined Paganini, de Beriot, and other great violinists in quartets, and later had the honour of meeting Mendelssohn and playing with him his fine duet-sonatas for piano and violoncello. [. . .] So, before I commenced the study of the violin, I was quite familiar with passages from various quartets, from having heard them played so frequently.” ([George Haddock], Some Early Musical Recollections of G. Haddock, 1906, pp. 16 and 21)

2.5 1830s. “Many have been the changes in our party through the last fifty years; still we contrive, once a fortnight, to regale our ears with a quartett of Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven. My oldest musical friend, Mr. Bankart, I still find by my side, with his violoncello; and, with our excellent leader, Mr. Gill, Mr. Graham, and Mr. Scott, we play the whole of Beethoven, except his posthumous quartetts, which we conceive require the penetration of the angel Gabriel to understand.” (William Gardiner, Music and Friends, 1838, vol. 2, p. 831, talking of Leicester, 1830s)
2.6. 1833. “From there [church] we went to a regular Sunday-quartet which takes place at a private gentleman’s [Thomas Alsager’s], in the innmost recess of his house [in London]. We chanced upon a quartet by Onslow; two of Onslow’s quartets had been played already. They wanted to perform Felix’s octet, but I begged for the quintet [Op. 18], and they played it, and gave the octet over and above.” (Letter from Abraham Mendelssohn to his family in Germany, 1833, in Sebastian Hensel, ed., The Mendelssohn Family (1729–1847): From Letters and Journals, 1882, vol. 1, p. 297)

2.7. 1834. “The day on Friday was truly ridiculous; the music began at two. Mama played a Sonata of Mozart with Mr. Mountain [Joseph Mountain, professional violinist], then Charles [Horsley, brother] and Mama played a beautiful symphony of Haydn’s in C with Quartett accompaniment, and then I played Mendelssohn’s [piano] Quartett [?No. 3] which I sincerely hope you will hear some day or other—it is so splendidly beautiful and lovely. The party at Dinner consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Mountain, Mr. Fleischer, Mr. Bannister (the violin cello player)[,] Mr. Klingemann, Harriet Neill and ourselves. We dined at four as we wished it to be an early party. [. . .] In the evening Matilda, the Buckleys, Mary, Helen, and Uncle William and Dr. Rosen came. Harriet played after tea a [piano] quartett of Mozart’s. I am quite glad Mr. K. should have heard her at last, for such a good judge as he is he must have been pleased. Mr. M. was quite delighted, and has asked her to play a Sonata of Beethoven’s with him. [. . .] I then played Mendelssohn’s Conerto, and we afterwards sung a dirge of Papa’s [. . .] and we ended by playing the Quartett of Mendelssohn again. Was it not very kind of the worthy Trio to go through it again? It went much better the second time.” (Letter from Sophy Horsley to her aunt Lucy, Nov 1834; repr. in Rosamund Brunel Gotch, ed., Mendelssohn and His Friends in Kensington, 1934, pp. 172–73)

2.8. 1836. “[I Dined with Mr. Jas: Rawdon] In the evening played Quartets & Quintets with Blagrove &c[.] Visitors chez Mr. R–. Mr. Ralph and Mr. Kirshaw, both from Halifax—also a Mr. Moira. Our host played well on the Viola, also did his eldest brother on the Double Bass, and his youngest on the Violin.” (John Ella, private diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 106, entry for 2 Oct 1836; on a visit to Liverpool)

2.9. 1836. “Dined with Scott [amateur musician] at 5, & played Quartets ’till 11.” (John Ella, private diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 106, entry for 22 Oct 1836; on a visit to Leicester)

2.10. 1840. “I am going to have a Musical Party on Thursday Evening April 2[n]d and I shou[l]d like exceedingly to play Hummell[’]s Septuor in D minor [for piano, winds, and strings], shall I be trespassing too much on your kindness in begging the great favor of your playing the double bass part, a favor which will give the greatest delight to me and my friends[,] all of whom will be worthy of listening to your splendid performance.” (Letter from the pianist Lucy Anderson, in London, to Domenico Dragonetti, 24 March 1840; cited in Fiona M. Palmer, Domenico Dragonetti in England (1794–1846), 1997, p. 204)


2.11. 1847–56. “Among our family’s best friends were several admirable men [. . .]. Keen musicians and busy men, the surreptitious pleasures of ensemble playing could only be indulged in on Sunday mornings during church hours in some
friendly back drawing-room. Such desecrations of the Sabbath being liable to be visited by the rigour of the law, the ire of landladies and neighbours, the fearful joy of quartet playing had frequently to be snatched in our house. On one occasion a sharp-eared policeman interrupted the harmony. ‘But this is sacred music,’ said my father, showing him a quartet by Haydn.” (Alexander Campbell Mackenzie, *A Musician’s Narrative*, 1927, p. 14, describing his childhood in Edinburgh, 1847–56)

2.12. **1848.** Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (novel, 1848), chapter 13, describes an office employee Mr Morfin, “a cheerful-looking, hazel-eyed elderly bachelor” who was “a great musical amateur in his way—after business; and had a paternal affection for his violoncello, which was once in every week transported from Islington [London], his place of abode, to a certain club-room hard by the Bank, where quartettes of the most tormenting and excruciating nature were executed every Wednesday evening by a private party.” (Edition by Andrew Sanders, London: Penguin Books, 2002, p. 194)

2.13. **1849.** “[Dinner at Mr Robley’s] Played Beeths: B flat Trio with S. [Edmund Schulz, pianist who was also a guest] & Mr. Robley (a bon cello).[.] d[itt]o with Hodges—D[itt]o in D[.].” (John Ella, private diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 118, entry for 7 Sept 1849; on a visit to Clifton, to the west of Bristol)

2.14. ca. **1861.** “Quartet playing was a very early love [of Alfred Gibson, professional violinist] which soon became deep rooted in his artistic nature. It was wossed in a curious way. The proprietor of the Shakespeare Hotel in Nottingham was an amateur violoncello player. He formed a quartet party, which met at the hotel on Sunday evenings. Young Gibson, with his father, attended these music-makings as a listener. One Sunday the leader failed to put in an appearance, whereupon the twelve-year-old ‘Alfred the little’ was asked to take ‘first violin.’ He did, and read Beethoven’s C minor Quartet (No. 4) at sight, to the astonishment of his adult colleagues. His enthusiasm in the cause of concerted music became intensified by the practice that was frequently afforded him of playing Corelli’s trios for violin, violoncello, and double-bass.” (*Musical Times*, 1 April 1900, p. 226; profile of Alfred Gibson [1849–1924], describing ca. 1861)

2.15. **1865.** “[O]n Saturday I had a good bout at Beethoven’s Quartetts—which I used to play with poor Blanco White [at Oxford, in the 1820s]—and thought them more exquisite than ever—so that I was obliged to lay down the instrument and literally cry out with delight.” (John Henry Newman, letter to his friend R. W. Church, from Birmingham, 11 June 1865; from The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, vol. 22, 1972, p. 9)

2.16. **1867.** “Mrs Wootten and Mr Neville were, I find, listening to our play [yesterday; Beethoven violin sonatas]—and they told me they never heard anything like your handling of the piano. A (professional) lady had been playing them (with me) some weeks ago—and they thought her play good, but your playing was quite another thing. That Sonata in A minor had, and has had since, an effect on me I can’t describe. Often Beethoven transports me, but I cannot express, or analyze, the strange effect which its first movement had on me. I could hardly go on playing.” (John Henry Newman, letter to his sister Jemima from Birmingham, 19 June 1867; from The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, vol. 23, 1973, p. 255)

2.17. **Late 1860s.** “My earliest recollection [of chamber music with amateurs] is of a visit in company with my old friend Thomas (better known as Tom) Lintott to the
house occupied by his two brothers, both ’cellists, in the late ’sixties [1860s]. They
gave me much encouragement (I was horribly nervous) and allowed me, to my
great delight, to take part in some Boccherini quintets [. . .].

“In the days which followed, I played almost exclusively with amateurs, and
have very vivid memories of snug evenings passed in the rooms of suburban villas
making acquaintance for the first time with the thirty ’berühmte’ of Haydn, the
great ten of Mozart, and the six op.18 of Beethoven.” ([Walter Willson Cobbett],
“Chamber Music Life, The,” in Cobbett’s Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music,
1929, vol. 1, pp. 258–59; Cobbett, born 1847, was from Blackheath, Kent, to the
southeast of London)

2.18. 1870s–80s. “I could fill pages with recollections of [. . .] the cordial welcome I
received in bachelor days from friends who were at once musically and hospitably
inclined, and of the families with whom in married days I exchanged visits from
week to week, from year to year, for the definite purpose of joining forces in the
playing of ensemble music both with piano and strings.” ([Walter Willson
Cobbett], “Chamber Music Life, The,” in Cobbett’s Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber
Music, 1929, vol. 1, p. 259; Cobbett’s date of marriage is unknown, but this extract
surely refers to the 1870s and 1880s, or later)

2.19. 1889–93. “I was fortunate in being up at Oxford [University, 1889–93] with a
gifted group of undergraduates. Among pianists was Paul Benecke, Mendelssohn’s
grandson, a beautiful player. Once on a visit to his parents at East Barnet
[Hertfordshire] I played the Mendelssohn D minor Trio with Paul as pianist and his
father as ’cellist. His mother (Mendelssohn’s daughter), and his sister were the only
audience.” (Edmund H. Fellowes, Memoirs of an Amateur Musician, 1946, p. 59)

2.20. 1891–1911. “Our home-life has been of the simplest. An early breakfast
(8 o’clock), followed by the most unflinching housekeeping on my wife’s part, and
a constitutional on my own, after which I to my studio, she to her piano or her
embroidery, and Winifred to her violin, varied by their practising duets together.”
(Henry Holiday, Reminiscences of My Life, [1914], p. 364, describing the period
1891–1911)

2.21. 1892. “We can have some string quartets to-night. What fun! Four of us will
be able to make a nice row.’ [Said Nan.]

“‘That’s not a becoming and reverential way for a young girl to speak of such a
sacred subject as music. The quartets of Haydn or Beethoven should not be spoken
of lightly,’ said Tom to his sister, in a half-serious way.’ [. . .]

‘Can you take one of the violins?’ she said to Mary, when they were all in the
drawing-room, and she was busily selecting trios and quartets to be tried over.’

‘I’m afraid I can’t read much,’ said Mary diffidently.

‘Oh, well, it will be good practice for you,’ Tom said. ‘I can’t read much ei-
ther, and Nan isn’t much better, though she thinks herself a great swell.’ [. . .]

“A listener would have said they were most successful [. . .]. [A]s they laid aside
Haydn for the loftier efforts of Beethoven and Schubert, the deep charm of the mu-
sic laid hold of their spirits, and they strove to realise to the best of their power the
ture effect. They went on and on with untiring zeal, and that insatiable enjoyment
of their united performance which is a common characteristic of the average
amateur. [. . .]

“One could hardly say whether it was vanity or enjoyment of the music which
lent a sparkle to Mary’s eye and a flush to her cheek, or rather, one can safely say it
was a mixture of both. It was the first time she had ever played with other instruments, and almost the first time she had ever heard a quartet rendered with any degree of intelligence, and the beauty of this form of musical composition was a revelation to her.” (“Up the Steep Hillside,” *Girl’s Own Paper*, 11 June 1892, p. 586; fictional)

2.22. 1894. “It was on a very beautiful Saturday in April, and my wife and I had availed ourselves of the fine spring weather to walk as far as St. James’s Hall (we live at Hammersmith), to enjoy the usual afternoon Popular concert [of chamber music]. The programme was unusually delightful [...]. In fact, my wife and I occasionally attempted portions of them [the works performed] when we were quite alone, the well-known slow movement of the Kreutzer Sonata being one.” (“The Story of a Lost Strad,” *Violin Times*, supplement no. 11, 15 Sept 1894, p. 4; fictional)

3. Activity in parsonages

3.1. 1810–17. “[M]y friend [Rev. George Hutchinson] was presented with the living of the Great Church, Nottingham, to which was appended a prebendary at Southwell. [...] When Mr. Hutchinson was in residence [at Southwell] I visited him, and spent a pleasant week with the literati of that place. At the residentiary we had quartets in the morning, and regular concerts in the evening, to which the gentry of the place were invited. Our first violin was a Captain Marsh, of the navy, who was so deaf that he could not hear any instrument but his own, yet was so steady in his time that we had no difficulty in accompanying him.” (William Gardiner, *Music and Friends*, 1838, vol. 1, pp. 404–5)

3.2. Before 1860. “Occasionally he [John Harrison; d. ca. 1860] had string quartet practices at the parsonage [in Chowbent, Lancashire]. On these occasions Dr. Harrison played the viola, and a very good performer he was. Dr. Harrison had a very good library of chamber music, including Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Pleyels [sic], and other authors; trios, quartets, and quintets.” (William Millington, *Sketches of Local Musicians and Musical Societies*, 1884, p. 50)

4. Activity within Oxford and Cambridge Universities

4.1. 1856–59. “It was agreed [...] that [music was not to go on] after ten. This latter rule was, I admit, more honoured in the breach than the observance, and often have I seen Mr. Frost or John Lunn—musical fellows of neighbouring colleges—pounding away in their shirt-sleeves, cigar in mouth, at my piano till past midnight, while I myself, the present Earl of Mar, and Mr. George Cooke—still a notable violoncello player in London (1883)—&c., made up the quartet or quintet in the rear.” (H. R. Haweis, *My Musical Life*, 8th ed., 1912, 83–84, writing of Cambridge, 1856–59)

4.2. 1866. “Sir Frederick [A. G.] Ouseley and [John] Stainer were both there [at the Oxford house of Professor Donkin, amateur violinist]. The Donkins performed a quartett of Sir Frederick’s which he had composed for them[.]” (Parry, diary, 4 Dec 1866; quoted in Jeremy Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry: His Life and Music*, 1992, p. 42)

4.3. 1867. “At [James] Taylors [organist of New College, Oxford]. Quartetts. [...] We had Duos and quartetts and solos and songs. They played for me
Mendelssohn’s Quartett No. 1 for Pian forte [sic], Violin, Viola, and Cello.” (Parry, diary 8 Feb 1867; quoted in Jeremy Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry: His Life and Music*, 1992, p. 49)

4.4. 1870s. “Chamber music was also well to the fore, and the public performances of quartets and concerted pieces by finished players gave a speedy impulse to the music-loving undergraduates, who formed a string quartet of their own. This devoted four used to practise assiduously, often into the small hours of the morning, in rooms in the great court tower of Trinity facing the chapel. They played steadily through all the quartets of Haydn, and many of those of other great masters[.]” (Charles Villiers Stanford, *Pages from an Unwritten Diary*, 1914, p. 116, speaking of Cambridge in the 1870s)

4.5. 1889–93. “Johnnie [J. H.] Mee, as we called him, ran the Musical Union as a hobby with lavish hospitality and kindness to us all. Every Sunday evening at 9 p.m. he held open house to any musical undergraduate who cared to come [. . .] At these Sunday evening gatherings our host would call on any of us to take part in a string quartet or any other class of chamber music in an informal way. Often we were faced with works to play at sight, and I remember the sensation caused by Arthur Warburton playing the piano part of the Schumann quintet in a most finished manner, although not only had he never seen it before, but had never heard it played.” (Edmund H. Fellowes, *Memoirs of an Amateur Musician*, 1946, p. 60, writing of Oxford in the period 1889–93)

See also 2.15 and 2.19.

5. Activity among the British abroad

5.1. 1842. Rome: “Quartet chez R[e]v[j]. Mr Goddard[.]” (John Ella, private diary, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS 111, 7 Dec 1842; see also entry for 14 Dec)

5.2. 1842–43. “During the winter of 1842–3, in Rome, we again inflicted upon our friends a *bagatelle*, in three movements, for pianoforte, violin, viola, violoncello, and contra-basso, for the accomplished Mrs. Lockhart [a distinguished pianist], and other amateurs, at that time in Rome.” (John Ella, in *The Musical Record*, 2 June 1857, p. xv)

6. Ownership of chamber music parts


6.2. 1847. “We have recently negociated [sic] and purchased for the Earl of Falmouth, the extensive and valuable library of the deceased amateur [Thomas Alsager, chamber music enthusiast and founder of the Beethoven Quartett Society]. The pianoforte compositions consist entirely of works of the classical masters; the Sonatas, Duets, Trios, Quartets, Quintets, Sestets, and Concertos, in one division alone making upwards of one hundred and sixty-four volumes. Of Quartets for stringed instruments, there are one hundred and seven volumes; [. . .]. The Quintets occupy sixty-eight volumes! The Sestets, Septets, and *ultra*, for both stringed and wind instruments, are contained in forty-one volumes. There are nine volumes of Trios; seven volumes of violin and violoncello Duets; [. . .] and twenty-three folios of
modern unbound concerted-music. [. . .] The Scores are fewer than we expected to find in so classical a library: these being chiefly of Quartets and Symphonies, in all fifty volumes.” (John Ella, in Record of the Musical Union, 1847, p. 4)

6.3. 1850. The Duke of Cambridge’s music library was sold at auction, 28–29 Nov 1850: Puttick and Simpson’s sale catalogue (in the British Library, London, S. C. Puttick & Simpson 17 (3)), shows many chamber music parts, including the complete sets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven quartets and dozens of other works by composers such as Boccherini, Hummel, Onslow, and Mayseder.

6.4. 1867. “I quite forgot I have a piano part of my own, of the 3 sonatas dedicated to the Emperor of Russia [Beethoven’s Op. 30 violin sonatas]—and am quite sorry I did not ask you to take it. I bought it (I believe) of Mr Sharp at Oxford, and it never has been used, by any one, and is doing no good. So I shall send it to you.” (John Henry Newman, letter to his sister Jemima from Birmingham, 19 June 1867; from The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, vol. 23, 1973, p. 255)

6.5. 1891–1911. “When I left work, at 6 or soon after, my wife and I have nearly always played duets. We have, I fancy, the most complete library possible of four-hand arrangements: all the orchestral and chamber-music of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms [. . .]. The intimacy this gave us with the subject-matter of all these compositions greatly enhanced our enjoyment of them when we heard them at concerts.” (Henry Holiday, Reminiscences of My Life, [1914], pp. 364–65, describing the period 1891–1911)

6.6. 1892. “Wanted.—Onslow’s String Quartets and Quintets [. . .]. Middleton, Dr. Johnson’s Passage, Birmingham.” (Advertisement, Strad 3 [1892–93]: 75)

6.7. 1903. “Wanted[:] complete String Quartettes by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Haydn; must be clean and cheap. [. . .]. Musicus, 5, Nelson Terrace, Barnstaple, Devon.” (Advertisement, Strad 13 [1902–3]: 318)

7. Informal private concert activity

7.1. 1853. Elizabeth Sheppard, Charles Anchester (novel, 1853), chap. 19, has a scene depicting an informal private concert in a grand house; the professional violinist “Santionio” plays a Beethoven sonata with a female pianist. “[H]ow well the piano met the violin in divided passages, and how exactly they went together.” (p. 211)

7.2. 1859–60s. “Since they had settled at 139 Westbourne Terrace at the beginning of 1859, my grandparents had rapidly drawn a large circle of friends around them, musical, literary and artistic. [. . .] It seems to have been nothing remarkable in my grandparents’ house to sit down twelve or even twenty to dinner several times a week, and to invite twenty or thirty more people in afterwards. And at these after-dinner gatherings there was nearly always music in which a number of those present often took part, singing, playing the piano or the violin, or joining in quartets.” (John Lehmann, Ancestors and Friends [based on Lehmann family papers], 1962, pp. 159–60)

7.3. 1888. Mrs Humphry Ward, Robert Elsmere (novel, 1888), chap. 18, depicts a female violinist, Rose, and a male pianist, Mr. Langham (both amateurs) playing to an informal gathering of listeners in a grand house. The repertoire includes a Beethoven sonata. “How the girl threw herself into it, bringing out the wailing love-song of the [Beethoven] Andante, the dainty tripping mirth of the Scherzo, in a way which set every nerve in Langham vibrating! Yet the art of it was wholly unconscious. The music was the mere natural voice of her innermost self. A compari-
son full of excitement was going on in that self between her first impressions of the man beside her, and her consciousness of him, as he seemed to-night, human, sympathetic, kind.” (pp. 101–2)

7.4. 1890s. “[W]hen Winifred had completed her course at the Royal College, and had had a season in Berlin (where she stayed with our friends the Gudes, and played in a quartet with Joachim), she formed a quartet of her own. By practising diligently together they attained to a very perfect ensemble, and we had some delightful performances with the very kind help of Mr. Leonard Borwick or Miss Fanny Davies at the piano, or Mr. Draper at the clarionet.” (Henry Holiday, Reminiscences of My Life, [1914], p. 365, probably describing the 1890s)

8. Other miscellaneous evidence of amateur activities

8.1. 1831. “During the musical season of London, these quartets and quintets [by Beethoven and Mozart] form a principal part of the entertainment of amateurs, yet they are not frequently understood, the difficulties of their execution being more apt to provoke the vanity of the performers, than the raciness of the compositions to excite their interest.” (From a review of J. A. Schlosser’s biography of Beethoven in the Foreign Quarterly Review 8 [1831]: 454)

8.2. 1835. “Concerts of this description [. . .] will not be attended by those whose chief objects of attraction are English ballads or the airs of the last new opera. But this metropolis now contains a large and rapidly increasing body of amateurs, of both sexes, who are conversant with the higher branches of instrumental music, and to whom it must be a source of great pleasure to hear the most exquisite works of the greatest masters. To those who are themselves performers, such concerts as these are full of instruction. Amateurs who are in the habit of playing quartets, quintets, and other concerted pieces, with each other, are apt to be too easily satisfied with imperfect and slovenly performance, and to play without apprehending the style, expression, and even time of the music. It is by hearing it played by able professors that they have a standard set before them, an attempt to arrive at which is the only means of improving themselves in delicacy and finish; and these means are furnished by a concert of this nature.” (Morning Chronicle, 9 Nov 1835, on the Concerti da Camera series, London)

8.3. 1851. “We shall spare ourselves the labour of analysing a Trio [Beethoven Piano Trio, Op. 1, no. 3] so well known to amateurs, by merely directing attention to the subjects and harmonies quoted[.]” (John Ella, program note for the Musical Union concerts, London, 20 May 1851; in Record of the Musical Union, 1851, p. 19)

8.4. 1859–87. “In the latter part of the last century [1859–87] a great movement towards the public appreciation of Chamber Music in this country was initiated by Mr. Arthur Chappell. [. . .] For twenty-eight years audiences of 2,000 enthusiasts crowded the concert-room [in London] [. . .]. Similarly crowded concerts were given in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Bradford, Manchester, and Liverpool. As a consequence, widespread interest in such music was evoked and large numbers of amateurs inspired to indulge in it. In my students days in London I attended many of these concerts [. . .].

“At this same time, parties of amateurs, who met for Chamber Music[,] were scattered all over London and the larger towns, especially in Yorkshire and Lancashire.” (John D. Hayward, Chamber Music for Amateurs, 1923, p. 66)
8.5. 1875. “The brothers will take to the violoncello if the sisters will only learn the violin and viola, and then what a feast of music is opened as soon as a moderate progress is made. Haydn wrote eighty-three string quartets, and Mozart twenty-seven, few of which require any exceptional degree of skill to play, and all of which might be compassed with half the labour and five times the effect bestowed on and gained from the senseless pearl and diamond style of modern piano music.” (Tonic Sol-fa Reporter, 1 Jan 1875, quoting from Leisure Hour)

8.6. 1890. “Where there are 2 or 3 members of the family desirous of taking up a stringed instrument, it will be found a most gratifying plan for each to study a different instrument of the string quartette, either the violin or violoncello. The advantage of this is clear. In the instance of a family of four or five girls, two should study the violin, the other two might study the viola and violoncello, and the fifth the pianoforte. Thus a quartette or quintette would be found in one family, and the pleasure of playing together when a degree of proficiency had been attained would make up for all the trials and troubles of the elementary stages.” (F. Joyce Barrett, “The Violin as an Instrument for Girls,” Woman’s World, vol. 3, 1890, p. 652; cited in Paula Gillett, Musical Women in England, 1870–1914, 2000, p. 101)

8.7. 1892. “GOOD AMATEUR VIOLINIST wishes to meet another for duet practice. Particulars address Violin, 7, George Street, Manchester Square, W. [London.]” (Advertisement, Strad 2 [1891–92]: 227)


8.9. 1902–? “This club [The Strings Club] (a unique institution of its kind) was founded in 1902 for the purpose of encouraging the practice and performance of chamber music. [...] The club started with seventy members; [...] Meetings for practice were held weekly, and meetings for performance fortnightly, in the hall of the Alpine Club [London]. [...]”

“[Such clubs as the Strings Club are a real boon to the community [...]. The crying need of the amateur chamber music lover is an opportunity to practise with fellow musicians, and that opportunity the Strings Club affords.]” (Gwynne Kimpton, “Strings Club, The,” in Cobbett’s Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music, 1929, vol. 2, p. 467; with editorial comment [2nd paragraph here, in brackets] by W. W. Cobbett)

8.10. 1904. “A STRING QUARTET is held once a week at 41, STANSFIELD ROAD, BRIXTON [London]. Vacancies for an Amateur Second Violin and Viola. For terms and particulars apply to above address.” (Advertisement, Strad 15 [1904–5]: 190)
Appendix B  Ensemble Chamber Works by British Composers Performed in Public in London, 1835–50

N.B. Quartets and quintets are for strings unless otherwise indicated.

Abbreviations:
BL  British Library, London
FMC  Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge
MS(S)  manuscript(s)
RAM  Royal Academy of Music, London
RCM  Royal College of Music, London
*  premiere

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work (composition date if known)</th>
<th>Performances</th>
<th>Extant contemporary sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banister, H. C.</td>
<td>Quartet in F♯Minor 1847*</td>
<td>1847*</td>
<td>Leipzig and London, 1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnett, R.</td>
<td>Quartet 1839</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnett, R.</td>
<td>Quartet 1843, 1844</td>
<td>1843 (* at RAM 3 years before)</td>
<td>Leipzig and London, 1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnett, R.</td>
<td>Quartet in D 1843, 1844</td>
<td>1843, 1844</td>
<td>Leipzig and London, 1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett, W. S.</td>
<td>Piano Sextet, Op. 8 (1835) 1838, 1842 (x2), 1843, 1844, 1845 (x2), 1848</td>
<td>1843, 1844, 1845 (x2), 1846, 1847, 1849, 1850 (x2)</td>
<td>Leipzig and London, 1846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett, W. S.</td>
<td>Piano Trio, Op. 26 (1839) 1840, 1844 (x3), 1845 (x2), 1846, 1847, 1849, 1850 (x2)</td>
<td>1840, 1844 (x3), 1845 (x2), 1846, 1847, 1849, 1850 (x2)</td>
<td>Leipzig and London, 1845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benthin, ?</td>
<td>Piano Trio 1850</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Performances</th>
<th>Extant contemporary sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bochsa, N.</td>
<td>Piano Trio (piano, harp, horn)</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>Op. 88 (Bonn, 1822)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calkin, J.</td>
<td>Piano Trio</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calkin, J.</td>
<td>Quartet in D, no. 1</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calkin, J.</td>
<td>Quartet in D Minor, no. 2</td>
<td>1842, 1843, 1847</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calkin, J. B.</td>
<td>Cello Sonata</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calkin, J. B.</td>
<td>Piano Trio</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calkin, J. B.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in D, no. 2</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calkin, J. B.</td>
<td>Quintet in E Minor</td>
<td>1850*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipp, T. P.</td>
<td>Quartet in A</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipp, T. P.</td>
<td>Quartet in D</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field, J.</td>
<td>Piano Duet “in Russian style”</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gledhill, J.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in F</td>
<td>1844 (x2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gledhill, J.</td>
<td>Quartet</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gledhill, J.</td>
<td>Quartet</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gledhill, J.</td>
<td>Quartet in D (ca. 1839)</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, H.</td>
<td>Piano Quartet in A</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, H.</td>
<td>Piano Quartet in F Minor</td>
<td>1843*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, H.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in B♭</td>
<td>1845*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, H.</td>
<td>Quartet</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, H.</td>
<td>Quartet</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, H.</td>
<td>Quartet in G</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, H.</td>
<td>Quartet in G Minor</td>
<td>1844, 1845, 1846</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griesbach, J. H.</td>
<td>Piano Decet</td>
<td>1842, 1850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griesbach, J. H.</td>
<td>Piano Sextet in E Minor, no. 2</td>
<td>1836, 1837, 1843</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composer</td>
<td>Work Description</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horsley, C. E.</td>
<td>Piano Quartet in F Minor</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsley, C. E.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in E♭</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>(London, 1848)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsley, C. E.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in G Minor</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>(London, 1848)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsley, C. E.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in B Minor, Op. 20</td>
<td>1847</td>
<td>(London, 1847); (Leipzig, 1848)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsley, C. E.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in B♭, no. 1</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>(London, 1846)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsley, C. E.</td>
<td>Quartet in D, no. 2</td>
<td>1848*</td>
<td>(London, 1848)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsley, C. E.</td>
<td>Violin Sonata</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewson, F. B.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in F</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambert, G. J.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in G Minor</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>(London, 1844); (Leipzig, 1848)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie, H.</td>
<td>Quintet in D</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>1849, 1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightfoot, Miss</td>
<td>Piano Trio</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loder, E. J.</td>
<td>Quartet in E♭, no. 4</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>1843(x2), 1845(x2), 1847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loder, Miss K.</td>
<td>Quartet in E Minor</td>
<td>1848*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loder, Miss K.</td>
<td>Violin Sonata</td>
<td>1848*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loder, Miss K.</td>
<td>Violin Sonata in E</td>
<td>1848(x2), 1850</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas, C.</td>
<td>Septet in E♭ (1836)</td>
<td>1842, 1843, 1844</td>
<td>MS, RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarren, G. A.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in E Minor</td>
<td>1844(x2), 1845</td>
<td>MS, FMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarren, G. A.</td>
<td>Piano Quintet in G Minor</td>
<td>1844, 1847(x2), 1850</td>
<td>MS, FMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarren, G. A.</td>
<td>Quartet in A, no. 3 (1842)</td>
<td>1843(x4), 1844, 1845</td>
<td>MS, FMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarren, G. A.</td>
<td>Quartet in F, no. 4 (1843)</td>
<td>1844, 1845, 1846</td>
<td>MS, FMC, (Leipzig, 1846)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Composer Work (composition date if known) Performances Extant contemporary sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Work</th>
<th>Performances</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macfarren, W. C.</td>
<td>Cello Sonata in E Minor 1846</td>
<td></td>
<td>(?1860)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarren, W. C.</td>
<td>Piano Sonata (4 hands) 1850</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Macfarren, W. C.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in C Minor, no. 1 1844</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarren, W. C.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in C# Minor, no. 3 1844, 1845, 1847</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarren, W. C.</td>
<td>Violin Sonata in D, no. 2 1848, 1850</td>
<td></td>
<td>(London, [1876])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mori, N.</td>
<td>Quartet in D 1849</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mudie, T. M.</td>
<td>Piano Quintet 1843</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mudie, T. M.</td>
<td>Piano Quintet in E♭ 1843, 1844</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mudie, T. M.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in D 1843 (x2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neate, C.</td>
<td>Cello Sonata 1842</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neate, C.</td>
<td>Cello Sonata in E♭ 1844</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neate, C.</td>
<td>Piano Duet 1837, 1839, 1841</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neate, C.</td>
<td>Piano Quintet 1837</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neate, C.</td>
<td>Piano Trio [in C, D Minor, or E♭] 1837</td>
<td></td>
<td>MSS, RCM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neate, C.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in C, no. 2, Op. 22 1844 (x2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>MS, RCM; (1831)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neate, C.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in E Minor, no. 5 1845*</td>
<td></td>
<td>MSS, RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Orger, Miss C.</td>
<td>Piano Quartet in A, no. 1 1845*</td>
<td></td>
<td>MS, RCM</td>
</tr>
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<td>+Orger, Miss C.</td>
<td>Piano Trio 1842, 1844</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Osborne, G.A.</td>
<td>Cello Sonata 1850</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osborne, G. A.</td>
<td>Piano Trio 1844</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Osborne, G. A.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in A, no. 2 1844, 1850</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Osborne, G. A.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in G, no. 3 1845, 1846, 1850</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Osborne, G. A.</td>
<td>Septet 1849</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry, E.</td>
<td>Quartet (for 4 cellos) 1842</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Piano Duet 1845, 1848</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Piano Duet in F 1846</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Piano Quartet in D Minor 1835</td>
<td></td>
<td>MS, BL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composer</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Date(s)</td>
<td>Edition/Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Piano Sextet, Op. 11</td>
<td>1836, 1842</td>
<td>MS, BL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in B minor, Op. 12/3</td>
<td>1841, 1843</td>
<td>(Bonn, 1824)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in E minor, Op. 12/1</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>(Bonn, ?1825)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Quartet</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Quartet</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Quartet in A minor</td>
<td>1844 (x2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potter, C.</td>
<td>Quartet in G</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>MS, RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Reinagle, Mrs.</td>
<td>Cello Sonata in G</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Reinagle, Mrs.</td>
<td>Piano Quartet in E minor</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Reinagle, Mrs.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in E minor</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richards, H. B.</td>
<td>Quartet in D</td>
<td>1844 (x2), 1845</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockstro, W. S.</td>
<td>Double Quartet in B minor</td>
<td>1847*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloper, L.</td>
<td>Piano Duet in E minor, Op. 9</td>
<td>1847*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloper, L.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in C minor</td>
<td>1850*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephens, C.E.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in F, no. 1</td>
<td>1846, 1847</td>
<td>(Mainz, [1860])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephens, C.E.</td>
<td>Quartet in F, no. 2</td>
<td>1844*, 1845</td>
<td>(Mainz, [1880])</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephens, C.E.</td>
<td>Quartet in G, no. 1</td>
<td>1843*, 1845</td>
<td>(Mainz, [1880])</td>
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<td>Thomas, J.</td>
<td>Quartet in D</td>
<td>1847*</td>
<td>(London, 1846)</td>
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<td>Westrop, H.</td>
<td>Flute Sonata</td>
<td>1845*</td>
<td>(London, 1850)</td>
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<td>Westrop, H.</td>
<td>Piano Quintet</td>
<td>1850</td>
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<td>Piano Quintet in C minor</td>
<td>1845 (x2)*, 1846, 1848</td>
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<td>Piano Quintet in E</td>
<td>1843*, 1844, 1845</td>
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<td>Piano Trio</td>
<td>1842</td>
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<td>Westrop, H.</td>
<td>Piano Trio in F</td>
<td>1842</td>
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<td>Quartet in E</td>
<td>1837 (x2)</td>
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<td>Westrop, H.</td>
<td>Quartet (“new”) in E</td>
<td>1838</td>
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<td>Westrop, H.</td>
<td>Violin Sonata in B</td>
<td>1844*</td>
<td>(London, 1879)</td>
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+ Miss Caroline Orger = Mrs. Caroline Reinagle
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Abstract

A persistent idea in chamber music historiography is that nineteenth-century Britain lacked a significant, serious domestic chamber-music culture of the type so prevalent in Austro-Germany. Such activity is assumed to have dried up ca. 1800, along with indigenous chamber-music composition, to be replaced by music making at the parlor piano and attendance at public concerts. This essay challenges that view and suggests a continuing, coherent subculture of private chamber music spread across Britain, often in unexpected settings and in communities of upper- and middle-class males. Underpinning the analysis is new, suggestive documentation from a range of sources including private diaries, letters, magazines, and auction catalogs.

At the same time, many publicly oriented sources are silent about British chamber-music life, or contrast it poorly with Germany. Historical contextualization of this evidence suggests that received thinking in the twentieth century owed much to cultural ideologies embedded in the nineteenth. A knot of British anxieties in the nineteenth century around masculinity, class, intellectualism, and national identity led to the serious, private pursuit of chamber music among men of wealth being downplayed in public, caricatured, or even ignored. While the tenacious positioning of chamber music as inherently German stemmed in part from Germany’s construction of its own national identity, it also owed much to the Victorians’ tendency to perpetuate a limited view of their own musical culture.

Keywords: chamber music, historiography, private sphere, British cultural identity, gender