to isolate the "dangerous classes" from the working poor and treat these "deviants" as if they were moral degenerates. Nevertheless, it was, to some degree at least, also due to this outlook, as well as to the traditions Mayne and Rowan had established, that London never really became a "policed society" during the Victorian and Edwardian periods and that a rough sort of balance could be struck between order and freedom, an accomplishment which stirs a considerable amount of justifiable nostalgia in late twentieth-century observers.

5

ENJOYING

A late Victorian cosmopolite, Michael Henry Dziewicki, wrote an article about how beauty reveals itself in London by night. "Life is in movement," he wrote, "and here, what movement, what life!" The kind of motion that attracted him, however, was not the traffic's rush or the flowing in and out of a great tide of humanity but the gestures of children dancing, the turning arm of the organ-grinder under the flaring gas lamp, the rippling effect of light from windows reflected in the Thames, the passing of shadowy figures in the curling, shifting mist. In the harsh reality of day, he believed London to be in no way superior to many other great European cities. When skies were bright and clear, street life was about freedom – to carry on the enterprise of everyday life. But when the fog, "this dingy yellowish monster," descends, the imagination is set free and London becomes, he thought, "the most beautiful city in the world."[1]

Had the century's straighteners, wideners, purifiers, controllers, moralists, and rationalists been impervious to this kind of romantic sensibility, their confidence in the reform agenda might have been greater than it was. If the temptations and moral contaminants were to be removed from the streets, then obstacles to free movement needed to be swept away and that meant that the Italian organ-grinder who turned his crank under the street lamp and the girls who danced to his tune would have to be moved along. Evident in the tone of Edwardian commentators on London life is the sense that modern efficiency, often associated with Americanization, must inevitably rob the London streets of the very quality that made them unique. One of them, Thomas Burke, made Queen Victoria's funeral procession through the streets of London into the symbol of the passing of a culture. After that great ritual there might, he thought, have been other parades and popular festivals, but the spirit had departed from them. "With the increase of population and of traffic, and with the coming of the American gospel of 'the strenuous life,' the people's own pageants came to an end."[2]

In one form or another that end had been proclaimed, usually by elderly men, for at least two centuries, the proclamation often marking a shift in the character of street life rather than any real demise. Much of the recent discussion of the popular culture of the past agrees that the campaigns mounted by the rich, powerful, or pious to suppress the spontaneous, cruel, and orgiastic aspects of traditional leisure began in the seventeenth century. Thus agitation against blood sports, gambling, and public displays of obscenity, as well as the rougher kinds of street games and festivals which we tend to associate with the period of social discord between the French Revolution and the decline of Chartism, were continuations of a much longer process. Like so many reform causes, this one took on a more systematic character in the 1830s. In this decade politicians and reformers began to formulate theories connecting the rapid shrinkage of urban space available for recreation with what was perceived to be a deterioration in health and morals. According to this view, the poor slum dwellers were forced to live and play in the only places left, the streets outside their cramped and cheerless dwellings.

A consequence of this perception was a sustained drive to provide alternatives, "rational recreations," activities which would not simply amuse but enlarge the mind and empower the participant. Until the third quarter of the century, these rational recreationists did not, beyond the provision of a number of People's Parks, have much to show for their efforts; nevertheless, there was a growing awareness, during the time when the New Police were being used to suppress fairs and put a stop to bear-baiting, cock-fighting, bullock-hunting, boisterous street games, and the public singing of lewd songs, that it was short-sighted, when the time available for leisure was increasing, to destroy old amusements without providing new ones to take their places.[3]

Although binary divisions of this kind between old and new, irrational and rational, traditional or communal, and modern or individualistic were commonly employed by Victorian reformers to explain to themselves and others what they were about, they give a distorted, because overly simple, description of the changes actually taking place, or not taking place, in street culture. It is true that reform had its successes, particularly in suppressing obscene entertainments and cruel sports. It forced the pornography industry to shift from London to Paris and Brussels, causing the sale of its products to move indoors and be concentrated in shops along Holywell Street, just off the Strand. As a youth in the late eighteenth century, Francis Place frequently listened to bawdy street songs. He remembered two women in particular who used to stand in an open space between Holywell Street and Wych Street and sing a song, with gestures, about a man who com-

plained that his wife's lecherousness had reduced him to a skeleton. Place said the crowd always joined in to shout the refrain: "And for which I'm sure she'll go to Hell / For she makes me fuck her in Church Time." But such sights and sounds, he noted, were, by the late 1820s, things of the past.[4] Animal-baiting, cock-fighting, bull-running, and what John Gay called "the furies of the football war" were also suppressed or driven indoors during the second quarter of the century. It is highly questionable, however, that the virtual disappearance of these activities weakened communal ties or that the initiative came entirely from above. The Monday morning bullock chase described in *Scenes from My Life* was not a community-affirming ritual, not a pre-Victorian Pamplona; working-class self-improvers like the Spitalfields weaver, as well as artisans, small shopkeepers, secularist radicals, and chapel-goers, welcomed police intervention whenever the sport was disruptive to normal neighborhood life and work. Boisterousness and lewdness had been toned down by the time Henry Mayhew made his investigations of street life in the late 1850s, yet much that was raw and bawdy remained. Saturday-night repartee between market sellers and their customers, perhaps the most ubiquitous of London's street entertainments, depended for its zest on sexual innuendo; violent street games like "Knock Down Ginger" continued to be popular into the twentieth century. In that one, gangs of older boys would run down a street knocking on doors and upsetting anything movable.[5] When viewed from the perspective of Place's youth in the 1820s, these survivals of gaminess and rough play would have seemed tame, nipped in as they were by police surveillance and "decent inhibitions." If the point of view shifts to the late twentieth century, however, Edwardian streets seem to be fairly bursting with activities. Girls' skipping games and boys' ball and marble games adjusted to traffic by shifting to the pavement, and in the process, reached unprecedented heights of invention. The capacity of this part of popular culture to withstand changes is remarkable. One Londoner, living at present in Notting Hill, can identify almost every activity taking place in Bruegel's sixteenth-century painting, *Children Playing Games*, and give the names he knew them by in Acton, where he grew up in the 1920s and 1930s.

Not all Edwardian streets were constantly filled with children playing hopscotch or "Nicks and Spans" or with acrobats, dancing bears, penny profile-cutters, or youths, arm-in-arm, singing Marie Lloyd's latest music-hall hit. Robert Roberts, in his memories of Salford life, spoke movingly about "the dumb accidie of the back streets . . . silent figures leaning against door jambs, staring into vacancy waiting for bedtime." "In general," he wrote, "slum life was far from being the jolly hive of communal activity that some romantics have claimed."[6] (See Plate 5.) Memorable too is Hippolyte Taine's complaint in the

early 1870s that "after an hour's walk on the Strand," on a foggy Sunday morning, when the rain is "small, compact, pitiless, the spleen rises and one meditates suicide."[7] Foreign visitors before and after Taine frequently spoke about how sadly Londoners took their pleasures, particularly on the day of rest. But most visitors agreed that there were diversions even on Sunday: a visit to Petticoat Lane, window-shopping on Regent Street, watching the mechanical orchestra set up just off Northumberland Avenue, perhaps following Gladstone's recommendation and going for a long ride on the top of an omnibus or observing the summer evening Monkey Walk on Fleet Street when separate parades of swaggering boys and girls in feather hats went through, with "little shoves and nudges," their courtship rituals.[8]

Searching for just that point where the streets lost their *joie de vivre* is probably a futile exercise, although people whose memories stretched from the mid-Victorian period to the 1920s or 1930s tended to blame the motor car, or the kind of municipal Puritanism which closed the notorious Alhambra, or the triumph of the commercial entertainment industry.[9] Important though these developments were in producing what M.J. Daunton has labelled the "socially neutral 'waste' spaces" that so many urban streets were to become,[10] there was no chance that the streets could have been sterilized so long as increasing density in the inner city forced people to use these streets as playgrounds and extensions of their sitting rooms. Furthermore, there was a limit to the amount of tidying up that could be done so long as there were so many casual laborers who needed to make their purchases close to home and in small quantities, a service street vendors provided. Under these circumstances, the urban poor showed a talent for adjusting changes to their needs, and not the other way around. The argument can be made that the proliferation of music halls, gymnasia, popular theaters, drill and assembly halls, fenced parks, walled sporting grounds, and the success of the popular press competed with the attractions of the street for the increasing amount of leisure time available to most workers from the 1870s on; but it seems more likely that those enclosed and regulated institutions taught skills and tastes which were then carried outdoors – street singing and marching being two examples. Therefore, well into the twentieth century, street life not only managed to survive its competition but to retain its exuberance and its variety.

That the culture of the streets had such vitality was a source of concern to reformers. Alexander Patterson, an Edwardian boys-club leader in South London, spoke feelingly about the formative influence of the streets and how the "succession of inconsequent episodes" to be found there were "calculated to produce smart, resourceful, but unreliable men at the age of fourteen."[11] About the same time, a Fabian

social investigator named Arnold Freeman argued in his *Boy Life and Labour* that the variety of experiences to be found in the street was dangerous, not so much because it was degrading or demoralizing but because it was so compelling. The working-class boy, he noted, prefers to spend his spare time on the street "loafing about" or "playing games, singing, exchanging witticisms, and generally making himself obnoxious to the police and the public."[12] For Patterson and Freeman, as for so many of their nineteenth-century predecessors, the free spirit and quick wits of the Cockney were admirable traits and worth preserving, yet the path to responsible citizenship and the higher life led away from the streets where those traits were acquired. If a cultural consensus were to be built, it would have to be done indoors and in a quiet, ordered environment.

A possible point of contact for all classes was thought to be music. It was the hope of many positive-minded reformers that harmony might beget harmony. An especially articulate and respected representative of this type was the noted economist and logician, William Stanley Jevons, who, in 1878, wrote a much-discussed article in *The Contemporary Review* about the need for Sunday concerts. His theme was the absurdity of using police to discourage working-class festivals and street amusements, forbidding band concerts in the parks on Sunday, the one opportunity for most city families to enjoy leisure together, and then pretending to be shocked when any "unusual elevation of spirits which the fresh air occasions" finds expression among these people in beer or in "horse-play and senseless vulgarity."[13] "Pure music," he maintained, was the ideal corrective to vulgar tastes, jangled nerves, discordant lives. He thought that provision of theaters, galleries, museums, libraries, parks, and science lectures assumed the prior existence of a demand for rational recreations, experiences which were "removed from the concrete and sensuous ideas of ordinary life"; but how, he asked, can we expect the "rich, rowdy, drunken artisans of England" to feel such needs, cut off as they are from rural peace or any remnant of folk culture? The obvious place to start, he said, was to attract them to something "above the trifling affairs of life." Copenhagen's Tivoli supplied the model; there all classes joined together under the trees to listen to a fine orchestra play a program of semi-classical music. There amusement and recreation merged in an atmosphere of "good taste and decency." He thought it a sad comment that London's educated classes should find delight in foreign pleasure gardens like this one, while at home, they ape the aristocracy, adopt its cultural aloofness, "fly the *profanum vulgiis*" and leave places like Ranelagh or Vauxhall to be "invaded by the *demi-monde*." One part of society goes to the opera, endows symphony orchestras and at the same time, tells the other half that amusement is sin. No wonder,

Jevons concluded, popular taste finds what it seeks in "our inane music halls."[14]

The Revd Hugh Reginald Haweis, whose parish was in Bethnal Green, also gave voice in the 1870s to this hope that music might be the means to draw the whole nation together in a bond of sympathy. His *Music and Morals* continued to be reprinted for the next thirty years.[15] The refrain of the book was: "Teach the people to sing and you will make them happy; teach them to listen to sweet sounds, and you will go far to render them harmless to themselves, if not a blessing to their fellows."[16] John Ruskin also took up this theme but gave it a more weighty treatment. In lectures and published letters during the 1860s and 1870s he maintained that music was "the most effective instrument of moral instruction" but warned that it could also be "the subtlest aid of moral degradation."[17] He believed good music to be that which calms and orders the soul. Unique among all creatures, human beings are conscious, he said, of the rules of harmony; in a truly virtuous society, musical creativity takes place within those cultural bounds and has for its purpose the "expression of a lofty passion for a right cause."[18] He concluded that the musical expression of his time bore sad testament to the disharmony of cultural life. The modern city, he noted, gives out discordant sounds; its dance melodies are often "frantic," its march music "blatant," the songs its populace sings "reckless, sensual, sickly, slovenly, forgetful even of the foolish words it effaces with foolish noise." He thought the love of novelty, the disconcerting pace of urban life, and excessive stimulation broke the connection between music and virtue and led to as well as reflected a growing anarchy both in the body politic and the individual soul.[19]

Advice and dark foreboding of the kind served up by Jevons and Ruskin moved some reformers to action. A Congregational minister named John Curwen publicized the Tonic Solfa method, developed by Sarah Ann Glover, as a way to teach choral singing to those working-class people who did not have sufficient time or energy to learn the conventional rules of reading music. Factories, schools, mines, clubs, regional associations, as well as Sunday Schools and Mechanics Institutes, used this method, and by the 1880s contests between choral societies had, like brass-band competitions, become an established feature of working-class culture.[20] The repertoire, especially of the vocal groups, was largely classical. Thus the promoters of cultural consensus could point to some solid victories, even though those choruses and bands were largely working class and despite the fact that, in most other areas, the gap between "high" and "low" culture continued to grow wider.

As in the early part of the century, most working-class Londoners in the 1880s and afterwards sang, played, and listened to music in the

pubs and streets, the main difference being that from the 1860s a new opportunity for musical entertainment and participation opened up with the dramatic expansion of the music hall. It had been the expectation of the rational recreationists that once a young working-class man or woman became accustomed to singing Handel or listening to Beethoven, he or she would lose all taste for "The Old Woman of Rumford," chanted in the street by the broadsheet busker, and find George Leybourn's rendition of "Champagne Charlie" at the Canterbury Arms distinctly vulgar. But that proved decidedly not to be the case.

In fact, to judge by the mounting complaints in journals and the press, the decibel count on the streets seems to have increased from mid-century on, despite laws aimed at depriving hawkers and entertainers of their whistles, bells, and trumpets. A component of that sound, one that caught the most attention, was the increase after the Continental upheavals of 1848, in the number of Italian organ-grinders and German street bands. To many Londoners it seemed as though the foreigner had all but displaced the native-born busker on the streets of the capital. Reform-minded Londoners, whether of the positive variety, those who wanted to promote music as a cultural bridge, or the negative kind, those who wished to rid the streets of obstructive and irrational behavior, responded uncertainly to this alteration in street culture.

One prominent Londoner, however, knew his own mind and saw no ambiguities. Charles Babbage's vision of the good society had no room in it for sentiment, disorder or, especially, noise. Ironically, there was little harmony in his own life or career. That life started at Walworth, Surrey, in 1792. His father, a wealthy banker, provided tutors for this precocious and rather odd only son before sending him up to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1810. Making no effort to hide his contempt for the backwardness of mathematical studies he found there, young Babbage turned for intellectual stimulation to fellow students, John Herschel, son of the famous astronomer, William Herschel, and George Peacock, later to become one of the country's leading theoretical mathematicians. Gregarious and good company though Babbage was, he was self-obsessed to quite an extraordinary degree, so much so that he transferred to Peterhouse because the competition would be so much less formidable. This need to be recognized as "The Philosopher," the title he gave himself, only partly in jest, never left him and assured that no success could bring much satisfaction. Successes there certainly were. In 1828, Cambridge acknowledged his contribution to algebraic studies by electing him to the Professorship once held by Newton, the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics. Wellington, convinced by advisors that Babbage's project for building a calculating

machine, "the Difference Engine," might have revolutionary practical applications, secured public financing to build a workshop next to the inventor's home on Dorset Street, Manchester Square, and to contribute £17,000 toward the project's completion. Between 1820 and 1834 Babbage was instrumental in founding the Astronomical Society, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Statistical Society of London. Laplace, Humbolt, Erasmus and Charles Darwin, Fourier, Malthus, and Brunel sought his company and respected his work. Byron's gifted daughter, Lady Ada Lovelace, found him "one of the most *impracticable, selfish, intemperate*, persons one can have to do with," but went on to become his protégée and later on his "High Priestess."[21] Preoccupations which earned him a reputation among the general public for being a crackpot were taken seriously by some of the best minds of the time. These preoccupations make an impressive list: oscillating lights and telegraph signals, a ship-to-shore communication system, submarine technology, and rocket propulsion. He recounted in his memoirs how he almost drowned in a youthful experiment with a device for walking on water. More prescient than any of these, perhaps, and his permanent claim on history, was the never-quite-finished Analytical Engine, an automatic digital computer. Although it was not the stored program instrument we are familiar with today, it establishes his position as the father of a technology which was to transform almost every aspect of civilization a century after his death in 1871. He would not have been surprised by this belated fame, for he understood what the consequences of, as he called it, the "Thinking Machine" might be; but this made it harder to bear that his contemporaries withheld from him the credit he believed was his due. Harriet Martineau wrote that he "spent all his days gloating and grumbling over what people said of him."[22] In 1861 he told some visitors that he had never had a happy day in his life. He spoke "as though he hated mankind in general, Englishmen in particular and the English government and organ-grinders most of all."[23]

Babbage's near mania about what he called "Street Nuisances" has more than mere anecdotal interest because it demonstrates, in a heightened form, the mental set of one type of urban reformer, one that was characteristically Victorian but that survived, in a more muted form, to later days. What filled his imagination was the possibility of reducing all human activity to components, assigning numerical values to each, and, with the help of analytical devices, rearranging them so as to eliminate waste and irrationalities. He passionately believed that social conditions as well as commerce and industry could be made infinitely more efficient and productive if scientific inquiry were to be released from the confines of academe and other realms of pure inquiry and applied in a systematic way to industry. In 1832 he put these

convictions into print with the publication of his *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufacture*.[24] So extensive and important is the "economy of time," he wrote, that "all other advantages might be subsumed under its head."[25] Karl Marx was particularly impressed with the section of the book which showed that as industry rationalizes in the sense of applying time and motion studies, refining mass-production techniques, and using applied science to advance the specialization of labor, it would be the largest commercial and industrial units, the ones able to afford long-term investment in technological research and human engineering, that would inevitably come out on top in the competitive struggle.[26] Time was for Babbage literally of the essence.

It followed that any process or behavior, no matter how trivial it might seem to the ordinary person, was for Babbage worthy of the most exacting investigation. His unguarded, unself-conscious autobiography is full of examples. He tells us that it was on first coming to London that he encountered street beggars. His response was to ask for particulars and then investigate. One mendicant, he recalled, said he was a watch-maker and gave an address in Clerkenwell. Babbage paid a visit and discovered that no person answering to the name given had ever lodged there. On meeting the man again he confronted him with this information and was told that the person answering the door bore a grudge and had deliberately given false information. So back Babbage went to Clerkenwell, reinterviewed the lodgers, and then, to make sure, checked all of the watch-makers' shops in the vicinity. The beggar, he determined, was not only an imposter but a liar.[27] After many such episodes, each described in detail, he came to the conclusion that indiscriminate charity was an evil, that hunger was the result of folly, and that poverty was best addressed by increasing the productivity of labor through the application of new technology and systematic procedures for increasing worker incentive, profit-sharing being one possibility.[28] How these busy, dedicated workers were to spend their leisure was not a subject that interested him. We can be sure, however, that listening to street bands or dancing to the sound of the hurdy-gurdy was the last thing he thought they should be doing. Distraction had no place in his technocratic utopia, especially noisy distraction which destroyed "the time and energies of all the intellectual classes of society by its continual interruptions of their pursuits."[29]

Many from London's intellectual classes smiled at Babbage's monomania but had some sympathy for his cause. Had the German and Italian entertainers confined themselves to the East End and brought a touch of lightness into grey areas there, it is unlikely that such illustrious figures as Carlyle, Dickens,[30] Mill, Tennyson, Millais, Wilkie Collins, and Holman Hunt would have put their names to a petition,

as they did in 1864, asking Parliament to give the intellectuals and creative artists some relief. Their charge was that these foreigners came to London because of the city's reputation for generosity to street buskers. Blackmail, not entertainment, was their object. According to this version, they would seek out the residences of wealthy people, especially those who were known to be sensitive to outside noises, and tootle or grind away until the victim sent a servant out with a shilling bribe. This had long been a traditional busker's gambit. What seemed to make the situation intolerable was that these performances had become louder, more frequent, and better organized. Worse, it was carried on by what many inhabitants of Belgravia thought to be riff-raff from Berlin and, as *The Saturday Review* sniffed, "filthy Italian refugees," who have left "the Abruzzi for Saffron Hill for the musical instruction of our foggy land."[31]

Householders had been given some legal recourse against such invasions of their privacy in the Police Act of 1839. It authorized constables to remove musicians if asked to do so by the head of the house, either directly or by means of a servant, providing that the grounds given were the illness of a resident or some "other reasonable cause." To learn that Sir Richard Mayne chose not to exercise in an aggressive way the considerable discretionary powers this language provided will come as no surprise. In 1859 he gave instructions that his men were to refuse requests to move musicians on unless there was no reason to doubt that a resident of the house was actually ill. Otherwise, the constable on the beat was to report the complaint and wait for instructions. The householder could request the musicians to leave and could obtain (and pay for) a warrant if the request were ignored, but the constable was not authorized to make a summary arrest unless the offense had taken place within his view.[32]

Under these circumstances it would take an unusually determined as well as exasperated man to put the law into motion, and Babbage was that man (see Plate 6). A letter he wrote to Mayne in 1859 shows how far he was prepared to go. Distracted, he said, at 10:30 in the morning from his labors on improvements to a device for communicating with ships in stormy weather, he asked a brass band playing under his window several times to desist and then went in search of a policeman, but to no avail. On returning home he found his persecutors being invited into a neighbor's house. Undeterred he searched a second time for the constable, returning with him just as the four-man band was emerging from its visit next door. At the station house, Babbage seems to have insisted on his right to make a citizen's arrest and demanded the group be brought before Mr Broughton, the magistrate. Broughton listened to the case and immediately dismissed the defendants. They emerged from the station to the cheers of a throng

which had gathered. At 4:00 p.m. that afternoon, Babbage wrote, two horn players appeared near his office window and four hours later two more men showed up to serenade him with pipe and tin whistle beneath the library window. And if that were not enough, the group leader had the cheek to threaten action for false arrest and demand £5 in compensation.[33]

When Mayne's answer gave no satisfaction, Babbage, some months later, fired off another detailed complaint. In this one he included a list of the nuisances that had made his life miserable during the interim. Included were "Organs, Brass-bands, Fiddlers, Harps, Monkeys, Punch . . . athletes, males and females walking on stilts, Fantoccini [Marionettes], Hindu and Mohammedan impostors beating monotonous drums and shamming insanity, troops of Scotch impostors, dancing with bag-pipes."[34] And now the organ-grinders were back again. On their latest visit, he told Mayne, he had been followed by about a hundred "men, women, children and idlers shouting and hooting" when he set off on yet another search for the suspiciously elusive local constable. In a draft of the letter he noted that, even as he wrote, twenty children were assembled in front of his house, "singing, dancing, shouting and beating sticks." He concluded by asking the Commissioner: since your men have discretionary powers, why don't they use them?[35]

Mayne, in his answer, tried to persuade Babbage to desist. He said that it was obvious the neighborhood wanted the entertainment the musicians provided; indeed, there seemed to be, he added, "a very strong feeling by many persons against the enforcement of the law even in cases to which it is applicable, and I have received many angry remonstrances against the interference by the police." He ended with the advice that, since the law was not effective, it might be wise for Babbage to give up his attempt to enforce it himself.[36]

Needless to say, that advice was wasted. Not only did Babbage continue to brave taunts and occasional missiles but he found a confederate in Michael Bass, the head of the famous brewery and a Liberal Member of Parliament, someone who was as annoyed as he was and able to get the ear of Palmerston's ministry. Neither the Prime Minister nor his Chancellor of the Exchequer, William Gladstone, had any enthusiasm for the cause and stalled Bass in 1863 when he raised the question of street music in the Commons. But Bass was determined. He organized the petition mentioned earlier, got *The Times* and a number of influential journals on side, wrote a short book on the subject (*Street Music in the Metropolis*), and finally managed to steer an amending bill through Parliament in 1864. Speaking before the House the previous year, he recounted having "had the occasion to call on his neighbour, Sir Richard Mayne, and found a band on his doorstep." On the south

side of Eaton Square a second band had gathered and was in action, and on the north side, a third. Finally, in yet another part of Eaton Square, stood a fourth, in front of the house of the Home Secretary, "shrieking, blasting, counter-blasting, and creating the most horrible discord." Can these gentlemen deny, he asked, that these "unfortunate foreigners who were blowing their wind away" are not a "hindrance to the serious business of life"?[37]

An Irish MP, Baron Fermoy, could not pass up the opportunity to wonder whether Bass's dislike of noise in the streets included the racket made by drays and beer barrels in comparison to which sounds of the bands and organs were melodious and sweet. He advised the wealthy and powerful who were annoyed to reflect that street music was about the only innocent recreation the poor and powerless had left to them; besides, he said, it was a generally accepted fact "that the streets must be free for all legitimate occupations." A colleague, Sir John Shelley, agreed: if men, women, and children of the working classes lost their street music, "there would be no life, no pleasure, no amusement."[38]

The bill that passed the next year did not go that far, but it did remove the "reasonable cause" phrase and direct the police to act upon being requested to do so by any householder. Gladstone spoke against the principle of giving a single individual a "purely arbitrary veto," doubting whether opera and concert-goers could be good judges of what amused the people. John Francis Maguire, Irish journalist turned nationalist politician, thought the proposed legislation reflected the "spirit of Professor Babbage." But it was the Liberal Member for the Tower Hamlets, Acton Smee Ayrton, who managed to undercut Bass's strategy by amending the bill so that a complainant would need to accompany the entertainers and the policeman to the station house and lay charges, an effective deterrent, it proved, in the great majority of cases.[39]

Babbage, of course, carried on, literally until the day he died, what one defender of street music called "the German Crusade."[40] In 1868 we find the sad, bitter old man complaining to the Home Secretary that a neighbor, seeing him remonstrating with "an Italian," came out and gave money for the music to continue. A crowd gathered and shouted curses. Babbage jumped into a cab followed by cries of "Turn it over!" The cabby managed to escape and to find a policeman. Although invited to ride, the constable refused and instead walked slowly back toward the still-angry crowd while the 76-year-old Babbage, believing himself now safe, descended from the cab. He was immediately surrounded by a pack of children who, crying "Old Babbage," showered him with filth from the street. The magistrate would not hear the case against the neighbor, and Mayne refused to take any action against

the constable. Babbage informed the Home Secretary that he had been forced to bar his windows and that friends had warned him against walking alone even in streets remote from Manchester Square.[41]

The reaction of many of the retail merchants on Oxford Street when Babbage did manage, on one occasion, to get a number of convictions, confirms this impression that the opposition to removing the bands and hurdy-gurdies was not simply a local incident provoked by a particularly cantankerous and eccentric individual. Store-owners all the way from Edgware to Tottenham Court Road placed large placards in their windows (the language was abusive, some of it in rhyme), denouncing the campaign by Babbage and his supporters.[42] One assumes that the merchants of Oxford Street believed that street entertainments were good for business.

However, it is not because street music suited some commercial interests that Edwardian as well as Victorian London was filled with melody. Parliament was never indifferent to the wishes of shopkeepers, but that does not explain why it responded only half-heartedly to pressure from influential people who had genuine grievances, nor does it explain why police chose to exercise their discretionary powers so sluggishly and why magistrates sided, more often than not, with the ragged, immigrant buskers who appeared before them. Far more important was the fact that street music provided a cultural meeting ground for almost every segment of the social structure. Michael Dziewicki, Ford Maddox Ford, Augustus Hare, Clarence Rook, Walter Besant, George Gissing, Emily Cook, Thomas Holmes, Charles Booth, Thomas Burke, Robert Roberts, indeed almost everyone we turn to in order to sense the flavor of street life in the period, confirms the impression that street music was one of the few aspects of urban life that just about everyone could enjoy, including, probably, many of those philosophers, artists, composers, scientists, and men of letters who signed Bass's petition. The American writer James Fenimore Cooper visiting London at the beginning of Victoria's reign, enthused about the street music he heard: "positively the best in the world," better even, he claimed, than that of Venice or Naples. Instrumentalists who would in most large cities, he thought, be engaged by orchestras walked the London streets and played Mozart, Beethoven, Mayerbeer, and Weber beneath one's window. Just the other evening, on his way to dinner, he had encountered a kind of wheelbarrow containing a "grand piano on which someone was playing an overture of Rossini, accompanied by a flageolet."[43] A story went the rounds in the 1860s that Bellini once said to Rossini, "My songs are sung in the streets of Paris and London." "Ah," Rossini was supposed to have retorted, "but mine *grind*!"[44]

We can be sure that selections from Italian opera were not the

only musical fare served up by griddlers (glee singers), violinists, brass bands, or barrel-organs. Nevertheless, it in concerts or choir rehearsals that the working class came with "high culture"; for every working man or woman who *Messiah* at a local concert hall, there were many more who from the classical tradition on the street. Mayhew interviewed owner of a flute harmonicon organ who said that of the eight his instrument played, one was "I Lombardi," by Verdi ("Æ." organs play that piece"), and another was from "Il Trovatore." the third and fourth items were the "Liverpool Hornpipe" and Ratcatcher's Daughter"[45] illustrates the point that, unlike the offered in almost every other kind of milieu, the repertoire in the streets was seldom an expression of one or several class cultures but a promiscuous jumble of tastes. This jumble continued up to and a little beyond the Great War.

Furthermore, there is abundant evidence that middle-class aristocratic Londoners not only enjoyed street music but frequently invited its performers into their homes and gardens to entertain at wedding receptions, birthday parties, and other domestic celebrations; indeed this patronage was the cause of some of Babbage's most intemperate outbursts. It seems safe to assume that on these occasions, from Verdi and Rossini would not have been the only pieces requested since the likelihood of hearing something bawdy or politically tendentious from professional street musicians, especially after the 1850s, was surprisingly remote. Therefore, there was at least this exception to the increasing tendency for working-class and middle-class leisure activities to draw apart, physically and in every other way, a process clearly evident in most recreational activities well before mid-century.[46]

People interested in social reform, providing they were not at the Babbage end of the spectrum, recognized the value of retaining this cultural bridge; they wished for cultural consensus and sought ways to bring it about. At the same time they valued privacy, which they thought of as control by individuals over who and what entered their personal space. The diarist Sir William Hardman recorded in February, 1863, that barrel-organs were "licensed nuisances."

> I, for example, am sitting, writing or reading, in my castle, for all our houses are castles! (save the mark!) comfortable, with slippers on feet, and spectacles on nose; and I must, forsooth, find a Peeler before I can rid myself of my nuisance.[47]

It would be the rare middle-class heart that would not have resonated to that sentiment. To complicate matters further, it is likely that tolerant and kindly liberals like Hardman would have agreed in a general way with the view of a writer in the *Examiner* that "the streets are for traffic

> and communication . . . not for orchestras, or stages, and to turn them to such usages is an abuse permitted in no capital in Europe but unhappy London."[48] But it is doubtful if these same moderate reformers would have been entirely comfortable with a sentiment expressed by Lord Stanley in a mollifying letter to Babbage, wishing him success in driving "The Organ Pest" out of the city. "But," Stanley continued, "the idea that this is a free country, and that therefore every man has a right to annoy his neighbour, is deeply rooted in a certain class of mind."[49] In fact those roots extended more widely. The idea, confused and overlaid with contradictions though it might be, that individuals should have the right to do as they chose on the highway had long ago been firmly planted in almost every class of mind and helped to give English men and women a sense of who they were. Middle-class reformers wanted to defend their castles and rationalize street use yet, at the same time, make cultural contact with the urban poor and not surrender a peculiarly English liberty, the right to use the streets with a minimum of interference. One consequence of the tension among these various goals and values, every one in conflict, was that London continued to provide the safest haven in Northern Europe for street entertainers even though they could often be intolerable nuisances and did sometimes obstruct the free flow of traffic and communication.