

<T>In Memoriam Indoor Fountains:

Promenade Concerts and the Built Environment

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<TX>They turned off the taps toward the end of the 2010 season of the BBC Proms. For much of that summer, like so many before, the stage crew at London’s Royal Albert Hall had been responsible for fitting, filling, decorating, and maintaining a pool about ten feet wide at the center of the standing-only arena. The “Proms fountain,” as it was commonly known, had been a fixture of the annual concert series for as long as any regular attendees could remember. It was only when it did not return the following summer that a few journalists went to the trouble of putting a date on its first appearance (1927 according to *BBC Music Magazine*) and a thousand or so festival devotees signed a petition against its removal.¹ The resistance, it seems, was fleeting. With minimal fuss the Proms fountain went from being a legacy feature to an archival curiosity. All that remains from its non-appearance in 2011 is a slim set of comments on the history and redundancy of an artificial pond.

I will come to the history in a moment. First, I want to note some of the explanations given for the fountain’s obsolescence by then festival director Roger Wright. From the perspective of the Proms organizers, the priority, understandably, was to maximize audience capacity. Given that there is only so much room in the Royal Albert Hall, why fill it with water when you could fill it with ticketholders? Wright also pointed to the impracticality of the existing arrangement. It is not just that the fountain had to be installed anew each season, but it also had to be drained and removed (then returned and refilled) to accommodate any non-standard stage arrangements such as a star pianist placed in the center of the arena. If these two objections, on the grounds of capacity and practicality, were the main drivers of Wright’s decision, “there will

also be an additional benefit,” the director remarked in a blog post at the time, “as the filling and emptying of the fountain’s vast quantities of water over a summer was not exactly environmentally friendly.”²

It is easy to be cynical about Wright’s nod to environmental friendliness. Not only does it smack of an afterthought, but it also dresses up hard-nosed efficiency savings in the garb of green cultural policy. The fountain was evidently removed to save space and cut costs; any resulting conservation of water was a bonus, but one that surely counted for little when set against the total resource consumption of a venue the size of the Royal Albert Hall, not to mention the festival’s continued reliance on large numbers of frequent-flying musicians. Such criticisms, however, are not my main concern here. What interests me about Wright’s environmental aside is the way it hints at a change in concert practice—both creative and corporate—around the time of the demise of the peculiar water feature to which this essay is addressed.

In the years since Wright bade farewell to the fountain, the language (and sometimes the logic) of ecological stewardship has been increasingly adopted by mainstream cultural institutions such as the BBC Proms. The 2019 season, for instance, featured “Earth and environment” as one of its overarching themes, with a press release explaining how decisions about programming and commissions were linked to “the changing world around us and . . . the topical debate around the future of our planet.”³ The largest community participation project that season was a performance, with some 600 singers, of John Luther Adams’s *In the Name of the Earth* (2018), a work described in the same press release as “a swansong for our planet.” There was also a world premiere (part of an early-year’s event) for Hans Zimmer’s more succinctly titled *Earth*, another work ostensibly responding to contemporary environmental thought. And

the same summer saw a family-focused concert devised around *The Lost Words*, a 2017 collection of “spell-poems to re-wild the language of children” written by Robert McFarlane and illustrated by Jackie Morris.⁴ In the context of the main program it is striking, if not entirely surprising, how easily some of the best known works of the long nineteenth century could be slotted into the same earth-and-environment agenda: from Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony* (1808) to Strauss’s *An Alpine Symphony* (1915), from Haydn’s *Creation* (1798) to Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* (1909), the canon of classical concert music is famously rich in allusion to landscape and nature. From there it is but a small step to thinking of these works—all programmed at the BBC Proms in 2019—as commenting, however obliquely, on the condition of the environment.⁵

This apparent consolidation of “the environment” as a credible means of organizing a classical concert schedule is one of the two key developments I see presaged by Wright’s remark about the “unfriendly” waste of fountain water. The other, more directly, is the obligation for cultural institutions to account for and mitigate their environmental impact. By the time Wright’s successor was shaping the Proms repertoire in the image of the earth, festivalgoers were being advised to adapt their behavior in the interests of “sustainability.” This imperative is most pronounced in publicity for an offshoot of the Royal Albert Hall series, the Proms in the Park concerts held since 1996 in Hyde Park, one of London’s largest open spaces. The website for these events boasts of “Creative Green Certification” and encourages the use of low-carbon travel. There is considerable detail, for anyone who is interested, about the Proms in the Park “waste strategy” as well as the by-now-familiar injunctions to avoid single use plastics and practice good separation of recyclable, compostable, and landfill material.⁶

As I alluded to above, this combination of thematic and pragmatic environmentalism seems to have stabilized—at least in the context of the BBC Proms—not long after Wright’s decision to disestablish the fountain. This is not, to be clear, a case of cause and effect. All built things must come to an end and it is a wonder the fountain lasted as long as it did. By the same token, there are plenty of earlier examples of ecologically savvy programs and policies in classical concert culture, within the United Kingdom and elsewhere. My aim in this essay is not to single out the summer of 2010, as if it marked some unique moment in the history of music and the environment.⁷ Rather, my reason for beginning at the end of the story—with a shorthand version of a post-fountain, climate-conscious regime—is that it provides a point of comparison for an alternative and considerably older tradition of environmental imagination, one that bears directly on the culture, and architecture, of promenade concerts.

<S>Why Fountains?

<TX>As you might expect, the alternative tradition of environmental imagination that I want to pursue is bound up with the history and function of concert hall fountains. This may seem like a quirky topic, and perhaps it is, but it is one that has the merit of material significance. The body of water that was, for so long, placed and replaced in the center of the Royal Albert Hall was not just there for show; it was supposed to *do* things, and some of these things were remembered (or researched) in the years immediately following its passage into obscurity. The writer for the aforementioned *BBC Music Magazine* piece, for instance, remarked how “the fountain was designed to regulate the temperature of the Queen’s Hall in Langham Place,” where the Proms were held prior to the Hall’s bombing in World War II, “but in recent times the seats which surrounded the water-feature had proved useful as a small seating area, particularly for elderly Prommers.”⁸

The mention of elderly Prommers (the term for anyone with a ticket to the central, ostensibly standing-only arena) was coupled in this case with a photograph of two white-haired audience members, one with a walking stick, both seated at the edge of the pond in an almost-empty Royal Albert Hall. Behind them is visible the greenery that adorned the Proms fountain: grassy fronds punctuated by the pink and white of foxgloves. I assume the leaves and flowers in the photograph were inorganic, but their colour and texture nevertheless offer a compelling contrast to the regulation red plush found elsewhere in the auditorium. The writer of the piece quotes one Lesley Melliard as saying to *The Daily Telegraph* in 2011 that the fountain “provided a calm atmosphere but also acted like a lung and cooled the hall down.” This, remember, was the point at which an energized few were attempting to shame the festival organizers into reversing their decision. Melliard was presumably among their number, remarking to the *Telegraph* that “there have certainly been more people fainting this year, despite the cooler weather. But the BBC would obviously rather get those extra 25 people in.”⁹

A few years later, when any opposition to the fountain’s removal had long since fizzled out, the same claim about temperature regulation was repeated in a #PromsFact tweet by the official festival account, which noted that “the Pond was intended to break up the crush of the audience and improve the temperature and humidity for instrumentalists and singers!”¹⁰ The inclusion of a jaunty exclamation mark seems to cast the information as mere trivia, a #fact to be consumed or scrolled past on the basis of its novelty value. Elsewhere, though, we find more elaborate attempts to make sense of the not-long-since-retired water-cooling system. Notably, in a blog post for the *Guardian* from 2013, one journalist sought the origins of the fountain in the years before the BBC’s involvement in 1927, paying close attention to the idiosyncrasies of a single historical figure: Dr. George Cathcart.¹¹

As the *Guardian* piece explains, it was Cathcart (a Wagner-loving otolaryngologist) who bankrolled Robert Newman (the rookie manager of Queen's Hall) to launch a series of relatively cheap and informal summer concerts in 1895 under the direction of Henry Wood (accompanist and conductor fresh from Bayreuth).¹² The BBC, for its part, tends to emphasize Wood's signal contribution to the establishment of the still-running series: his name is sprinkled liberally across promotional material, his bust is installed on stage for the duration of the festival, and part of the Last Night ritual (more on which at the end of this essay) involves a select delegation of Prommers adorning his bronze likeness with a laurel wreath.¹³ By contrast, the narrative in the *Guardian* foregrounds the work of Cathcart, the wealthy ear, nose, and throat doctor, who is presented as a visionary eccentric combining musical and medical insights.

The post tells the well-documented tale of Cathcart's interventionist approach to patronage, not least his insistence that the people should listen to more Wagner. It also recalls how Cathcart "worried that English voices were becoming damaged by singing at a pitch that had been rising by about a semitone over the past 50 years compared to most of western Europe." Regardless of the validity of this apprehension, the story goes that Cathcart offered his financial backing for the new series of promenade concerts on the strict condition that all performances conform to lowered concert pitch, even if that meant subsidising the purchase of new brass and woodwind instruments.¹⁴ Most significantly for the purposes of the present essay, Cathcart's third and final condition was that the hall should be fitted out with a fountain. "Given a high summer start, he knew that Queen's Hall would get pretty hot and stuffy, so, with the stalls seating removed for strolling around (they were billed, after all, as Promenade concerts) he had the bright idea of installing a fountain in the centre surrounded by a bank of flowers." This was clearly an idea the *Guardian* writer could relate to: "The Royal Albert Hall always gets pretty hot

in the summer, this sweltering summer [2013] for sure . . . It always seemed that much cooler to enter the hall to the sight and sound of the Proms fountain.”

Besides the homage to Cathcart’s innovations, this post is remarkable for the fondness of its personal recollections and the attempt to connect past and present. The Proms is nothing if not a performance of tradition and for those who care (not an insignificant constituency) the fountain is already an established feature of the festival’s mythology. What I find striking is how aspects of this mythology are so finely attuned to matters of heat and stuffiness. Indeed, the *Guardian* writer goes on to state how “in a bid to raise the humidity in the hall, even if it didn’t lower the temperature, [Cathcart] plonked blocks of ice in the water.” The next line pokes fun at such a scheme—“History doesn’t reveal whether [the ice blocks] had any effect and eventually they were replaced by goldfish”—but such gentle mockery is surely a sign of affection. Whatever their scepticism with regard to the workings of Victorian air conditioning, there seems no doubt in the journalist’s mind that a pool in a concert hall can modulate the mood of those present: “The good doctor knew that the mere sight and sound of a water fountain had a calming (if not an actual cooling) effect and, of course, it was turned off as soon as the music began.”

<S>Inside the Auditorium

<TX>Judging by press comments from the early years of the Queen’s Hall series, the fountain may in fact have stayed on throughout performances: “Nothing but praise can be bestowed on the arrangements,” went one report on the opening night of the 1897 season, “except that the fountain in the centre of the promenade suddenly becomes audible when the orchestra sinks to a *piano* or *pianissimo*.”¹⁵ It is tantalising to imagine the overlapping of aquatic and orchestral sound in this context.¹⁶ For the most part, however, the fountain was not remarked upon as an audible feature of Queen’s Hall events, and I have found conspicuously few objections on the

grounds of noise or distraction.¹⁷ More commonly it was commended as part and parcel of an ambitious new concert architecture: “The palatial establishment in Langham Place is thoroughly well adapted for the purpose to which it is being put at present,” observed a writer for the *Musical Times* in 1895, “and the special decorations, consisting of towering palms at the sides and back of the orchestra, and a cool fountain surrounded by huge blocks of ice in the centre of the promenade, together with the general arrangements for the comfort of visitors, testify at once to the astuteness and the good taste of the management.”¹⁸

If this seems praise enough, there was yet more to come in the *Monthly Musical Record* a short while later. Notwithstanding another minor complaint about the volume of water—“Let this [fountain] fall more softly, we pray”—the end-of-season editorial went so far as to argue that that “the Promenade concerts [at Queen’s Hall] point to the Concert of the Future.”¹⁹ The Wagnerian reference is no accident, of course. As I have already mentioned, Cathcart had a hand in selecting the early programs, which featured numerous “Wagner nights,” and Wood was partly recruited on the basis of his Bayreuth credentials. In the opinion of the editorial, only the addition of a conductor such as Hans Richter or Felix Mottl (both Wagner specialists) could further raise the quality of the concerts. Yet quality was not the only yardstick. Indeed, “since high quality by itself has been tried—tried and found wanting, from a commercial point of view—it appears obvious that what we want is cheapness and free-and-easiness, and of these we place the last first in importance.”²⁰

Without wishing to pin down too firmly what “free-and-easiness” might mean here, the editorial offers an indicative picture inspired by the existing Queen’s Hall series. The reader is presented with audiences walking about and chatting during concerts, taking advantage of the absence of seats in the promenade and the presence of unlocked corridors. The writer also

ponders the possibility of somewhere to smoke (though this last option is introduced as a bone of contention) and imagines a place—in this ideal concert of the future—for “Mr. Newman’s ferns and fountains.”²¹ In a literal sense, the promenade pond was at the center of this blueprint for musical reform. It was a focal point around which the imagined concertgoers of the future might congregate before dispersing, drifting, and rearranging themselves into temporary groupings (near the front, at the back, in the corridors, amid the smoke) as the mood and/or the music should take them. This was a model of a listening public made conspicuously mobile. Instead of a fixed seat with a predictable sightline, the purchase of a ticket would grant an opportunity to mill around in a pleasant environment—to be free and easy in the company of refined music and refreshing water.

This forward-looking editorial from 1895 makes the connection between the early promenade concerts at Queen’s Hall and the later institution of the BBC Proms irresistible. The direct link—in the form of the Royal Albert Hall fountain—may have been broken, but the ethos of relatively relaxed and convivial summer concertgoing remains in place. In this light, you might even say the BBC Proms *are* the concerts of the future, an ongoing fulfilment of a late-nineteenth-century wish. By the same token, it is no surprise that the *Guardian* writer expressed such an affinity for Cathcart’s project because the benefits it brought—the calm around the pool, the plants inside the hall—could still be felt in the early twenty-first century. However, the story of London promenade concerts is not only one of positivity and continuity. Cathcart, Newman, and Wood may have inaugurated (what turned out to be) a long-running and much-loved series, but they did so on the understanding that their chosen format was not universally admired.

The piece from the *Musical Times* quoted above, for instance, begins by noting how “it is customary for superior people to sneer at Promenade Concerts.” There is an honourable mention

for Alfred Mellon's role in conducting "amateurs of scanty means" toward uplifting orchestral repertoire, but this is the implicit exception to the rule: "some caterers of late years," the article continues, "have deemed it well to consult the tastes of the vulgar, and have reaped a deserved reward in failure."²² This writer did not identify any purveyors of sneerable fare, but the editorial in the *Monthly Musical Record* was more forthcoming: "We know, as well as anyone, what the Promenade concerts used to be in the old days at Covent Garden."²³ Given the class-consciousness displayed elsewhere in the same text, the knowingness of this remark begs to be read in terms of social and cultural snobbery, that is, the Covent Garden promenade concerts attracted the wrong sort of public with the wrong sort of program. Rather than colluding in this nudge-nudge condescension, however, I prefer to ask what *fin-de-siècle* writers might have known about earlier promenade concerts, even if they deemed that knowledge too obvious or insignificant to commit to print. This is useful for two reasons: first, it means crossing the threshold of 1895 in order to explore the period of concert history *not* claimed as a precursor by the BBC Proms; second, it provides further opportunities to examine the architecture and atmosphere of promenade performance.

In the case of Covent Garden, I suspect the 1890s reference to the "old days" points to the period in the 1870s when members of the Gatti family, from the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino in Switzerland, ran both a series of late summer promenade concerts (1873–1880) and winter pantomimes (1878–1880).²⁴ It is possible to parse such entertainment in terms of the lowest common denominator populism invoked and abhorred by the writers quoted above. For instance, a report in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, a far cry from the *Musical Times*, notes a full house on the first night of the 1877 promenade season and draws attention to the audience's "continued applause" and "efforts to encore every piece on the programme."²⁵ I

could imagine such excessive enthusiasm drawing the scorn of certain contemporaries, but I also think there is a risk in routing all analysis along the fault lines of taste and class.²⁶ Recall the editorial discussed above: quality and cost were given as two of the key criteria for judging concerts, but “first in importance” was a sense of informality or free-and-easiness. While the promenade format was, to a great extent, defined by the music on the bill and the price of entry, it was also, perhaps to an even greater extent, conditioned by the circumstances of attendance and audition.

It is with this in mind that I turn to the next passage in the same report, which details (as reports of new seasons often do) the theater’s latest renovations: “The orchestra is surmounted by a tasteful canopy, the floor is covered with a new Brussels carpet, costing £400 ; and in addition to the blocks of ice amongst the ferns and flowers at the back of the orchestra, an agreeable effect is introduced by placing four enormous blocks of ice in front of the dress circle. These are illuminated by coloured lamps, and impart refreshing coolness to the atmosphere.”²⁷ If fountains are not mentioned directly here, it is probably because they were already taken for granted in the context of promenade concerts, certainly the Covent Garden variety. “The theatre itself is beautifully decorated,” ran a similar puff piece from the 1874 season. “Ferns, fountains, mirrors, gaseliers, blocks of coloured ice, pink curtains hung with roses, handsome carpets, fairy-like grottoes, with well-executed figure paintings form a scene which for exquisite beauty and variety it would be difficult to rival.”²⁸

It is hard to know where to begin with such lush descriptions. One of the most remarkable features, to my mind, is the illumination of the ice, which was presumably sourced from one of Carlo Gatti’s wells near King’s Cross. It was Carlo, the first of the family to settle in London, who made the Gatti name synonymous with frozen goods—first by manufacturing ice

creams in the 1850s (known as “penny licks”) then by importing, storing, and trading vast quantities of ice from Norway.²⁹ This was a business built on the dual sense of refreshment, both culinary and atmospheric, and its success indicates the lengths to which Victorians would go for an ephemeral cooling sensation. By the time Gatti’s frozen blocks were lit by gas for the comfort and dazzlement of concertgoers they had, in all likelihood, travelled across the North Sea from Norway, up the Thames to Limehouse, half way round the Regent’s Canal, and a couple of miles by cart to Covent Garden.

Given the twenty-first-century references to environmental friendliness with which this essay began, it is tempting to ask after the carbon footprint of shifting so much solid water, especially as it must have turned to liquid fairly quickly under the glare of gaseliers. But this was surely not a matter of concern for either Gatti or his contemporaries (and, in any case, the blocks may have travelled much of the way as ballast). Even if it were possible to count the cost in the preferred currency of today’s climate science, that need not take away from the sheer effort and ingenuity that went into controlling the indoor environment of the promenade concerts. This was partly to do with ice, but also fountains, ferns, flowers, canopies, carpets, and all the rest. For Victorian Londoners, a cool theater in summer was a marvel to behold, and the Covent Garden of the Gatti regime was marvellous indeed. Here was a fantasy land in which quadrilles, waltzes, and opera arrangements floated on the freshened air inside the leafy hall. Doubtless the end results appeared gaudy to some, and a potential distraction from the orchestral program.³⁰ But, as I have already observed, I am anxious not to collapse the space of performance into a mere symbol of social or musical status.

Much existing scholarship has identified the promenade format as a site of emergence for new kinds of publics with broad-based taste. Derek Scott put promenade concerts first among the

“new markets for cultural goods” that helped to shape nothing less than a “nineteenth-century popular music revolution.”³¹ Observing the same phenomenon from the other side of a not-yet-great divide, Christina Bashford has shown how large-scale promenade concerts could be understood as both related and opposed to the contemporary “pursuit of high culture” in chamber music settings.³² Scott and Bashford were both building on the work of William Weber, whose landmark study of the “social structure of concert life,” anchored in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, introduced the promenade format as “by far the largest in scale and the most successful of all low-status concerts.”³³ My aim in this essay is to not to disavow such analyses, which ultimately locate promenade concerts somewhere on an elite-to-popular axis, but to supplement them by paying closer attention to the built environments in which such concerts took place. That means looking both inside and outside performance venues.

<S>Promenades in the City

<TX>Hengler’s Cirque on Argyle Street, which advertised promenade concerts into the 1880s, is a prime example of an institution all too easily determined by markers of taste and class. Located on the site of the present London Palladium, Hengler’s was a short stroll down Regent Street from Queen’s Hall on Langham Place. This permanent circus-and-variety venue was rebuilt in brick in 1884 after the condemnation of an earlier all-wooden structure and it continued trading on the name of an acrobatic dynasty long since past its heyday. The Cirque’s original proprietor, Charles Hengler, was a non-performing son of a ropedancer and grandson of a horse-riding pyrotechnist.³⁴ Charles’s death in 1887 precipitated a period of rapid turnover at the Argyll Street premises during which promenade concerts ceded space to aquatic spectacles. The floodable ring presumably came in handy when a change of ownership in 1895 occasioned the conversion of the circus into an ice rink known as the National Skating Palace. If Hengler’s lacked the

pretensions to artistic seriousness that characterized the initiative of Cathcart, Newman, and Wood, it did not want for either free-and-easiness or water. Once again, there is no escaping the familiar hierarchies of value (both social and cultural) that distinguish different sorts of entertainment and different sorts of concert. But the other running theme in these examples is no less important and can, I suggest, complement existing strategies for understanding nineteenth-century urban concertgoing.

For much, if not all, of its existence, Hengler's had a fountain. This much is clear from a promotional image for promenade concerts dated ca. 1880 (see plate 1), which features a fountain in two of the inset scenes (bottom left and middle right) surrounding the main event. The height of the jets is matched by that of the palms, but both are dwarfed by the exaggerated scale of the central arena. While boasting, rather improbably, about the airiness and ease of circulation within the wooden structure (this image predates the 1884 rebuilding in brick), the execution of the lithograph draws attention to the decorative greenery. The composite design, showcasing a variety of spaces and attractions within a single venue, was quite common at the time. Likewise, there is nothing out of the ordinary in using ferns and ivies to break up or soften an illustration of this kind. Yet the way in which the seated audience at the bottom of the image continues the line of the trailing leaves, with the chair legs obscured by a sketchy form of land or foliage is not, I think, so conventional. This lithograph is, on one level, a visual document of a venue's ambitions to *haute bourgeois* respectability, complete with all the predictable trappings of dress and decorum (top hats, frock coats, fancy dresses, and room to breathe). On another level, however, it hints at the outgrowth of promenade concert culture from outdoor or almost-outdoor settings.

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Long before the Gatti tenure at Covent Garden, never mind Cathcart and others at Queen's Hall, the promenade format was imported to London from Paris in the 1830s, with some of the first concerts taking place in mid-December 1838 at the Lyceum Theatre on the Strand (also known as the English Opera House). The seats in the "pit" (that is, the stalls) were covered over to allow audiences to move around and, judging by contemporary publicity material, the orchestra was seated on the stage with the conductor facing the auditorium.³⁵ The key reference point for London audiences, underscored by the Lyceum's advertisements for "Concerts à la Musard," was the French celebrity composer and conductor Philippe Musard.³⁶ As well as leading the band for the *bals de l'Opéra* in Paris, Musard had made a name for himself arranging summer concerts in the *Champs Elysées*. These events were sometimes billed as *concerts à l'anglais* because of the English predilection for outdoor entertainment and the international fame of pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall and Ranelagh.³⁷ Among Musard's chief innovations was the attempt to replicate the *Champs Elysées* format indoors during winter, in the Salle Valentino on *Rue Saint-Honoré*, with greenery recalling the lush summer months and, of course, a fountain.³⁸

As Stephanie Schroedter has recently shown, Musard was a leading figure in a generation of musicians concerned with the popularization of hitherto elite genres.³⁹ He was also a pioneer in the interiorization of hitherto outdoor events. Promenading in the presence of music was, by the turn of the 1840s, nothing new for London (or Paris); the novelty was to do so indoors, in a built-up area. And where Musard led, many followed. The box office success of the Lyceum series soon inspired similar ventures at competing venues, including the two patent houses—Covent Garden and Drury Lane—that were ostensibly dedicated to spoken drama. This concert takeover of London's stages was initially a winter phenomenon, in keeping with the spirit of the

concerts d'hiver that Musard had directed in Paris in the 1830s. By June 1840, however, Musard's chief rival, the charismatic conductor Louis-Antoine Jullien, was promoting summer concerts at Drury Lane. "No expense has been spared to render the house an agreeable promenade in hot weather," went one report in the *Musical World*. "Several fountains are to throw their sparkling waters among the gaslights, and growing shrubs and flowers are to be introduced."⁴⁰ In a matter of only eighteen months, a format designed as a seasonal adaptation—a way of enjoying summer's free-and-easiness despite the freezing winter—had been reimagined in the interests of year-round profit. It was at this point that the air-freshening fountains and soothing plants entered the building and, at least in London, that is where they remained for the next 170 years.

This process of quitting the outdoors and adapting the indoors to suit was by no means unique to promenade concerts. There is a parallel in the history of the Victorian circus as promoters increasingly moved from pitching tents in parks to building venues in city centers.⁴¹ This was also, of course, the age that cemented the shopping arcade and covered market as prominent features of city life in industrialized societies. More prominent still were the giant glasshouses built not only to encase exotic flora but also to showcase art and industry. Unsurprisingly, there was some overlap between these phenomena. I have already cited Hengler's Cirque, which played host to promenade concerts into the 1880s. I have also mentioned, in passing, Alfred Mellon, but have yet to point out that the concerts he conducted at Covent Garden in the 1860s took place in the Floral Hall (the forerunner of today's Paul Hamlyn Hall).⁴² This conservatory-like structure, built in 1858 for the sale of fruit and vegetables, was quickly adapted to the fashion for promenade performance. One of the reasons it made sense for Mellon to use Floral Hall was the ample London precedent for concerts in settings that blurred

the boundaries between indoors and out. Jullien had put on promenade concerts at the Surrey Zoological Gardens in the late 1840s, for example, and was leading his band there during the Great Exhibition of 1851.⁴³ When the Crystal Palace—the most famous glasshouse of them all—was moved to Sydenham (opening in summer of 1854) it, too, became a concert venue, notably under the direction of August Manns.⁴⁴ The list goes on.

The front page of one summer 1877 issue of the *Musical World* featured advertising, on the left-hand side, for the Gatti promenade concerts at Covent Garden and, on the right-hand side, for Luise Liebhart’s Grand Concerts at the Agricultural Hall, Islington. The first line of information about the latter events promised no less than “Ten Thousand Pounds’ worth of Foliage Plants, Trees, Fountains, Fruits, and Flowers, from the most eminent Florists and Growers.”⁴⁵ These verdant entertainments were promenade concerts in all but name, offering “Unreserved Seats and Promenade” for the usual flat rate of one shilling. The same venue would continue to host promenade concerts for years to come, often as part of a mixed bill. In the summer of 1889 they could be found alongside “Garden *fêtes*, Flower shows, Variety entertainment . . . Military bands [and] Cooke’s arcadian al fresco circus,” with the whole attraction entitled *Arcadia, a Veritable Fairyland*.⁴⁶ Another notice from the same summer details “Fountains, Flowers, Palm Groves, Alcoves, [and] Ferneries,” as well as “Thousands of Coloured Lights and Lanterns.” There was even a “GRAND CASCADE 75 feet wide, falling 50 feet,” which represents an apex of sorts for the subject of this essay.⁴⁷

<S>Conclusions

<TX>By now it should be clear that the series of promenade concerts instigated at Queen’s Hall in 1895 was by no means the first to install a fountain. The tradition that ended in 2010 went back much further than the small number of dutiful press reports at the time implied. In fact, I

would suggest that Cathcart's innovation was not to include the fountain, but to exclude the more outlandish Arcadian accoutrements described above. The origins of the BBC Proms thus lie in a partial refusal of the environmental imagination—decorations and all—that I have been tracking in this essay. Nevertheless, one of the most consistent features of the promenade tradition, from the 1830s to the present day, has been an attempt to bring elements of outdoor experience within the interior concert space. This process of interiorization has not been simple. It represents a challenge for historians of urban culture, not least because the elements involved—leaves, breezes, hanging around—defy obvious categorization in terms of taste and class. While existing narratives about promenade concerts and the popularization of classical music remain compelling, they have relatively little to say about architecture and environment. In this essay, I have tried to begin to remedy that, to pause by the pool for long enough to take the temperature of this concert hall curiosity, to ask how it got there, and why it lasted so long.

In concluding, I also want to ask to what extent the historical connections between promenade concerts and the built environment remain relevant. In recent times, at least in the United Kingdom, discussions of this distinctive performance format have been bound up in sometimes vicious debates about national identity and so-called culture wars. More specifically, the much-hyped Last Night of the Proms has served as a lightning rod for political comment about flags, jingoism, and the words to “Rule, Britannia!”⁴⁸ This is an important debate to have, but it is one that risks reducing promenade concerts to a mere play of symbols, without depth, without sound, without geography. There is more to the BBC Proms than the Last Night and there is more to the Last Night than the Royal Albert Hall. Early in this essay, I referred to the concerts under the banner of Proms in the Park held not only in Hyde Park, but also in cities across the four nations of the United Kingdom. Most of these concerts (in London and

elsewhere) are recorded for broadcast on BBC radio and/or television. When the Last Night comes around it brings together the largest “single” audience, with satellite link-ups and big screen simulcasts used to foster a sense of connection among the 6,000-odd souls inside the Royal Albert Hall, the many more thousands sitting or standing in urban parks, and millions of listeners and viewers tuning in from home. Somewhere in that mix is a vestige of the older, pre-1895 tradition of promenade concerts, in which musical free-and-easiness mediated the city and the country, the indoors and the outside. Perhaps the fountain is not finished, after all—it has just left the building.

Abstract

Discussions of promenade concerts, at least in the United Kingdom, tend to run along one of two lines: either the format is emblematic of attempts to popularize classical music or (in the famous case of the Last Night of the BBC Proms) it is symptomatic of a contested cultural nationalism. An alternative line of inquiry is to consider promenade concerts as part of the built environment. Until 2010 the fountain at the Royal Albert Hall was a mainstay of musical promenading; it had been so for over a century and a half. Such fountains, often accompanied by potted plants and Arcadian décor, were said to cool the concert hall and freshen the air, especially when their sprinkles were supplemented with blocks of imported ice. They occupied a prominent place in a concert architecture that encouraged mobility and informality, drawing on a long tradition of outdoor promenading that had gradually moved indoors. The history of concert hall suggests that the promenade phenomenon not only constituted a site of social and political negotiation (as it has typically been described), but also a staging post in the enclosure of hitherto open spaces and an example of the Victorian desire to control the climate of public assembly. Keywords: promenade concerts, Victorian London, built environment, popularization, middle class

Plate 1: Promotional lithograph for promenade concerts at Hengler's Cirque on Argyle Street, London. Printed by M.M. Hanly, 18a Fetter Lane, E. C., c. 1880. Evanion Collection 2584. By permission of the British Library.

¹ Gareth Thomas [for *BBC Music Magazine*], "Removal of Proms Fountain Causes Outcry," *Classical Music*, 7 September 2011, <https://www.classical-music.com/news/removal-proms-fountain-causes-outcry/>.

² Roger Wright, "Roger Wright Introduces This Year's Proms," *BBC Radio 3 Blog*, 14 July 2011, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio3/2011/07/roger-wright-introduces-this-y.shtml>.

³ "Unveiling the 2019 BBC Proms," *BBC Media Centre*, 17 April 2019, bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/proms2019/earth.

⁴ Robert McFarlane and Jackie Morris, *The Lost Words: A Spell Book* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2017). This illustrated book inspired a series of spin-off musical projects, including the Proms performance, under the banner of *Spell Songs*. For details, see: thelostwords.org/spell-songs/.

⁵ The accommodation of such varied repertoire within a single environmental frame tells us more about current programming strategies than any hitherto unacknowledged historical or aesthetic affinities. The Alps are not the Earth any more than the book of Genesis is a ramble in the countryside. To flatten such distinctions or imply a false consensus of creative purpose would run counter to the ambitions of this essay.

⁶ "Sustainability Information," *Proms in the Park 2019, London*, no date, bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1W11YxrwKIP5Xpx4KWbsswP/sustainability-information. The Creative Green Certification (three out of five stars in 2017 climbing to four out of five in 2018) comes from

London-based arts charity Julie’s Bicycle, which describes its mission as “support[ing] the creative community to act on climate change.” For details, see juliesbicycle.com.

⁷ The summer of 2010 was, at the time, the hottest on record in the northern hemisphere. That record has—predictably and miserably—been surpassed multiple times since.

⁸ Thomas, “Removal of Proms Fountain Causes Outcry.”

⁹ Quoted in Thomas, “Removal of Proms Fountain Causes Outcry.”

¹⁰ @bbcproms, 28 August 2017

¹¹ Dan Zerdin, “How the Proms Had Their tone – and Temperature – Lowered,” *The Guardian Music Blog*, 16 August 2013,

theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2013/aug/16/proms-george-cathcart-wagner-fountain.

¹² There is an extensive literature on the BBC Proms, which invariably links to the series beginning in 1895. One of the earliest books on the subject, besides commemorative works produced in house, was Ateş Orga’s *The Proms* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1975). Two more books, both by former BBC employees, soon followed: Barrie Hall’s *The Proms and the Men Who Made Them* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981) and Robert Simpson’s *The Proms and Natural Justice: A Plan for Renewal* (London: Toccata Press, 1981). For a more up-to-date account see Jenny Doctor, David Wright, and Nicholas Kenyon, eds., *The Proms: A New History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007).

¹³ As well as the earth and the environment theme in 2019, there was a strand of programming celebrating the 150th anniversary of Wood’s birth.

¹⁴ For a broader discussion of European and North American pitch concerns around this time see Fanny Gribenski, “Tuning Forks as Time Travel Machines: Pitch Standardisation and Historicism,” in “Sonic Things: Knowledge Formation in Flux,” eds. Viktoria Tkaczyk and Leendert van der Miesen, *Sound Studies* 6, no. 2 (2020): 153–73. See also Gribenski’s contribution to the current special issue of this journal.

¹⁵ “Promenade Concerts,” *Musical News* 13, no. 340, 4 September 1897, 204.

¹⁶ I thank Peter McMurray for noting, in response to this contemporary press comment, how the long shadow of the *Ring Cycle* was surely cast over any watery orchestral music at this time.

¹⁷ I would also like to thank Chris Collins for relaying an anecdote about a BBC Proms concert in the early 2000s when the technical team at the Royal Albert Hall apparently forgot to switch off the pump after the interval. As the orchestra started playing some of the Prommers shouted “FOUNTAIN!” and the water soon fell quiet. While the mishap was apparently taken in good humour, the shout out from the auditorium suggests a playful way of policing an unwritten code of “silent” listening. By this logic the sound of the fountain is pleasant in the interval, yet a nuisance during performance.

¹⁸ “Queen’s Hall Promenade Concerts,” *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 36, no. 631, September 1, 1895, 600. For a more detailed impression of how this title reported on promenade concerts, see Percy Scholes, *The Mirror of Music, 1844–1944: A Century of Musical Life in Britain as Reflected in the Pages of the Musical Times* (London: Novello, 1947), esp. 192–93.

¹⁹ “The Concert of the Future,” *The Monthly Musical Record* 25, no. 299 (November 1, 1895): 241–42 (242).

²⁰ “The Concert of the Future,” 241.

²¹ “The Concert of the Future,” 241.

²² “Queen’s Hall Promenade Concerts.”

²³ “The Concert of the Future,” 241.

²⁴ Peter Barber, “Gatti Family (per. 1847–1981), Restaurateurs, Theatre Owners, and Entrepreneurs,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; accessed 10 October 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/53168>

²⁵ “Covent Garden Promenade Concerts,” *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* 7, no. 184 (August 18, 1877): 522.

²⁶ For an example of a Victorian musician who approached promenade concerts with considered disdain, see Christina Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture: John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), esp. 72 and 219.

²⁷ “Covent Garden Promenade Concerts.”

²⁸ “Music and the Drama,” *Mayfair: A Quarterly Magazine* part 2, vol. 1 (October 1874): 234–41 (241).

²⁹ Barber, “Gatti Family.”

³⁰ The disdain expressed in the 1890s for the “old days” at Covent Garden may also have been laced with xenophobia and a resentment of wealthy immigrants. By the end of the century the Gatti family was associated not only with ice cream and promenade concerts but also cafés and music halls. Theirs was a visible presence in the landscape of popular London entertainment and an easy target for criticism.

³¹ Derek Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41–44.

³² Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture*, esp. 72, 85, 160, and 219–20.

³³ William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 86.

³⁴ George Speaight, “Hengler, (Frederick) Charles (1820–1887), Circus Proprietor,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; accessed 10 October 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12926>.

³⁵ The British Library holds a collection of programmes for the Lyceum promenade concerts of 1838–1840, published under the title of the *Theatrical and Concert Companion* (later the *Concert Companion and Musical Journal* then the *Concert Companion*). While the Lyceum promenades were among the first in London to be advertised as standalone concerts, there were similar events put on earlier in the decade, such as the “Musical Promenades” promoted by Madame Tussaud and Sons in 1833. See John Theodore Tussaud, *The Romance of Madame Tussaud's* (New York: George H. Doran, 1920), 108–09.

³⁶ On Musard's career see François Gasnault, *Guinguettes et Lorettes. Bals publics à Paris au xix^e siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1986). See also John Spitzer, "The Entrepreneur-Conductors and Their Orchestras," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 5, no. 1 (2008): 3–24.

³⁷ Musard had first-hand experience of London concert life, having worked in the city for much of the 1820s. It was during this time that the Vauxhall gardens enjoyed royal patronage from the newly crowned George IV. For more on music in London's pleasure gardens, see Rachel Cowgill, "Performance Alfresco: Music-Making in English Pleasure Gardens," in *The Pleasure Garden: From Vauxhall to Coney Island*, ed. Jonathan Conley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 100–26. I thank Catherine Harbor for the observation that heat was just as important as refreshment in London's eighteenth-century pleasure gardens, as evidenced by the furnace pictured in a variation on Canaletto's famous image of the "The Interior of the Rotunda, Ranelagh." See Thomas Bowles II, "The Inside View of the Rotunda in Ranelagh Gardens with the Company at Breakfast," published in London by Robert Wilkinson in 1753 (British Museum 1872,0608.255).

³⁸ See Planque, *Agenda musical pour l'année 1836* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1981), 76–78, cited in Spitzer, "The Entrepreneur-conductors and their Orchestras," 6.

³⁹ Stephanie Schroedter, "Listening in Motion and Listening to Motion: The Concept of Kinaesthetic Listening Exemplified by Dance Compositions of the Meyerbeer Era," in *Bild und Bewegung im Musiktheater: Interdisziplinäre Studien im Umfeld der Grand opéra*, eds. Roman Brotbeck, Laura Moeckli, Anette Schaffer, and Stephanie Schroedter (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2018), 13–42 (esp. 25–26).

⁴⁰ "Miscellaneous," *The Musical World* no. 219, new series 127 (4 June 1840): 359–60 (359).

⁴¹ One prominent example from across the Channel is the Cirque Napoléon, which opened in Paris in 1852 and has been known, since 1870, as the Cirque d'hiver. It was here that Jules Etienne Padeloup's eponymous concerts ran for over twenty years from 1861.

⁴² Noël Goodwin, “Mellon, Alfred,” in *Grove Music Online*, 20 January 2001; accessed 31 March 2021, <https://doi-org.nls.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.46377>.

⁴³ On Jullien at the Surrey Zoological Gardens, see James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart, “Fantasies of Total Description,” in *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789–1851*, eds. James Q. Davies and Ellen Lockhart (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1–24 (esp. 9–10).

⁴⁴ See Michael Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴⁵ *The Musical World* 55, no. 34, 25 August 1877, 565.

⁴⁶ Notice for *Arcadia, a Veritable Fairyland* (1889). British Library Evanion Collection, Evan.47.

⁴⁷ Notice for *Arcadia, a Veritable Fairyland* (1889). British Library Evanion Collection, Evan.614.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, “Rees-Mogg Plays Rule, Britannia! in Commons to Celebrate Proms U-turn,” *The Guardian*, 3 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/sep/03/rees-mogg-plays-rule-britannia-commons-celebrate-proms-u-turn>.