Introduction

When I began this study many years ago the social history of music was still a fledgling discipline, and the few works in that field tended to focus primarily on sources of financial support such as patrons and audiences.[1] Although patronage is certainly very important, from the perspectives of a social historian it is only one part of the story and neglects the lives, perceptions, and values of the musicians themselves. The present study was influenced by a number of approaches – the themes and methods of labor history, Marx's assertions that consciousness evolved from human interactions in pursuit of material subsistence,[2] and the French *Annales* historians' rich interweaving of social and intellectual history.[3] Inspired by such sources, it proceeds from the assumption that in order to study the social context of music it is necessary first to consider the musicians who created music and made decisions about musical life – their economic, social, professional, and artistic goals, and the material and cultural conditions under which these goals were pursued. Recreating the landscape of musicians' careers and perceptions from 1750 to 1850 is the central task of this book.

It soon became clear to me that during the social and economic transformation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, professional musicians occupied a complex and ambiguous social status that did not fit neatly into existing social categories. Their low social origins and severe financial hardships might have made them sympathetic subjects for labor historians, but the same musicians' glaringly middle-class social values and aspirations would certainly have tempered those sympathies. Their professional claims and values might have inspired the interest of historians of the professions, but such scholars have tended to focus on occupations that either already enjoyed or eventually achieved professional status. But even well after the mid-nineteenth century the social and professional status of musicians remained equivocal. Of course it was just such ambiguities, interacting as they did with the musical life of the time, that made musicians' careers so intriguing a field of inquiry.

I also thought it possible that investigating the social ambiguities and economic struggles of musicians might shed light on a larger musical conundrum. The apparent lack of great native composers in England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has led some to describe it as the "land without music."[4] Finding explanations for the relative dearth of musical creativity during this period has been an ongoing challenge for historians of British music.[5] I suspected that the preoccupation of musicians with day-to-day social and economic concerns may have led them to place relatively less emphasis on musical and artistic values, with potentially serious implications for the development of British music during those years. This suspicion was confirmed; indeed, musicians' preoccupations extended beyond social and economic struggles to include a range of negative cultural beliefs which thwarted their social, professional, and artistic aspirations.

The focus on the struggles and aspirations of individual musicians led my research away from a more conventional study of musical institutions and patronage and toward a study of career patterns and perceptions. This meant not only the sequence of events in individual careers, but the minutiae of musicians' daily professional lives: choice of career, training, employment, wages, job security, hard times, relationships with colleagues and employers, and perceptions of social and professional status. Methods and concepts that proved useful for answering these questions included the empirical resources of social history, the richness of the *Annales* school's concept of *mentalités*,[6] and the technique of prosopography (collective biography), especially as it was developed by historians of science. The latter were experimenting with this technique as a way of deriving cultural meaning from the social identity of certain groups.[7]

Toward accomplishing the task of reconstructing the daily realities of musicians' careers, I compiled a biographical catalogue of almost 6,600 professional musicians who worked between 1750 and 1850 in all branches and levels of musical activity: church organists and singers, secular singers and instrumentalists, teachers, composers, and entrepreneurs. The catalogue drew from a wide range of sources, some of them previously unexplored: manuscript letters and account books, contemporary musical directories, periodicals, books and pamphlets. One of the richest was the manuscript archive of the Royal Society of Musicians, which includes membership applications for 696 musicians during this period. These applications indicate the musicians' age, marital status, number of children, musical training received and the name of the master (if the applicant had served an apprenticeship), current sources of employment, and current income. In the cases of musicians who requested financial assistance, the files contain letters filled with insights into the conditions of musical employment, the extent of musicians' financial resources, and, in

many cases, the values and perceptions of musicians struggling to endure illness, old age, unemployment, and even debtors' prisons. Occasionally the files include indenture agreements to apprentice the children of musicians who had become claimants on the Society. A number of other manuscript sources – including the Treasury Account Book of the Philharmonic Society and the choir records of Westminster Abbey – provide useful information on wages.

Viewed through the same conceptual lens – the professional lives of musicians – even the printed sources yield up new treasures. Biographical dictionaries play an important role. John Sainsbury's *Dictionary of Musicians*, compiled in the early 1820s, incorporates autobiographical letters that Sainsbury solicited from professional musicians throughout Britain. In some cases he seems to have incorporated parts of the responses verbatim, resulting in entries which are both uneven and rich, frequently offering colorful insights into the values and perceptions of contemporary musicians. Early editions of Sir George Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as well as a later source, James Duff Brown and Stephen Stratton's *British Musical Biography*, provide additional information. Inspired by a patriotic wish to preserve the memory of British musicians, Brown and Stratton's late nineteenth-century professional ideals caused them to list professional memberships and awards while tending to omit evidence of the sorts of traditional patronage relationships that had been proudly included in the same musicians' accounts in the Sainsbury dictionary.

Other contemporary printed sources supply much biographical information as well as glimpses of values and perceptions. Musical periodicals provide evidence of the history and contemporary character of musical institutions, membership lists of orchestras and concerts, and heated editorials on issues of concern to professional musicians. Books and pamphlets by musicians are a particularly rich source of values and perceptions. Among the most valuable are works by H. J. Banister, William Hayes, Michael Kelly, W. T. Parke, John Potter, R. J. S. Stevens, S. S. Wesley, and T. D. Worgan.

The resulting catalogue (referred to as 'the catalogue' throughout this study) is more representative of some decades than others. Table 1 indicates the number of musicians in the catalogue who were present in each decade, the total number of names in musical directories, and the number of musicians counted in census years. The two directories – Doane's 1794 directory and the Musical Directory of 1855 – provide many names as well as brief biographical information. The catalogue is probably most representative in the period from 1790 to 1830 and in the 1850s, because the sources were particularly complete for these decades.

Since I compiled the catalogue and first wrote about it several years ago,

Table 1. *Number of musicians in the catalogue, by decade*
n = 6,587

Date	Catalogue	Directories	Census	
			London	Britain
1750–59	368			
1760–69	421			
1770–79	569			
1780–89	681			
1790–99	1,821	1794: 1,271		
1800–09	906			
1810–19	1,162			
1820–29	1,456			
1830–39	1,440			
1840–49	1,727		1841: 1,168	3,992
1850–59	3,117	1855: 2,246	1851: 3,686	11,203

both musicology and social history have traveled far. In the past two decades British musicology has flourished, producing much valuable analysis of the institutional, biographical, and musical landscape.[8] The field of social history has also been transformed profoundly: late twentieth-century political developments challenged some of Marx's interpretations of class and history;[9] linguistic studies have alerted historians to the role of language and ideas in social history;[10] and the evolution of gender studies and feminist history have offered new perspectives on all aspects of society and culture.[11]

Several of these developments have enriched the conceptual framework of the present work. My earlier, gently Marxist assumption that musicians' careers and concerns represent an essential link between musical life and its social context still seems to be on target. But this is far from a narrowly materialist view. Perceptions of music and musicians, the attitudes and ideals of musicians themselves, and the intersections among gender, class, and nationality – all play central roles. The social and economic conditions of musical careers presented one set of challenges to musicians as they collectively struggled to define and enhance their professional status; the complex networks of values and perceptions that were interwoven with musical experience presented another. A synthesis of approaches to both these groups of issues is essential if we are to understand musicians who focused simultaneously on sometimes desperate economic struggles, complex social interactions, and the creation and production of music. We need to take all these elements into account in order to reconstruct the *mentalités* of professional musical life.[12]

Chapter 1 of this study sets the stage for musicians in the eighteenth century, in the early days of the social, economic, and political transformation of Britain, just as British musical life started to expand dramatically.[13] The chapter also introduces the central issues for musicians throughout this period: their relative lack of professional status, organization, and autonomy; foreign competition; and a network of cultural values about music, nationality, gender, and class – values that English musicians navigated with great difficulty. Chapter 2 considers musicians' social and geographical origins and circumstances. Since the financial support for music and the range of patronage relationships are very important for understanding both careers and perceptions, chapter 3 examines the system of patronage and how it evolved. Chapter 4 describes the evolution of institutions for musical education, proposals to reform the system, and implications for musicians' professional autonomy. Chapters 5–8 present the career characteristics of various branches of the profession. Although wages are discussed throughout, chapter 9 specifically addresses the economic conditions of musical careers and the institutions that were founded to assist impoverished musicians. Finally, chapter 10 focuses primarily on the nineteenth-century context, particularly the solutions proposed by musicians as they attempted to redefine their social and professional identity. By the 1840s, after a century of social, political, and cultural transformation, we can discern new and pragmatic compromises in musicians' professional identity, careers, and aspirations at a time when musicians had not yet attained an unequivocal social and professional status.

The place of women in the profession was important and increased significantly in the nineteenth century, but to insert a separate chapter seemed an inadequate treatment, for the careers and struggles of women musicians were intricately connected with the careers of their male colleagues, and the evolving gender values and perceptions of the time presented professional and artistic challenges to male and female musicians alike. In a separate study I have traced one influential attempt by women musicians to organize themselves into an effective professional group, the Royal Society of Female Musicians.[14] For the purposes of this book, however, the findings of that study (as well as other information about women musicians) have been incorporated where relevant throughout.

1 The social and professional status of musicians in the eighteenth century

Like many other eighteenth-century professionals, musicians belonged to the large, socially and economically fluid group that historians term the "middling sort."[1] The economic pressures and occupational reconfigurations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries presented them – both individually and collectively – with significant challenges. As a result, their social identities evolved in a variety of possible directions. The historian John Seed has argued convincingly that focusing solely on the "rise of the middle class" during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries neglects the history of the "middle ranks" from which it emerged. It is essential to perceive "the way in which as a social category 'the middling sort' were splintering into a number of quite different strata and quite divergent individual fates."[2] Many members of the middle ranks experienced downward social mobility. Others rose to the level of small employers, although perhaps not entirely partaking of the new cultural definition of "middle-class." Still others stayed more or less in the same place but with some loss of social status and stability, evolving into what has been termed the "middling class" of the early nineteenth century.[3] And some moved into "quite new and distinctive middle-class groups: new professions, white-collar groupings, specialised functionaries within commerce and so on."[4]

A close study of musicians has revealed the full range of outcomes just described, with important implications for the evolution of the profession. The nature of the struggle of musicians to maintain or raise their social and professional status will be a central theme of this book. This chapter will first consider "profession" as a general category in the eighteenth century and the musical profession in particular,[5] including the minimal but growing presence of women in the profession. It will then examine two of the major obstacles facing the musical profession's autonomy and status: foreign competition, and a variety of negative cultural perceptions about music and musicians.

Professional status

"Profession" was not a new concept or occupational category in the eighteenth century. While the rise of the professions has often been linked with the development of a middle class in the early nineteenth century, the professions in England had had a long history.[6] The three traditional professions were divinity, medicine, and law, although other occupations increasingly shared their social status and professional ideals. Music had at one time enjoyed some of the trappings of an elite profession, and in the eighteenth century still retained vestiges of its former status.

The traditional professions were characterized primarily by their suitability as careers for gentlemen: they involved no manual labor, were based on a liberal (classical) education, and were protected by church, state, and university from undue competition. There were two educational routes to membership in a profession. The historian W. J. Reader describes the elite route: "the essential qualification for entry into any of these three occupations, which were sometimes called the 'learned' professions, was a liberal education: that is, the education of a gentleman, not of a trader or an artisan."[7] It was assumed that individuals with a sound classical education and general erudition would be entirely capable of learning whatever else they needed to know through independent study. At the same time, part of the claim to independent and exclusive professional status depended on access to specialized knowledge: "it was the type of learning which professionals possessed, rather than social status or institutional forms of organisation, which set them apart from other groups."[8] The status of the old elite professions was guaranteed by their presumed theoretical bases, classical educations, and links with church, state, and university.

Alongside the old elite professions, there were lower branches – especially in law and medicine. Sometimes viewed as specifically eighteenth-century upstarts, the professional status of attorneys (later called solicitors), surgeons, and apothecaries in fact began much earlier. They were distinguished from the elite branches of the professions by the social origins of their members, who generally emerged from a lower, artisanal, social stratum of the "middling sort," and by their educations, which were largely practical and obtained through apprenticeship. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such groups organized and attempted to gain increased legitimacy as professions. At the same time, newer aspiring professions (veterinary surgeons, civil engineers, architects, surveyors), which did not have high-status counterparts, were also organizing to achieve middle-class professional status and independence. The attempts by these occupations to assert their own professional importance posed a threat to the traditional professions. W. J. Reader points out the tendency

of the higher-status branches, especially in medicine, to try to obstruct the process of professionalization in the lower ranks: "The physicians were fighting a determined defensive action, not at all to their own credit or ultimate advantage."[9]

How did the lower branches of both the old professions and the new, aspiring ones achieve their goals? The main strategy was to assert control over entrance, training, and certification. For example, the Apothecaries Act of 1815 granted the London Society of Apothecaries the legal right to forbid anyone to use the title "apothecary" who had not fulfilled the minimum qualifications set by the Society. The new professions thus established minimum educational standards, formed qualifying associations that gave examinations and granted licenses, and established professional training institutions that replaced the traditional apprenticeship route.[10] In this way, aspiring professions formulated a theoretical basis for their work that put them on a level with the established professions, and protected their credibility, while also asserting the importance of more practical kinds of expertise to justify their ability to complement or compete with the traditional professions.

Professional status was inextricably linked with social status, and the professionalizing impetus was largely about raising or preserving a particular social position. As a result of the redrawing of social categories, members of the middle ranks experienced heightened pressure to achieve and to consolidate their middle-class status, both as an end in itself and to safeguard access to a middle-class clientele. M. S. Larson has argued convincingly that the "market control" achieved by professional self-regulation was closely harnessed to the goal of collective social mobility.[11] The Society of Gentlemen Practitioners (attorneys), founded in the first half of the eighteenth century, was concerned primarily with raising the notoriously low public image of attorneys. Wilfrid Prest identifies this organization as "a precursor of the Victorian 'qualifying associations' which eventually came to control most professional and would-be professional occupations."[12] It tried to exclude members whose low social origins and/or unscrupulous business practices contributed to the popular prejudices against attorneys.[13] Such measures also gave the professions power to assure conformity with the emerging middle-class standards of decorum and respectability. Another example was the founding of the Royal Academy in 1768. Jeremy Black explains that it was founded to elevate the fine arts, and that "engravers were excluded from the ranks of the Academy for many years because they were regarded as artisanal."[14]

It is particularly important to note the character of the social aspirations shared by both traditional and aspiring professions. According to Harold Perkin, the ideals of the professional middle class were at first closely

related to those of entrepreneurs, but diverged increasingly into a discrete ideal by the mid-nineteenth century.[15] The professional ideal, obsessed with social status, eager to dissociate itself from trade, and focused on formal education and high standards of moral conduct, in some ways aimed even higher than a middle-class ideal. As Reader expresses it, "Their idea of social standing was to get as close as they could to the pattern set by the landed gentry, or what they imagined the pattern to be";[16] "the new professional man brought one scale of values – the gentleman's – to bear upon the other – the tradesman's."[17] The uneasy combination of such ideals is particularly characteristic of musicians, whose careers often combined both relatively low social and economic conditions with direct dealings with wealthy patrons.

Unlike emerging professions such as apothecaries, architects, engineers, and the artistic professions of painting or acting, music could claim a long history of association with the requisite characteristics of a traditional profession: a high-status career track securely linked to church and universities; a foundation of theoretical knowledge; recognition as a liberal art by the universities (which had been granting degrees in music since 1463); and essential social value due to its role in the cathedral services of the Anglican Church. The formal education of musicians, which included classical languages, had been provided for in the centuries-old royal endowments attached to the cathedrals.

Music also had a lower-status, artisanal branch made up primarily of secular musicians such as stage singers and orchestral instrumentalists. These musicians benefited as the increasingly prosperous middle classes eagerly adopted the practices of a cultured elite – attending concerts, purchasing instruments and sheet music, and taking private lessons.[18] As one periodical reported in 1821, "There are . . . the strongest proofs that it [music] is becoming the ornament and the solace of other classes beside the most affluent . . . The proofs to which we allude are, the increasing manufacture of instruments, the vast augmentation of musical publications, and the number of professors and instructors."[19]

It would seem that musicians were in a good position to enjoy both the advantages of traditional professional status and the growth in demand for secular musicians. However, even in the mid-eighteenth century the high-status branch of the musical profession no longer commanded its former prestige, the financial and social advantages of careers in church music and of university degrees in music had declined considerably, and the old profession with its church and university ties became much less significant in the profession as a whole. No successful attempt to reverse this trend occurred until at least the middle of the nineteenth century. This decline weakened the theoretical, intellectual component of the profession, and

with it music's identity as one of the liberal arts. Since the intellectual component, recognition by the universities, and an essential role in the church were the primary legitimizing characteristics for the musical profession, the decline in church music careers in the eighteenth century struck at the foundation of musicians' traditional claims for professional status.

By the late eighteenth century, music was no longer viewed primarily as a liberal art or a liberal profession, but rather as an artisanal craft with links to the theatres and pleasure gardens, financial insecurity, and poor long-term economic or social prospects. Partly as a result of the growing demand, the urban, secular branch had in the eighteenth century already started to become the most significant branch of the profession, both musically and economically. This occupational classification is accurately reflected in Patrick Colquhoun's tables of national income distribution for 1806.[20] In the more detailed of his two tables, he defined the liberal arts and sciences as medicine, literature, and the fine arts. In the more general table the term "liberal professions" includes the same items as well as law. Musicians, however, whose estimated incomes were somewhat lower than those in the professional category, were labeled as "Persons employed in theatrical pursuits, and attached to theatres and concerts, as musicians, etc."

In order to withstand the loss of prestige of its higher branch, as well as the social and economic pressures building toward the end of the century, musicians needed to organize in some way. As Reader explains, "An occupation's rise to professional standing can be pretty accurately charted by reference to the progress of its professional institute or association."[21] At first such associations were usually informal, without recognition outside the profession; the more important next step was incorporation, usually by means of a royal charter, "which may be said to confer official recognition by the State that the occupation has achieved professional standing."[22]

The musical profession included a number of organizations, and individual musicians proposed others, but only one – the Royal Society of Musicians, founded in 1738 – had any of the characteristics of a professional association.[23] Application for membership in the Society usually required a statement of the nature and extent of the musicians' training, employment, and income, and this information was verified by the signatures of other musicians. A royal charter was granted in 1790.[24] However, the RSM had none of the powers normally granted by royal charter such as control over examinations and licensing, or the authority to take legal action against unqualified practitioners. Although composed of the leading London musicians, it had been founded to provide charitable assistance to its members, and this remained its primary function. The RSM's