During the second half of the eighteenth century, the pace of London’s concert life quickened dramatically, reflecting both the prosperity and the commercial vitality of the capital. The most significant development was the establishment of the public concert within the social and cultural life of fashionable society. The subscription concerts that premiered symphonies by J. C. Bach and Haydn were conspicuous symbols of luxury, even though they were promoted on broadly commercial lines. It was a lucrative environment that attracted many other foreign musicians, including the Mozart family in 1764 and virtuosos like Clementi, Dussek and Viotti, whose influential music deserves greater recognition. At the same time London supported two alternative cultural environments. One was based around the English music of composers such as Arne and Boyce. The other was dedicated to the preservation of older repertoire, culminating in the massive Handel Commemoration of 1784. Drawing on hitherto untapped archival sources and a comprehensive study of daily newspapers, this book analyses audiences at venues as diverse as the Hanover Square Rooms, Vauxhall Gardens and City taverns. The musical taste of the London public is investigated in the light of contemporary theories of aesthetics; and there is detailed discussion of the financial and practical aspects of concert management and performance, in a period that encouraged enterprise and innovation.
Concert life
in London from
Mozart to Haydn
Concert life in London from Mozart to Haydn

SIMON McVEIGH
Lecturer in Music,
Goldsmiths' College, University of London
To my parents
Contents

List of illustrations: xxi
Preface: xiii
Acknowledgments: xvii
List of abbreviations: xviii
Map of London in the second half of the eighteenth century: xx

1 Prologue: 1

The social role of the concert

2 ‘An exclusive principle’: subscription and ancient concerts: 11
3 Other types of concert: 28
4 The concert in London life: 53

Attracting an audience

5 The musical product: novelty and familiarity: 73
6 The musical product: programming: 101
7 Taste and national idioms: 119
8 Musical style: ‘music intended to reach the heart’: 129
9 Musical style: the learned, the sublime and the dramatic: 149

Concert management and the musician

10 The finances of concert promotion: 167
11 Life as a professional musician: 182
12 The practicalities of concert promotion: 206
13 Epilogue: 223

Appendix A. Subscription and oratorio series: 233
Appendix B. Concert programmes: 242
Appendix C. Concert accounts: 250
Notes: 252
Musical sources: 272
Select bibliography: 274
Index: 287
Illustrations

Plates

1 The Hanover Square Rooms in 1843  page 16
2 The Handel Commemoration at Westminster Abbey, c. 1793  23
3 The royal box at the Pantheon for the Handel Commemoration, 1784  26
4 An oratorio performance at Covent Garden Theatre  30
5 The rotunda at Ranelagh Gardens, 1754  40
6 A concert at Vauxhall Gardens, c. 1784  42
7 Earl Cowper and the Gore family: a private concert, c. 1775  44
8 A ticket for Giardini's benefit, 1780  59
9 A handbill for the New Musical Fund benefit, 1791  74
10 Advertisements for Haydn's first London concert and for a Handel selection, 1791  77

Plans

1 Plan of the performers at the Handel Commemoration in 1784  page 210
2 The arrangement of performers at the Academy of Ancient Music in the early 1790s  211
3 Reconstruction of the orchestral arrangement at Salomon's concerts, 1791–4  212
Preface

London’s importance in the early development of the public concert has been recognised since the eighteenth century itself. The main outlines – from the modest City origins of the late seventeenth century through to the fashionable subscription concerts of Salomon and Haydn at the end of the eighteenth – are well enough known. But the only extensive study of London’s concert life in the second half of the eighteenth century remains C. F. Pohl’s *Mozart and Haydn in London*, published in German as long ago as 1867. Furthermore, the history of the public concert has often been misinterpreted as a smooth progression of middle-class commercial endeavour, leading directly from John Banister’s concerts at his Whitefriars music-school in 1672 to the symphony concerts at today’s Festival Hall. In fact the process was by no means so smooth; nor is the role of the middle classes, however defined, nearly so straightforward.

Undoubtedly music played its part in the ‘commercialisation of leisure’, to quote the title of J. H. Plumb’s 1972 Stenton Lecture which has had such an influence on eighteenth-century studies in general. Music-publishing and instrument-selling are clear examples of a luxury product spreading into new middle-class markets. The rise of the public concert has traditionally been regarded in the same light. In fact London’s concerts developed in a quite different manner. Certainly they were commercialised, in the sense that tickets were sold by enterprising impresarios, who sought to attract audiences by strenuous advertising and by all kinds of attention-seeking publicity ruses. But the price and ticketing systems of the principal subscription concerts and benefits were specifically designed to maintain social exclusivity, a cachet reinforced by the novelty of the entertainments on offer – usually the latest foreign music and the most prestigious soloists. London’s early concert life in reality developed somewhat fitfully; the main achievement of the later eighteenth century was the establishment of public concerts in the fashionable calendar of high society. Concerts remained at the forefront of London’s entertainments at least from the mid 1760s to the mid 1790s – the successful years of J. C. Bach and Abel, of the Pantheon and the Professionals, of Salomon. The extent of bourgeois participation, whether by attendance at the
Preface

top concerts or by emulation elsewhere, is open to debate, as will be seen. But it would certainly be a mistake to attribute the rise of the modern symphony concert to a welling-up of middle-class energies. In this respect, the study of concert life evidently contributes to the current debate about the relative roles of the aristocracy and the middle classes in British political and social life. The realignment of the upper classes is particularly manifest within the ‘ancient-music’ movement, investigated in detail by William Weber in his recent study *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1992), to which this book, with its emphasis on London’s modern musical culture, is intended to be complementary.

The second half of the eighteenth century forms a convenient period for reasons other than mere chronology. In the early 1750s London witnessed a sudden explosion of concert activity, and Charles Burney regarded the arrival of Felice Giardini in 1751 as the start of a new era in the instrumental music of the capital. Indeed the foundation of the modern symphony-concert series in London can effectively be dated to that very year, coinciding with the introduction of Italian symphonies in an early Classical style. The end of the century, perhaps surprisingly, forms a natural end to the cycle: the departure of Haydn in 1795, among other factors, brought about a temporary decline in the vitality of London’s concert life, which was only resuscitated by the foundation of the Philharmonic Society in 1813.

Various limitations have deliberately been imposed on this study. The term ‘concert’ is interpreted rather loosely to incorporate public subscription series, benefits, oratorios and performances at the pleasure gardens, as well as meetings of orchestral societies and private or court concerts. But glee clubs and other convivial groups have been excluded from detailed discussion, and no attempt has been made to cover all those myriad occasions in eighteenth-century London when music played an ancillary part—from odes for anniversary dinners through elaborate church services to wind-bands playing on Thames barges. Nor has any comparison been offered between London’s musical life and that of other European capitals, in view of the insuperable obstacles as yet involved. Certainly one is tempted to speculate that London’s concert life was unrivalled in Europe for the volume and range of its activities, if not always for its creative achievements. My database *Calendar of London Concerts 1750–1800* (Goldsmiths’ College, University of London) lists nearly 5,000 public concerts—and this without several hundred unadvertised concerts at the two ancient-music societies and many more at the pleasure gardens, not to speak of private concerts. It is unlikely that such a figure could be rivalled by Paris, and it could certainly not be matched by Vienna, with its predominantly salon-concert culture. Comparison with provincial British music must also remain a subject for further inquiry. Music outside London operated within a different type of social framework, and with some notable exceptions it did not inspire new repertoire of the highest quality. But undoubtedly a fascinating network of cultural links remains to be disentangled,
Preface

both within Britain and outside it: after future research London’s music will surely appear to be only part of a much broader social and musical picture.

Much of this book is dependent on hitherto untapped newspaper sources. There are dangers in the use of such material – not only because newspaper reports are often simply unreliable, but also because editors with an eye to commercial gain made no pretence whatsoever of impartiality. Malicious gossip about musicians sold newspapers and (for a fee) it could also be planted by a rival. Nevertheless newspapers provide a much more comprehensive picture than any other single source; furthermore, the nature of advertisements and reviews gives a direct insight into the attitudes of both promoters and audiences. My research in this area has benefited greatly from the support and enthusiasm of Rosamond McGuinness. The computerised Register of Musical Data in London Newspapers 1660–1800 (Royal Holloway College, University of London) has not yet reached 1750, but I am most grateful to her and to Ian Spink for kindly making available to me the college’s newspaper microfilm resources.

I should like to acknowledge in particular the generous assistance given by William Weber and Cyril Ehrlich, whose advice and comments on sections of the manuscript were invaluable in encouraging me to view the subject in the widest perspective. Many other scholars have kindly responded to requests for information and in some cases shared research materials, among them Mark Argent, Robert Bruce, Donald Burrows, H. Dack Johnstone, David Wyn Jones, Leanne Langley, Zaide Pixley, Curtis Price, Stephen Roe and Tony Trowles. Edward Olleson skilfully guided my research during its early stages at Oxford in the late 1970s; and on one occasion he casually suggested that I might glance at a few eighteenth-century London newspapers, with consequences that even he cannot have foreseen. The archivists of the institutions acknowledged below have given unstintingly of their time; and I have also been assisted by the staff of the British Library, the Royal College of Music, the Greater London Record Office, the Guildhall Library, Marylebone Library, Lambeth Archives Department, the Theatre Museum, the Museum of London, the Bodleian Library (Oxford), the Pendlebury Library (Cambridge), Leeds Central Library, the Library of Congress (Washington) and the Beinecke Rare Book Library (Yale University). I should like also to record my gratitude to the staff of Cambridge University Press, in particular to Victoria L. Cooper and Penelope Souster, who have carefully overseen the production of this book at every stage.

Finally I should like to express my thanks to my wife Alice, without whose tireless encouragement and search for the mot juste this book would be immeasurably the poorer.
Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the following institutions for permission to reproduce extracts from their archives: the United Grand Lodge of England (Freemasons’ Hall records); the Royal Academy of Arts Library (Society of Artists); the Royal Bank of Scotland plc (Drummond’s Bank); the Royal College of Surgeons of England (Lock Hospital); the Royal Society of Musicians; the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children (Foundling Hospital).

The following have kindly supplied photographs and granted permission for their reproduction: the Hulton Picture Library (plate 1); the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (plates 2, 7); Westminster City Archives (plate 3); the Archive Department, Royal Opera House Covent Garden / trustees of the late Robert Eddison (plate 4); Trustees of the National Gallery, London (plate 5); Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (plate 6); the British Museum, London (plates 8, 9); the British Library, London (plate 10); University of London Library (plan 1).
Abbreviations

Contemporary newspapers

Full titles vary slightly from year to year

DI   The Diary, or Woodfall’s Register
DUR  The Daily Universal Register (becomes The Times)
GA   The General Advertiser
GZ   The Gazetteer
MC   The Morning Chronicle
MH   The Morning Herald
MP   The Morning Post
OR   The Oracle
PA   The Pubic Advertiser
TB   The True Briton
TI   The Times
WO   The World

Others

BL   British Library, London
Bodl. Bodleian Library, Oxford
CPL  Pendlebury Library, University Music School, Cambridge
CUL  University Library, Cambridge
EM   Early Music
GSJ  The Gespin Society Journal
IRASM International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music
JAMS Journal of the American Musicological Society
JRMA Journal of the Royal Musical Association
LS   The London Stage (see bibliography)
ML   Music & Letters
MQ   The Musical Quarterly
MR   The Music Review
MT   The Musical Times

xviii
Abbreviations

P(R)MA  Proceedings of the (Royal) Musical Association
QMMR  The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review
RCM  Royal College of Music, London
RMARC  Research Chronicle, published by the Royal Musical Association
RSM  Royal Society of Musicians

Currency

One pound (£1) = twenty shillings (20s.)
One shilling (1s.) = twelve pence (12d.)
One guinea (1 gn.) = £1 1s.
10/6 = ten shillings and sixpence (half a guinea)
Map of London in the second half of the eighteenth century, showing the principal concert venues.

XX