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In a certain opera house of northern Europe, it is the custom among members of the orchestra, several of whom are cultivated men, to spend their time reading books – or even discussing matters literary and musical – whenever they perform any second-rate operas.

Berlioz, *Evenings with the Orchestra*¹

Reading Berlioz’s *Evenings with the Orchestra* for the first time at a ‘certain university’ in the southern Pacific, I initially experienced no difficulty in engaging with its basic premise. Indeed, for a musicologist or orchestral musician, the subject position Berlioz assumes of his reader in northern Europe in 1852 is not difficult to adopt 150 years later on the other side of the world, in New Zealand, despite the historically and geographically encoded aesthetic assumptions this perspective entails. In *Evenings with the Orchestra* Berlioz presents his own music criticism as anecdotes recounted by the musicians of a fictional orchestra and overheard by the authorial persona, who engages in dialogue with the players and contributes additional stories of his own. By speaking directly to the orchestral musician, whose respect now – as then – Berlioz might count on having won through his compositions, he implicitly trusts the performer to share his own intelligence, taste, and understanding. Berlioz encourages his reader tacitly to concur with his distinctions between first- and second-rate works, between those individuals so powerfully moved by music as to die for it and those who applaud because they are paid to do so, and between the superficiality of music driven by ego or commerce and the magnificence of music that is seen to transcend such concerns. Where Berlioz’s outlook might seem extreme and in danger of alienating the reader, he offers irony or acknowledges an element of exaggeration. Both the extremity and the irony are exemplified in the twelfth ‘evening’ of *Evenings with the Orchestra*, in which an ardent young man, reminiscent of Berlioz himself, commits a ‘suicide from enthusiasm’ over the music of Spontini. While such an act might seem

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difficult to fathom, Berlioz acknowledges the improbability without wholly dismissing the possibility: ‘Do you really believe such fanaticism possible?’ the double bass player Dimsky asks, the evening after the story has been recounted in the pit; ‘I don’t believe it, but I’ve experienced it – often’, is the reply.²

However, in the case of the final story of *Evenings with the Orchestra*, Berlioz’s irony was insufficient to counter a jolt of alienation that thrust me completely outside the subject position I had adopted up to this point. The Second Epilogue of *Evenings* concludes with a story recounting ‘The Adventures of Vincent Wallace in New Zealand’. While I had thus far recognised in Berlioz’s orchestra and its (mostly) European world a precursor to my own musical experiences, the final story makes it clear that to Berlioz my homeland, New Zealand, was in every respect wholly foreign and Other, a land of cannibal warriors and alluring exotic maidens, threat and seduction, whose music is the complete antithesis of the European tradition represented by Berlioz, his fictional orchestra, and the Irish composer, Vincent Wallace, who enters this Other world.³

The fact that New Zealand in the mid nineteenth century was unlike Berlioz’s Europe should not come as any surprise to a New Zealander. Indeed, the potential shock lies not so much in the setting as in the tone of the narrative, and what it assumes of its reader. In Berlioz’s account, Vincent Wallace comes to New Zealand from Sydney to take part in a revenge attack on Māori.⁴ After tricking a number of Māori into approaching their ship, Wallace and his fellow Europeans blow them ‘sky high’ with cannonballs, to shouts of ‘God save the Queen’. The battle decisively won, Wallace goes ashore, where he is welcomed by the remnants of the tribe; he is worshipped by two young Māori girls, but his affections are inevitably drawn to the chief’s daughter, Tatea, whom he eventually wins over with a keg of tobacco. After making love in the flax bushes and celebrating with a cannibal feast, Wallace is forced to leave this supposedly idyllic life when his ship returns

² Berlioz, *Evenings with the Orchestra*, p. 152.
⁴ Berlioz actually uses the word ‘New Zealander’ rather than Māori, reflecting common usage at the time. Throughout this book I instead adopt modern practice and refer to the tangata whenua (the indigenous people of Aoteaora New Zealand) as Māori. In fact, this practice is itself anachronistic, as the tangata whenua did not identify as Māori but, rather, defined their identity through iwi (tribal) affiliations (as do many Māori today); but in the case of the Wallace narrative, the contradictory accounts of where he went within New Zealand make it difficult to establish which iwi he encountered.
to the bay. Tatea is distraught, carving her initial onto his chest in a form of tattoo, using the calligraphy Wallace has taught her. Wallace almost swims back to Tatea, but a chorus of ‘Rule Britannia’ aboard the ship gives him the requisite fortitude to sail onwards to ‘civilisation’.

The flippant tone used to relate the attack on Māori and the exoticising sexualisation of their women are offensive, but Berlioz was aware of this and, as elsewhere in Evenings, he offers irony as a means of allowing his readers to distance themselves from the views expressed. Moreover, while the story is one of the few in Evenings that is attributed to Berlioz, rather than to one of his fictional orchestral musicians, he claims to have had it ‘from Wallace himself’, and at times he interjects in the voice of his author persona to critique the attitudes assigned to Wallace. For example, when Wallace steps ashore after the massacre, Berlioz remarks: ‘I must say [. . .] you both deserved to be roasted over a slow fire and eaten. Your folly and presumption are inconceivable!’ However, even allowing for irony, a subtly disturbing trace remains in the Wallace narrative, forcing the reader to question the subject position of the composer whose music (and, to some extent, aesthetics) are elsewhere so easily accepted as part of the western musicologist’s or orchestral musician’s broader cultural heritage. Berlioz uses New Zealand as a blank screen on which to project his own aesthetic outlook, safe in the assumption that his readers will view that screen from a perspective not so remote from his own. Such a position is clearly no longer tenable. The screen is not blank; it never was, of course, but now the projections shine onto readers who stare back at the phantasmagoric apparatus, and what they see exposed is the assumptions behind the traditions of European art music itself.

In particular, Berlioz’s Wallace narrative in Evenings with the Orchestra incites reflection on two ways in which western art music situates itself in the world. On one hand, Berlioz juxtaposes the world of his orchestral musicians against the exotic Other of remote New Zealand; but on the other hand, Berlioz implies that the great works in the repertoire of those orchestral musicians actually provide a means of imaginary transportation to Other worlds. Whereas New Zealand is defined by Berlioz in physical terms, as comprising places and bodies that can be conquered, seduced, or (as in the case of Wallace’s tattoo) literally inscribed, the Other worlds of great art music are presented to us in Evenings as metaphysical ones. The chatter of the orchestra is silenced; no narrative is offered; the readers are told simply

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5 Berlioz, Evenings with the Orchestra, p. 366. 6 Ibid., pp. 369–70. 7 On the phantasmagoria metaphor, see Chapter 3.
that the musicians are playing *Der Freischütz* or *Don Giovanni*, and if they wish to be transported with the musicians to those sublime realms they are left to construct the sights and sounds of the performance entirely in their heads. In other words, Berlioz’s *Evenings with the Orchestra* sets up a relationship between great art music and exotic realms that is both complementary (each offers escape from the mundane reality of the present) and oppositional (the material, physical, and situated nature of exotic worlds – even if imagined – is juxtaposed against the metaphysical nature of the ‘Other world’ of western art music, envisaged as being beyond the physical altogether). While such distinctions are undoubtedly overdrawn, their tenacious legacy is still evident today, for example, whenever a division is made between western art music (or ‘Classical music’) and ‘World music’.  

Of course, we do not need to read Berlioz’s Wallace narrative to be critical of this mentality. ‘Otherness’ as a concept has been so well treated in the humanities as to appear almost hackneyed. And while my initial response to the Wallace story was as a New Zealander, the unease I have described is certainly nothing new to anyone who has confronted the possibility of racism in *Madame Butterfly*, the orientalism of *Aida* or the anti-Semitism of Wagner.  

Although I am sympathetic to those who feel it is now time, as Thomas Claviez puts it, to ‘lay to rest [the] spectral presence’ of Otherness and alterity, I resist the return to ‘sameness’ or universalism that such a resistance implies. Arguably race – the ‘spectre in the house of music’ long after it was confronted head-on in other disciplines, as Philip Bohlman and Ronald Radano pointed out in 2000 – is still not sufficiently acknowledged. My approach is to historicise the concept of the racial Other in western art music by demonstrating how the dialectic between Otherness and universalism is germane to Berlioz’s milieu, but I also broaden the definition of Otherness to encompass not only racial or ethnic identity, but also temporality and technology, as well as the supposed transcendence of western art music itself.

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10 Claviez, ‘Done and Over With’, 608.

Particularly since the late 1980s, musicologists have been all too willing to expose, historicise, and deconstruct the ideological assumptions of western art music; both the paradigm that aligns western art music with remote Other geographic regions and the paradigm that locates such music beyond the physical world have been thoroughly interrogated. In the first category, studies of exoticism in western art music have examined the ways in which that music encodes thinking about Other peoples and places, not only in cases where the musical language conspicuously departs from ‘unmarked’ norms but also in those where it does not. The all-too-close resemblance between Berlioz’s telling of Vincent Wallace’s narrative and the exotic opera plot archetype so vividly summarised by Ralph Locke reveals the significance of this body of literature to Berlioz’s approach:

Young, tolerant, brave, possibly naïve, white-European tenor-hero intrudes, at risk of disloyalty to his own people and colonialist ethic, into mysterious, dark-skinned, colonised territory represented by alluring dancing girls and deeply affectionate, sensitive lyric soprano, incurring wrath of brutal, intransigent tribal chieftain (bass or bass-baritone) and blindly obedient chorus of male savages.

Other musicologists have drawn on postcolonial scholarship, reception studies, or ethnographic work to consider ways in which Europe’s supposed Others have themselves responded to this repertoire. At the same time, the fundamental tenants of the most seemingly ‘unmarked’ western art music – even, or especially, works of the Austro-German instrumental canon – have themselves been subject to scrutiny. In particular, Lydia Goehr’s The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works revealed the extent to
which the timeless and universal pretensions of autonomous music were situated in a specific historical and geographical moment.¹⁶

In taking its cue from Berlioz’s Wallace narrative and its telling in the pit of an imaginary orchestra, my primary purpose in this book is to interrogate Berlioz’s conception of ‘Other worlds’ through a series of historically informed critical readings that uncover the tensions between the material and metaphysical realms in Berlioz’s writings about and for the orchestra. I will be concerned not only with the complementary and contradictory relationships between western art music and Other worlds in and of themselves; rather, I am also interested in the ways those relationships shade into each other, in the tensions and ambiguities that arise as music is pulled between physical and metaphysical paradigms, and in the processes by which particular narratives became privileged.

Such issues have been addressed in a variety of ways by scholars in other contexts. For example, Vanessa Agnew has examined the role of travel and encounter – specifically the experiences of Charles Burney in Germany and James Cook (and Burney’s son) in the Pacific – in redefining thinking about music’s role, power, and universality and helping to shape thought around the work concept.¹⁷ And Gary Tomlinson’s work on Music in Renaissance Magic draws on anthropological methodology to ‘approach Others’ who were marginalised in the prevalent historical narratives of western art music.¹⁸ Rather than focusing on racial alterity, Tomlinson’s study locates Otherness in terms of the occult. Tomlinson thereby reflects a significant epistemological distinction between Renaissance and nineteenth-century thinking on Otherness, demonstrating that Renaissance thought is itself Other in ways traditional musicological scholarship had sometimes tended to overlook. Similarly, while studies of Otherness in nineteenth-century music have typically privileged the racial and ethnic difference that was a source of fascination in an age of increasing exploration, colonisation, imperialism, and tourism, musicologists have also uncovered ways in which


Otherness might be located in temporal terms. Indeed, nineteenth-century European thought aligned racial difference with temporality, by locating Europe’s racial Others as occupying earlier stages on an evolutionary trajectory. Additionally, Otherness in the nineteenth century (as in the Renaissance) can fruitfully be examined in relation to manifestations of supernatural or occult thought, which since the Enlightenment had been framed as reason’s Other.

Berlioz’s Vincent Wallace narrative is simply a final, and exaggerated, instance of the negotiations with a variety of forms of Otherness that occur throughout Evenings with the Orchestra and that are seen in Berlioz’s writings more broadly. Berlioz readily explores Other worlds of the supernatural and of distant times, as well as distant places, and he does so in ways that might occasionally alienate modern readers, who are less accustomed to seeing our nineteenth-century ancestors as distanced from ourselves in the way we might with their Renaissance predecessors. Indeed, in exploring the ‘Other worlds of Hector Berlioz’, as with any historically inflected criticism, we are constantly reminded that just as the future, the supernatural, or New Zealand was Other to Berlioz, Berlioz’s Paris is also Other to us.

A further way of exploring the sometimes contested nexus between the physical and metaphysical claims of western art music is found in the work of those scholars who have sought to give voice to the performers of this repertoire, for performers’ perspectives and very presence had been similarly marginalised – or colonised – by an aesthetic which privileged musical autonomy and abstraction. Thus performer-centred perspectives have arisen in opera studies, where acknowledging the embodied creativity of the singer of Italian opera, in particular, has provided a powerful counternarrative to German metaphysics, sometimes drawing on feminist scholarship to acknowledge the gendered aspects of the familiar dialectic. Alternative performer-centred models have been developed in relation to instrumental music. Elisabeth Le Guin explores a ‘carnal musicology’ that listens to and observes the modern performer’s body (her own in particular) in dialogue with the (necessarily imagined) perspective of the

composer-performer Boccherini, and others have traced the importance of Liszt’s or Paganini’s physicality in their works.21

All these authors present powerful frameworks for considering tensions that underpin the process whereby western art music increasingly asserted its supposed independence from the concerns of the material or physical realm – the process whereby music moved from an alignment with physical worlds to one with metaphysical Other worlds. However, the focus of these texts is inevitably on individual performers (including composer-performers) and/or repertoire with prominent soloists. Berlioz occupies different territory. As a ‘born virtuoso of the orchestra’,22 Berlioz’s perspective was most obviously that of the composer or composer–conductor who oversees (and perhaps overrides) the individual subjectivities of the orchestral masses to unite them within his singular vision. Sceptical and at times downright hostile towards the aesthetics of Italian opera and the demands of divas and virtuosi, renowned primarily as a composer of instrumental music, and claiming to be three-quarters German,23 Berlioz is not an obvious subject for an application of ‘carnal musicology’. Indeed, Goehr cites Berlioz as an example of the privileging of text over performance, referring to his Orchestration Treatise (along with that of Czerny) as being ‘written from a standpoint at which they were able to consider the complexities of instrumentation in abstraction from the demands and practical difficulties of actual performance’, and alluding to the fact that Berlioz’s Prix de Rome cantata on Death of Orpheus was declared unplayable.24 But Berlioz’s frustration on that occasion could also be interpreted as a sign of the opposite tendency – of an intense engagement with the materiality of the orchestra that was forced on this occasion to go unfulfilled, despite his conviction that his music could be played. Indeed, Evenings with the Orchestra tells a story subtly different to that promoted by Goehr, for it encourages us to view works, and Berlioz’s musical aesthetic, through the eyes of the orchestral musicians, who are conceived as distinctive individuals. Those individuals

are silenced in the face of a masterwork, but Berlioz nevertheless gives us a sense of what it is that we must sacrifice for great art.

Certainly questions of agency and subjectivity in Berlioz’s music are sometimes complex, but it is the claim of this book that the tension between a composer-oriented work concept and a performer-centred physicality is not only acknowledged but also actually dramatised as part of Berlioz’s aesthetic vision. In this respect I might be seen to build upon recent studies of the orchestral body. For example, Emily I. Dolan has exposed the ways in which Haydn’s music participated in an ‘orchestral revolution’, whereby the orchestra as an entity and the ‘work’ as a concept were actually interdependent. As Dolan points out, musicologists have been apprehensive of exploring the connection between the ‘abundant materiality of the orchestra’ and ‘the notion of great musical works’, for ‘this inextricability of the orchestra from the “work” reverses the traditionally held values of the work concept. The great work is not ideal, but something immediate, sensuous, and bodily.’

Dolan positions Berlioz at the other end of this revolution: ‘If the consolidation of the modern orchestra in the late eighteenth century liberated instruments, enabling composers to embrace their individual characters and expressive potential, the nineteenth century witnessed an attempt to circumscribe that freedom. To put it another way, Berlioz re-instrumentalises the instruments of the orchestra: they are obedient to his hand.’ If a new approach to Haydn’s orchestra can thereby uncover the ‘sensuous’ and ‘bodily’ aspects of the orchestra, Dolan’s language here suggests that Berlioz shifts the focus back to instruments as abstract entities, at the expense of the physicality both of the performers and of the instruments themselves – a suggestion this book will attempt to nuance.

Situating instruments in relation to technology opens up an additional, valuable line of enquiry and another potential form of Otherness: in Berlioz’s era of accelerated industrial revolution and innovation, technology itself could be construed as exotic. Moreover, technology intersects with – or is (in both senses of the word) instrumental to – all the Other worlds with which this book is concerned, as a powerful symbol of modernity, western civilisation, or masculine rationality against which a primitive, exotic, supernatural and/or female Other is juxtaposed, or through which that Other is contained. In exploring the role of technology, my book

26 Ibid., p. 219.
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responds to a widespread growth of interest in the humanities in recent years in materiality rather than metaphysics – the ‘material turn’ which superseded the ‘linguistic turn.’ This ‘new materialism’ has been eager to embrace ‘the otherness of things.’ In terms of musicology, a number of scholars have steered a careful path through the risks of what Dolan warns can descend into ‘weird musicology’ in order to situate western art music in relation to contemporaneous technological paradigms, to ‘re-materialise’ autonomous music and move ‘beyond the work’, or to validate the material dimension of maligned works whose reception was damaged by the rise of that aesthetic. Berlioz, like Meyerbeer (a composer who has particularly benefited from this reevaluation), long suffered from being turned into Wagner’s Other – not least of all by Wagner himself.

However, while I will repeatedly explore the concept of orchestra-as-technology in this book, I do not wish to lose sight of the bodies that wield that technology; indeed, I argue throughout that the sight of the orchestra, as well as the negotiation between body and instrument, is integral to that same dialectic of Otherness which this book seeks to address. The ways in which the sights of the orchestra might either echo or obstruct the internal vision fostered by the instrumental ideal runs parallel to the similar negotiations of agency and subjectivity that attend the process whereby western art music positions itself in one world or an Other. And, on a larger level again, my book thus reinforces recent historiographical arguments that ‘reassert the importance of the human’ in the ‘material turn’.

While a number of concerns recur across the book, each chapter essentially examines the central dialectic between Berlioz’s writings and music and Other worlds through an individual metaphor for the orchestra. Beginning with a close interrogation of Berlioz’s Wallace narrative,