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Introduction

In parallel with studies of the poetry of the Great War, Britain's musical history of the conflict has focused on a small group of elite composers.[1] Comparatively little is known about the musical cultures of the British armed forces despite music's quotidian nature in the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force. This book will examine the formal and informal applications of music in the British forces on land, sea and air, during their periods of work, rest and play, in military camps, on ships, in aerodromes, on the battlefields and in hospitals and prisoner of war camps, theatres, cinemas and canteen huts. It will explore how music of all kinds, live and recorded, was utilised to stimulate recruitment and fundraising, for diplomatic and propaganda purposes, and for religious, educational and therapeutic reasons. It will observe how the unprecedented expansion of Britain's armed forces by the recruitment and conscription of approximately 6 million British civilians brought elements of continuity and change to the musical cultures of each service. It will show why the musical cultures of Britain's armed forces should be examined in the social, cultural and military contexts in which they developed.

Music was a staple of family and community life across the social spectrum. Singing and the playing of instruments were appreciated and there was an expectation that those who were capable should entertain. In 1914, there were approximately 3 million pianos in Britain, one for every fifteen people.[2] Street singers were common, and in 1900, there were more than 30,000 brass bands in the UK, often subsidised by local employers, regularly competing in high-profile competitions.[3] The Great War occurred at a time of significant social and cultural change in the British military services as well as in civilian life. After the inglorious performance of the British Army in South Africa (1899–1902) the service was subject to a series of reforms, culminating in the recommendations of Lord Haldane between 1906 and 1913.[4] In parallel with the Army, Admiral John 'Jackie' Fisher, as First Sea Lord between 1904 and 1911, did much to

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modernise the operation of the Royal Navy. The Royal Flying Corps was founded by the Aerial Navigation Act on 1 April 1912. It operated under the dual command of the War Office and the Admiralty, and comprised two wings, naval and military, to support the Navy and the Army as required. In parallel with the developments in Britain's armed forces, the quality of their music was of concern to the Naval and Military Musical Union. Established by leading military figures in 1909, it sought to raise the tone of Navy and Army concerts by 'popularizing the fine old soldier and sailor songs, which have been somewhat neglected of late'.[5]

In Britain, a cultural war simmered between the forces of traditionalism and modernity.[6] Forms of popular music, particularly music hall songs and 'ragtime', were seen by some as signs of cultural decadence which were polluting British cultural life.[7] There were tensions between what middle-class observers considered to be 'the true music of the people, namely folk music' and what we now recognise as the actual music of the people, commercial popular songs disseminated via the gramophone.[8] The outbreak of war exacerbated cultural tensions which had been present in peacetime; the old versus the young, the old fashioned versus the modern, the national versus the foreign. Added to these 'conflicts of values' were charges of decadence. The war, some argued, had been sent to put England right.[9] The British sculptor, W. R. Colton, expressed the widely held view that Edwardian England had become degenerate, slothful and corrupt. It was, he said 'high time that war should come with its purifying fire' because 'so-called Art had grown in Europe like unto a puffed-out fungus of enormous size, without beauty, without delicacy, without health'.[10] For those who agreed with Colton, Modernism did not start with post-impressionism and the twelve-tone scale, it was the symptom of an infection from the time of Nietzsche and Wagner. These links between German culture and perceived decadence were one and the same sickness. This sense of needing to be cleansed, and of war as a social and cultural disinfectant, was expressed by Rupert Brooke, the most published and read poet of the wartime generation. Serving with the Royal Naval Division during the evacuation of Antwerp in October 1914, Brooke implored his peers to 'Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move/And half-men, and their dirty songs'.[11] Furthermore, there were hopes in 1914 that the war would serve to develop a recognisably British elite musical style. The nineteenth century had been a time of musical internationalism; Italian music dominated opera, German composters led the orchestral field and the French the operetta.[12] There was considerable prejudice against British music in Britain. *The Strad* magazine claimed that war 'except so far as it crushes individual talent, is

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not in principle inimical to art', asserting the conflict would arouse 'the best and truest feelings of our race'.[13]

Several leading professional performers were quick to identify the problems and the possibilities the war presented. Before the outbreak of war there were approximately four hundred touring musical theatre companies in Great Britain, and in the Autumn of 1914, this decreased by more than half.[14] In August 1914, a National Relief Fund was established to assist any person whose livelihood was negatively affected by the war. However, there were limiting caveats, such as the stipulation that if performers were unemployed on 4 August 1914 – the date of Britain's declaration of war – they were deemed ineligible for assistance.[15] Perhaps in response to the difficulties caused by such stipulations, *The Era* started its own War Distress Fund, chaired by the actor-manager of the Kingsway Theatre, Lena Ashwell, who saw that as men could enlist in the forces it was the employment prospects of female performers that would be worst affected. Ashwell's fund explained that it existed 'for the purpose of assisting ALL WORKERS . . . who suffer through the war'.[16] Lena Ashwell also established the Three Arts Club in Marylebone, one of many organisations established by higher profile women in the first few weeks of the war. Ashwell was also heavily involved in establishing the Women's Emergency Corps, which was set up on 9 August 1914 by Evelina Haverfield and Decima Moore with the Women's Social and Political Union. The WEC headquarters were located at the Little Theatre, London. Moore was an actress and soprano who had performed with the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company and the George Edwardes Company, and, like Ashwell, she had connections to the Suffragette movement.[17] The primary aim of the WEC was to train women as doctors, nurses and motorcycle riders in order to support the war effort.[18] Professional performers needed to balance their desire to contribute to the war effort in addition to protecting their careers and livelihoods. It should not be forgotten that the industries involved in publishing printed music and producing gramophones and records were required to generate profits to survive. The expansion of Britain's armed forces, and the desire of those at home to support – and sometimes forget – the everyday realities of war, meant that the desire for music of all kinds created an enormous market for these commodities. However, the work presented here is not intended as a definitive history of British military music, nor does it seek to act as an encyclopedia of every servicemen's troupe that performed in the Great War. This book examines servicemen's musical encounters, illuminating why, where and how music was provided and experienced by performers and servicemen alike.

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Historiography

During the Great War, many men and women were involved in music-making on the fighting fronts as enlisted servicemen or civilian volunteers. However, the majority of these individuals are absent from the histories of the conflict. While established entertainers such as Harry Lauder, Lena Ashwell and Ellaline Terriss published their wartime memoirs, too many voices are missing.[19] As Sir Walter Raleigh's official history *War in the Air* underlined in 1922, official records do not in themselves make history, that they are 'colourless and bare'.[20] This lack of texture was still felt in 1963, when veteran RFC pilot Sholto Douglas complained that books written about the war were 'lacking in a feeling for the temper of that time' which have reduced the most intense experiences 'to the dull level of clinical research'.[21] However, the words of R. H. Mottram should also be kept in mind. In 1924, in the preface to his *Spanish Farm Trilogy,* Mottram warned that studies of the conflict should beware of making the war appear as 'fabulous, misunderstood and made romantic by distance'.[22] Nevertheless, servicemen's songs and music which were widely sung and played during the Great War form key topographical features in the landscape of Britain's memory of 1914–18.[23] They have become *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory).[24] However, certain creative interpretations including Great War songs, such as the stage play and subsequent film *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) have twisted the musical memory of the conflict away from the history of the music concerned, telling us more about the social, cultural and political conflicts of the 1960s than the songs and music of 1914–18.[25] *Tipperary* for example 'was never greatly sung', highlighting the fact that it was propagated by the *Daily Mail* correspondent, George Curnock, who reporting from Boulogne heard soldiers of the BEF singing the song 'instead of another equally popular, which the same troops started up a few miles farther on'. As a result, 'a hitherto unknown and unwanted song of such mediocre worth . . . was never Tommy's song'.[26] A visitor to the fighting fronts was much more likely to hear the strains of *Annie Laurie*.[27]

The musical lives of servicemen were studied during the course of the conflict. Some already understood that the voice of British soldiers, sailors and airmen were distilled in the songs that were sung on the fighting fronts, for example Second Lieutenant Frederick Nettleingham's *Tommy's Tunes* (1917) and *More Tommy's Tunes* (1918). Interest in servicemen's music continued after the war. In 1927, *Air Force Songs and Verses* was published to raise money for the RAF Memorial Fund and featured 54 RFC/RAF squadron songs with another 27 from the period of the Great War and Armistice. In 1930, Western

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Front veterans John Brophy and Eric Partridge published *The Long Trail: What the British Soldier Sang and Said in The Great War of 1914–18.*[28] Their survey of soldiers' songs found that most came from private soldiers, songs of 'homeless men, evoked by exceptional and distressing circumstances; the songs of an itinerant community, continually altering within itself under the incidence of death or mutilation'.[29] The desire to collect and preserve servicemen's songs continued after the Second World War. Published in 1945, the *Airman's Song Book: Being an Anthology of Squadron, Concert Party, Training and Camp Songs and Song-Parodies [. . .]* aimed to preserve the songs and therefore 'the traditions reflected in them'. The author stated that as 'the sailors had their shanties and the "brown types" their marching refrains' the airmen 'had written their own history' in their songs. These are songs and ditties purely composed by, for and about airmen.[30] In 1960, Brophy and Partridge's work enjoyed a second edition which featured more accurate lyrics to many of the songs than had been permitted by their publishers thirty years earlier.

The histories of the military music schools during this period are also key to our understanding of the role of music in Britain's military culture. There are just a handful of existing histories of music in Britain's armed forces. While many of them are well-written, with evident access to sources held in personal collections, few of them are fully referenced works providing signposts for future scholars looking to write the histories of Britain's military music institutions. The work of Henry Farmer, Bandmaster of Portsmouth Division 1884–1917, and Hector Adkins, of the Royal Military School of Music 1921–43, are still acknowledged as the authorities on military music.[31] Former Army bandsmen produced two histories of the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall; Lieutenant Colonel P. L. Binns's *A Hundred Years of Military Music* (1959), and Gordon and Alwyn W. Turner's *The Trumpets Will Sound* (1996). The study of the history of music in the Royal Navy was opened by John Trendell's *A Life on the Ocean Wave: The Royal Marines Band Story* (1990) and more recently John Ambler's *The Royal Marines Band Service* (2003). Ian Kendrick's *Music in the Air* (1986) contains relatively little information about the early years of music in the RFC/RAF. The most authoritative recent work, Trevor Herbert and Helen Barlow's *Music in the British Military* (2013), examines the formal role of music in the British Army up to 1914 from a musicological perspective.

In the last thirty years, some historians have opened studies into the cultural life of Britain's armed forces. J. G. Fuller's *Troop Morale and Popular Culture* (1990), Alex Revell's *High in the Empty Blue* (1995) and

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Maryam Philpott's *Air and Sea Power in World War I* (2013) have shown that cultural history and military history are not mutually exclusive. Histories of the music of imperial troops, and non-British servicemen who fought for Britain in the Great War, have begun to appear. Music in the Canadian and Australian/New Zealand forces has been examined by Jason Wilson and Robert Holden.[32] The work of Anne Sampson, Dominiek Dendooeven and Santanu Das is also greatly contributing to this field.[33] Historians need to venture further into uncharted territory of the Great War, and music of all kinds is an area which has long been neglected. Historians should recognise the significance and usefulness of music because it is an intrapersonal process, a social phenomenon and a product of cultural influences and traditions.[34] Contemporary criticisms and analyses of music help us to locate musical practices, values and meanings in their cultural contexts. Recent studies of popular forms of music have proven to be particularly illuminating in terms of the genre's commercial, entertainment and leisure value.[35] Musical industries – encompassing the theatres, cinemas, music halls, music publishers, instrument makers and gramophone firms – were employing hundreds and thousands of people and making a significant contribution to the national economy.[36]

However, in today's archives items related to music are generally classified as 'ephemera'. Even in the largest national collections, those whose task it has been to make some order of the millions of items relating to the Great War have inadvertently consigned the historical traces of music and musicians to the margins of historical interest. The record keepers in post-Armistice Britain prioritised the maps, memoranda and battle-plans laid out by Commanders during those tumultuous, but ultimately victorious, years. This is eminently understandable. Britain had won a costly victory in 1918, and after the Treaty of Versailles was signed in June 1919, Britain hoped never to go to war again. Whatever records relating to music and musical entertainment which survived the culls of the 1920s and 1930s and were stored in the Public Record Office in Central London may have been among those destroyed by the Luftwaffe in the second world conflagration. The records of the various military music schools suffered from a different kind of attrition. As the British armed forces went through successive restructures in the post-1945 period, the documents relating to their activities in the Great War were lost or discarded along the way. Whatever survived was at the mercy of archivists' selective preferences throughout the twentieth century. Written in 1977, for example, the regimental journal of the Royal Engineers, *The Sapper,* is preceded by the disclaimer: 'References to some articles published has been omitted because, although providing

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good experience for the participants, the events can hardly be classified as being of historic value worthy of being referenced.'[37] Because of these selective practices and assumptions, surviving primary source material which documents the formal and informal musical activities of British servicemen during the Great War is scattered far and wide.[38]

However, the research presented here indicates that the War Office and Admiralty may have had very little to do with the organisation of musical activities; they were fighting the considerable might of the German Empire on land, at sea and in the air, and British civilians were for the first time being killed on British soil by German bombers and battleships. The music of the troops, not least for ceremonial, entertainment and recreational purposes, was not high on the government's priorities. The war was expected to be short, so there was no anticipation of any need to change the ways in which the British armed forces operated. No one in August 1914 could imagine how the war would develop into four years, three months and fourteen days of attrition, at incalculable human cost. Musical activities are rarely mentioned in official documents, for example unit war diaries, so the traces of music on the fighting fronts are mainly found in servicemen's letters, diaries, photographs, local and national press and regimental magazines. Oral testimonies are also useful. This is one of the reasons that it is very difficult to examine the musical cultures of non-white servicemen, such as the Labour Corps workers from India and China. With high rates of illiteracy, these men were not keeping diaries, and no one interviewed them to record their wartime experiences.[39] The main traces of their music have been found in the collections of voluntary-aid organisations that worked with these men. It was these agencies, such as the Salvation Army, British Red Cross – with the Order of St John of Jerusalem, and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) – that filled the gaps that the British War Office and Admiralty were unable or unwilling to fill. They became the largest enablers and providers of music to the battlefronts as a natural extension of their work in camps, canteens, rest huts and hospitals. However, they were by no means the only organisations of their kind to be working in the battle zones. Other charitable groups active before the Great War extended their reach, such as the Seamen's Rests, the Church Army, the Dominion Comforts Fund, the Church of England Soldiers' Home, Army Scripture Readers, the Navy Mission Society and the British Soldiers Institute. The Salvation Army, British Red Cross and the Young Men's Christian Association, however, were the three largest groups both by their reach and by resources and personnel in serving the British forces wherever in the world they were fighting. A good deal of musical activity was encouraged, enabled, inspired or created by these

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organisations according to their own priorities. However, very few military historians have mentioned music or the work of voluntary organisations.[40] General aspects of the YMCA's wartime work have recently been subject to academic attention by historians such as Michael Snape and Jeffrey Reznick.[41] While these studies have done much to uncover the enormous efforts the voluntary-aid organisations made during the war years, this book builds on their work to examine the full extent of the provision of music for servicemen.

To the servicemen of the Great War, music was not ephemeral. It was entirely desirable, if not vital, to have both formal and informal music in all wartime contexts. The more we seek to understand the everyday wartime existence of British servicemen and women at war, the greater is the need to appreciate all aspects of their lives during the conflict. So many veterans spoke of the brass bands playing near recruiting stations, and as they went to war from camps, barracks and train stations. Many more recalled with great accuracy the words, both official and unofficial, to their regimental march, and who could sing the more respectable song lyrics to oral history interviewers in the 1960s and 1970s. We can now listen to these men singing their songs via online collections. We can hear how they edited and altered lyrics to suit their mood and identity, how the men could let officers know if they were dissatisfied with their leadership by the choice of their songs on the march, of the hymns that were sung to offer comfort (or comedy when the tunes were appropriated), tunes that reminded them of home, and of the songs composed as memorials to remember lost comrades. From the trenches, to aerodromes and ships, in medical settings and in prisoner of war camps, the power of music to amuse, reassure, inspire and to heal was recognised and valued.

That the fighting fronts were full of all kinds of music may come as a surprise. Private Charles Jacques, who served in Macedonia, wrote that many soldiers recalled 'happy evenings spent around an ancient and dilapidated piano in some billet or estaminet' when 'even the poorest singer was received with as much acclaim as if he were a very Caruso'.[42] Furthermore, as Coldstream Guards Bandmaster, John Mackenzie-Rogan underlined, music 'plays a great part in our lives at all times, ... especially in great times of stress that its influence can be almost overwhelming'. Rogan maintained that 'the effect on the hearts and minds of the hundreds of thousands who heard the music was magical'.[43] As Scott Hughes Myerly's *British Military Spectacle* (1996) showed how military traditions such as uniforms and parades played a powerful role in the maintenance of soldier's morale and espirit de corps up to the Crimean War, we can see how in the Great War military bands continued to provide a central focus of a unit's tribal identity.

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They were a major source of pride and enjoyment for the soldiers as well as anyone who witnessed the spectacle of a band leading a column of servicemen on the march, on parade, or showing off their prowess by 'beating the retreat'. Furthermore, recent works of history have reached previously unexplored areas of Great War history showing how sport and theatre were taken to servicemen to maintain morale.[44] Studies of music in the Australian and Canadian armies have been recently published.[45] Glen Watkins's *Proof Through the Night: Music and The Great War* (2003) studied predominantly American music during the time of the Great War, and John Mullen's *The Show Must Go On! Popular Music in the Great War* (2015) focused largely on popular music at home in Britain. This study will show that, much to the chagrin of some commentators from Britain's musical elite, music from home was highly prized in servicemen's concert halls, recreation huts, hospital wards, prisoner of war camps and mess rooms.

Chapter Overview

The structure of this book is organised to examine the formal and informal applications of music at work, at rest and at play. Chapter 1 will provide the context of how and why military music was coordinated in the period immediately before the outbreak of the Great War. It will briefly trace the beginnings of Royal Marines Divisional Bands in the Royal Navy during the late eighteenth century, as well as the founding of the Royal Military School of Music at Kneller Hall, and the Royal Naval School of Music at Eastney Barracks, explaining how bandsmen were recruited, trained and deployed, and why music was a vital element of the services' daily, ceremonial and wartime operations. This chapter will also engage with pre-war concerns expressed about the lack of music in Britain's armed forces, and the wider debates about the quality and direction of British music in the Edwardian period.

The second chapter will examine the use of music in recruitment and fundraising. It will show how military musicians were mobilised in the early days of war, and the ways in which commanders had to cater for the newly expanded forces. It will look at how the civilian music industry responded to the start of the conflict, and the ways in which bands, concerts and other musical events were used for the purposes of supporting the war effort. This chapter will also provide a survey of the work of various committees established to support both the music industry and individual musicians, all of whom sought to both protect and maximise performers' employment opportunities during the early years of the war.

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Chapter 3 will move with the military bands, pipes, drums and Buglers to the fighting fronts. It will show the practical uses of music in the field and on board ships as an important marker for servicemen's daily schedules. This section will also outline musicians' roles in battle. It will show that while Bandsmen in regular infantry units often acted as stretcher bearers, those who enlisted from August 1914 and served in Territorial battalions did a great many other jobs. It will also show that the formation of bands was driven largely by the men themselves.

The fourth chapter will show how music played a key part in the unit's identity on land, at sea and in the air. The squadron songs of the RFC, for example, tell us a great deal about how airmen dealt with combat stress and fear.[46] The singing of songs on the march or at rest was a vital component of regimental identity as well as discipline.

Chapter 5 will demonstrate that music was a vital part of the daily routines of those interned in prisoner of war camps. The forming of orchestras and theatrical revues were a popular way of passing the time and maintaining morale, but in many cases musical activities were used by prisoners of war to conceal attempts to escape. This chapter will give examples of how prisoners of war used music as a means of keeping up their morale to stave off feelings of 'mouldiness', later identified as barbed wire disease.[47]

Chapter 6 will examine the role of music in religious worship and pastoral care on the fighting fronts. It will show how the singing of hymns was a central feature of several organisations' work in drawing men towards their religious services and pastoral care, and of how the hymns were deployed in times of great stress. It will show how many of the voluntary-aid organisations combined their own brands of practical Christian philanthropy and pastoral care to servicemen as a 'counter-attraction' to keep men away from less salubrious pursuits, as well as to educate and civilise servicemen and labourers fighting for Britain.[48] The seventh chapter will provide an overview of the ways in which music was used in medical settings during the war. It will outline how the British Red Cross, which was tasked by the War Office to coordinate the organisation and supply of British hospitals, ensured that provision was made for live and recorded music in the majority of their facilities. This chapter will also consider how the medical profession came to recognise that music was an aid to servicemen's recovery and convalescence. The experiences of civilian entertainers in military medical settings will also be examined.

Chapter 8 will look at the use of the Gramophone for both educational and recreational purposes, showing how this developing technology was used on the fighting fronts in the maintenance of servicemen's morale, as

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well as for medicinal and therapeutic uses in hospitals and convalescent homes.

The ninth chapter will provide a survey of the principle civilian concert parties which travelled to entertain servicemen throughout the war. The frontline tours undertaken by well-known entertainers such as Ellaline Terriss, Seymour Hicks and Harry Lauder will be examined, showing how their appearances on the fighting fronts boosted servicemen's morale but also how they played into a wider political agenda. Lena Ashwell's collaboration with the YMCA will be explored through the diaries and correspondence of a myriad of performers and war workers, providing a deeper analysis of personnel who were key to the success of the Ashwell productions.

The tenth chapter will examine the growth of servicemen's concert parties in the context of the rapid expansion of the fighting forces, and of the significant figures who were key to the provision of music for the purposes of recreation and amusement. This chapter will show that Britain's armed forces each had a strong tradition of musical entertainments solely by servicemen for their comrades which was much bolstered by men who had been professional performers before they enlisted. Furthermore, this chapter will show that servicemen used the pantomime form to reinforce their belief that they were fighting in a just war. Chapter 11 explains what happened to musicians and music in the British armed forces after the signing of the Armistice. As the true cost of war was counted, the individuals and organisations who had worked to raise the status and quality of servicemen's musical experiences throughout the conflict continued much of their work in the immediate post-war period. The book ends by showing how music was used to remember the dead, and explains the genesis of the first Festivals of Remembrance 1923–27.

It is time to recognise the wartime endeavours of British musicians who served King and Country during the Great War. This book will show that amongst so much fear and death, music exuded life, purpose, identity and belonging. The following chapters will demonstrate that music was not ephemeral; in all its different forms music was an essential and highly valued part of everyday life in Britain's armed forces during the Great War.

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