Concert life in London from Mozart to Haydn

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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 virtuosi like Clementi, Dussek and Viotti, whose influential music deserves greater recognition. At the same time London supported two alternative musical cultures. 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.

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 und 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

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,

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. Diack 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.

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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 Public Advertiser*
TB	*The True Briton*
TI	*The Times*
WO	*The World*

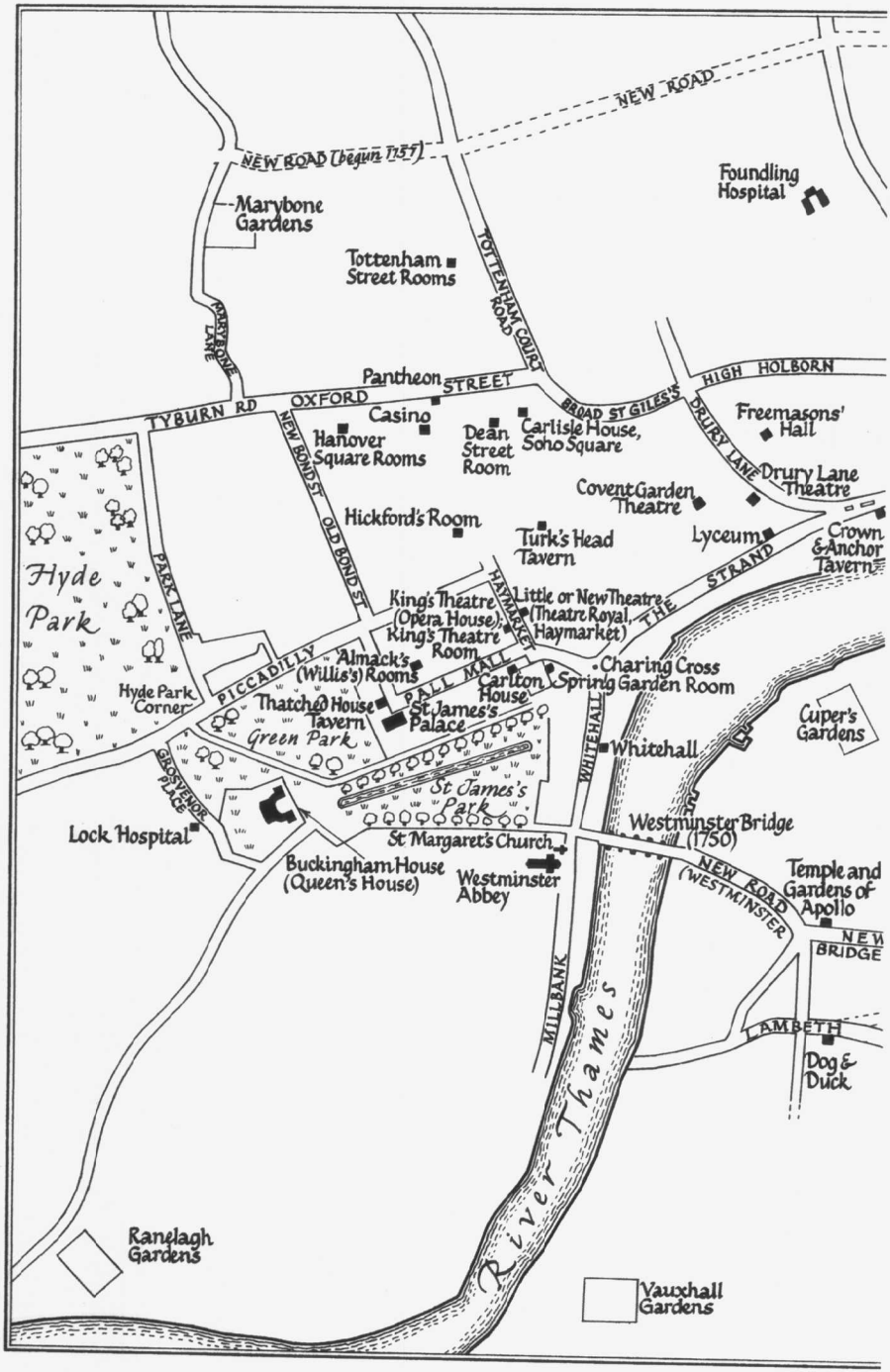
Others

BL	British Library, London
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CPL	Pendlebury Library, University Music School, Cambridge
CUL	University Library, Cambridge
EM	*Early Music*
GSJ	*The Galpin 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*

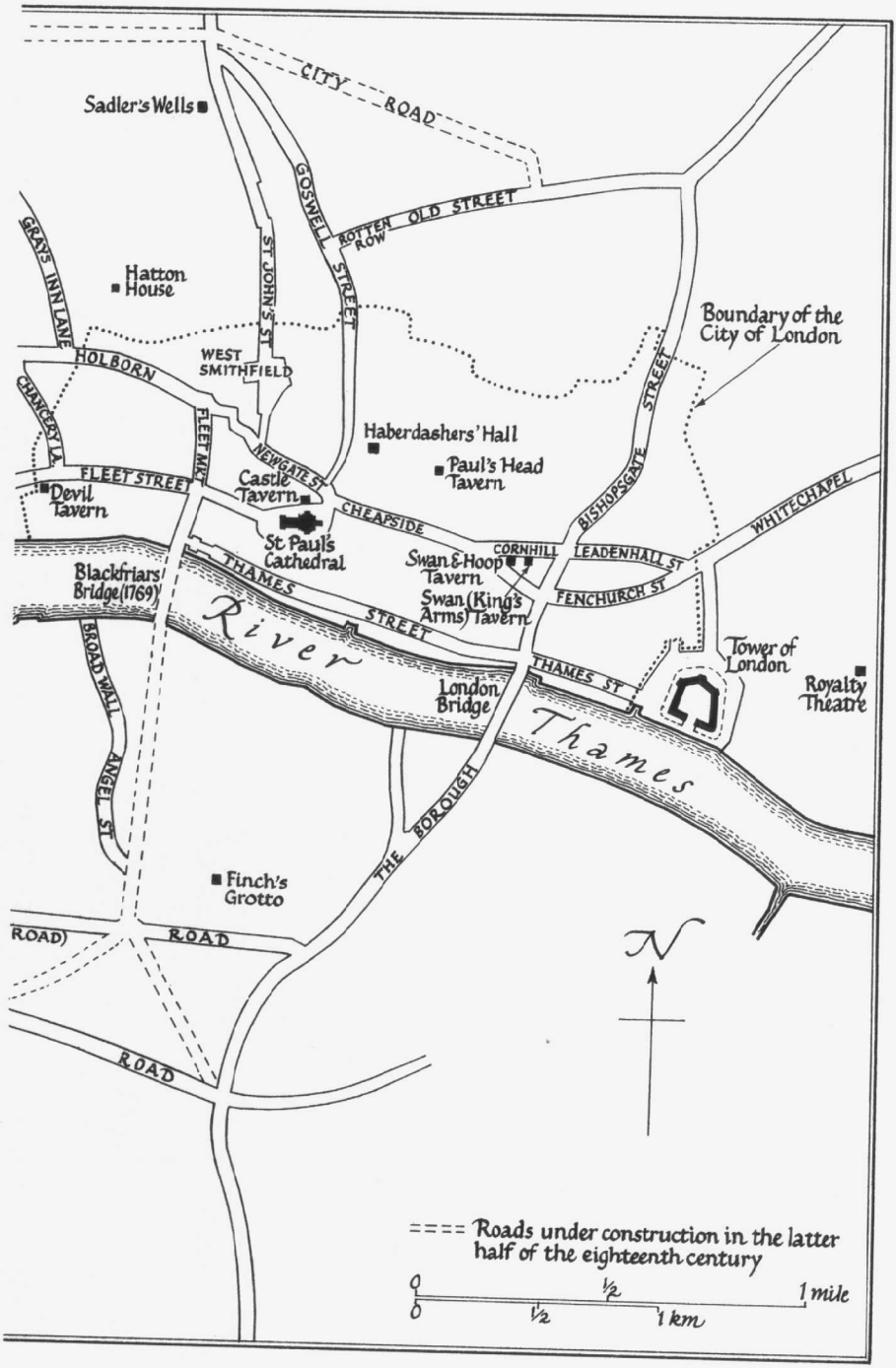
P(R)MA	*Proceedings of the (Royal) Musical Association*
QMMR	*The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*
RCM	Royal College of Music, London
RMARC	*Research Chronicle*, published by the Royal Musical Association
RSM	Royal Society of Musicians

Currency

One pound (£1) = twenty shillings (20*s.*)
One shilling (1*s.*) = twelve pence (12*d.*)
One guinea (1 gn.) = £1 1*s.*
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.



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The rage for music

Around 1790 London was in the grip of an unprecedented fervour for musical entertainment, ritually described as the current 'rage for music'. The number and variety of musical entertainments, the publicity they attracted and the extent of public enthusiasm were prodigious. Although music continued to play a major role in the theatre (at the Italian Opera and the two main playhouses), the phrase was primarily applied to concert life. Often it was used defensively against imaginary foreign taunts: 'The present rage is music. – The Professional Concert, the [Concert of] Ancient Music, the Oratorios in Tottenham Court-Road, and Salomon's Concerts – Four such meetings cannot be paralleled in any part of Europe.'[1] The fashionable vogue was frequently satirised. For Vauxhall Gardens in 1788 James Hook set the following verse in his comic dialogue *The Musical Courtship*:

> All the Modish World appear
> Fond of nothing Else my dear.
> Folks of Fashion eager seek
> Sixteen Concerts in a Week.

In reality the craze was not limited to the upper reaches of society. As one journalist put it, 'the present encreasing rage for Musick, is a contradiction of the character given by Foreigners of John Bull ... There are concerts in every part of the town, and the lower sort of people have their musical clubs, to which they nightly resort.'[2] A letter sent to a German magazine mocked London's universal 'epidemic of Melomania', noting that concerts were so popular at all levels of society that the nation itself was in danger of collapse.[3]

Newspapers before each season contain endless speculation about new performers and forthcoming repertoire. Often they published a scheme of regular musical events for the new season, and even weekly updates, as in the following example of *The Morning Chronicle*'s 'Mirror of Fashion' in 1792:[4]

MONDAY.	Her Royal Highness the Duchess of YORK's Concert.
	The Professional Concert.
TUESDAY.	The QUEEN's Concert, Buckingham-house.
	The Pasticcio, Hanover-square [Gallini].
WEDNESDAY.	Their MAJESTIES and PRINCESSES, will attend the Concert of Ancient Music, Tottenham-street.
	Mrs. VANNECK's Concert.
THURSDAY.	The QUEEN's Concert and Card Party, Buckingham-House.
	[Academy of] Ancient Music, Free Mason's Tavern.
FRIDAY.	The Duchess of GLOUCESTER's Concert.
	SALOMON's Concert.
SATURDAY.	The Pasticcio, Hanover-square.
	Catch and Glee Concert.
SUNDAY.	Duchess of GLOUCESTER's Concert.
	Lady HAMPDEN's Concert [Nobility Concert].
	Mrs. STURT's Concert.
	General TOWNSHEND's Concert.
	Mrs. R. WALPOLE's Concert.

Even if the press coverage was partly whipped up by concert managers, London concert life was undoubtedly going through one of its most brilliant and vital phases. Foreign visitors, perhaps expecting a *Land ohne Musik*, were constantly surprised by the important role played by music in London's social life. Memoirs and letters bear witness to the intense interest that concerts attracted, as in the graphic reaction of Miss Iremonger to Salomon's concerts of 1791:

> The Reviewers remark that 'At the Concerts in Hanover Square, where [Haydn] has presided, his presence seems to have awakened such a degree of enthusiasm in the audience as almost amounts to frenzy!' You have my thanks for procuring me the opportunity, which I did not lose, of being one of the Infected.[5]

London now supported a well-established season of public concerts, organised on more-or-less commercial lines with fully professional performers. Such events occupied a central place in the social calendar. Yet both the widespread enthusiasm and the modes of concert organisation were comparatively new phenomena, as a glimpse at London music in 1690 and in 1740 will illustrate.

Changes in London's concert life during the eighteenth century

London played a pioneering role in the development of the concert. Indeed Europe's first major public concerts were those organised in 1672 by John Banister at his Whitefriars music-school, an initiative quickly followed up by others at the York Buildings room and at the Vendu in Charles Street. From

1678 to 1714 Thomas Britton, the 'musical small-coal man', put on his celebrated concerts in a loft above his Clerkenwell shop; despite the eccentric venue and low price (rising to only 10/- a year), Britton's concerts were patronised by a surprisingly high-class clientele. Nevertheless a glance at London newspapers for 1690 reveals as yet only a handful of public-concert advertisements. Though attended by the quality, concerts at the York Buildings room had an informal, even haphazard nature, reminiscent more of a house music-party:

> Here was consorts, fuges, solos, lutes, Hautbois, trumpets, kettledrums, and what Not but all disjoynted and incoherent for while ye masters were shuffling out & in of places to take their parts there was a totall cessation, and None knew what would come next; all this was utterly against the true Model of an entertainment, which [for] want of unity is allway spoiled.[6]

Fifty years later music played a much greater role in the life of the town. Italian opera had achieved a certain security, and musical productions were heard at the English playhouses of Covent Garden and Drury Lane. London's concert life had also grown in extent and organisation. A major subscription series was offered at Hickford's Room in Brewer Street, London's foremost concert venue: twenty concerts took place from January to May for a subscription of 6 guineas (single tickets at 5/-). The individually advertised programmes featured large-scale vocal works by John Christopher Smith and included solos by London's premier violinist, Michael Christian Festing. Meanwhile, at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, Handel promoted an oratorio season, as he had done in most years since 1733; he himself contributed an organ concerto each night. The performance on 28 March was devoted to the 'Fund established for the Support of Decayed Musicians and their Families', administered by the Society of Musicians. Some half-dozen other benefit concerts were also advertised, either oratorios or concerts 'of Vocal and Instrumental Musick'. During the summer high-quality instrumental music was on offer nightly at Vauxhall, Marybone and Cuper's Gardens.

In addition to these fully publicised concerts, mostly in the West End, the City supported three well-established musical societies, whose meetings were not advertised. The Academy of Ancient Music met fortnightly at the Crown and Anchor Tavern. Founded in 1726 as the Academy of Vocal Musick, the society's original purpose was for members of the choral foundations to sing older polyphonic music, but it soon expanded in membership and repertoire, with Handel oratorios taking their place alongside motets and madrigals. The two other societies, also founded in the 1720s, met at the Swan Tavern in Cornhill and at the Castle Tavern in Paternoster Row. But like the Academy of Ancient Music, these were essentially gentlemen's clubs, designed for the wealthier bourgeois of the City (according to Hawkins, the Swan concerts were set up by 'a great number of merchants and opulent citizens').[7] Regulations published by the Castle Society in 1751 reveal that it was run as a non-profit-

making exercise by an elected committee; strict rules were applied and fines levied for infringements. Membership was available to both performers and auditors, but the performers retained clear control over the proceedings, with the right to fix the repertoire and nominate new members. Hawkins mentions that aspiring 'young persons of professions and trades' attended, but certain categories were statutorily excluded: vintners, victuallers, keepers of coffee-houses, tailors, peruke-makers and barbers, as well as journeymen and apprentices. Two important features of such organisations set them apart from public concerts in the modern sense. First, the performers were drawn from the membership, apart from some professional stiffening (in the 1740s John Stanley 'despotically reigned' at both the Castle and the Swan).[8] And, second, ladies were not allowed to subscribe, though ladies' tickets might be made available to members on a limited basis.

Looking back later, Charles Burney summed up London's concert life in the 1740s as follows:

> The only subscription concert at the west end of the town at this time, was at Hickford's room or dancing-school, in Brewers-street; and in the city, the Swan and Castle concerts, at which the best performers of the Italian opera were generally employed, as well as the favourite English singers.[9]

Concerts had begun to be promoted on a more regular basis and with a clearer sense of programme-planning. The foundations had been laid for later expansion. But several of the principal institutions were City mens' clubs designed for amateur performance. The series at Hickford's Room in the West End was a foretaste of what was to come, but after a similar venture the following year the idea was abandoned, indicating that the subscription series was far from an essential feature of the season. It is also noteworthy that concert programmes of 1740 were typically based around larger vocal works, with only the briefest mention of any instrumental items.

By 1790 London's musical life had been transformed. The 'rage for music' was at its height, and both the number and the variety of musical entertainments far outstrip those of 1740. Table 1 presents a summary of the musical events of the season, but even this constitutes only a selection: it excludes numerous private concerts and lesser societies, as well as such informal events as band concerts in St James's Park.

Out of all this varied musical activity, public interest in music outside the theatre was largely focussed on the fashionable West End subscription concerts: 'THE PANTHEON, it is said, means to have a vigorous conflict with the PROFESSIONAL CONCERT, and to try which will be most successful in gaining the patronage of the higher circles.'[10] These organisations were quite different from the men's clubs that Burney identified as at the centre of London's concert life in the 1740s. Both were run as essentially commercial exercises, designed to make profits for the organisers – the Pantheon share-holders on the one hand, the orchestral musicians themselves on the other.