

Music and Movement in Britain, 1793–1815

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Abstract The frequent references to the actors and events of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in the titles of the dance tunes of the period raise the question of how we should understand their significance. This article argues that the practice is one of a number of examples of music and song shaping people's lived experience and behavior in ways that were rarely fully conscious. Drawing on a range of music collections, diaries, and journals, the article argues that we need to recognize how significant aural dimensions were in shaping people's predisposition to favor the status quo in this period of heightened political controversy.

In work on the politics of the 1790s and early 1800s, music and popular song, like caricature, tend to be used for illustration, not as subjects of study in their own right.¹ Moreover, when specific songs or tunes, such as “The Black Joke” or “Derry Down,” are recognized as having a deeper and much more general significance, there has been a tendency to essentialize their individual political or social character and to treat them apart from other songs or tunes rather than as part of a wider fabric.² Many political and social historians treat popular ballads as the most salient aural material—and focus on them predominantly as texts—whereas social and cultural historians might encourage us to consider a much wider musical spectrum in which songs appear alongside tunes, hymns, military bands, Dibdin entertainments, Ranelagh Gardens performances, boys whistling in the streets, and women selling and singing song sheets in the market. While specialist literatures by musicologists address some of these activities, there are also more directly historical questions, as raised by David Hopkin in his work on France, about the ways in which this wider sonic world was an integral component of the cultural cloth of the period,

¹ For recent exceptions, see Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin, eds., *Folklore and Nationalism during the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 2012); John Kirk, Andrew Noble, and Michael Brown, eds., *United Islands? The Languages of Resistance* (London, 2012); Kate Horgan, *The Politics of Songs in Eighteenth Century Britain* (London, 2014); Oskar Cox Jensen, *Napoleon and British Song, 1797–1822* (Basingstoke, 2015); Ian Newman, “Civilizing Taste: ‘Sandman Joe,’ the Bawdy Ballad and Metropolitan Improvement,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 48, no. 4 (2015): 437–56; Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres, 1807–1815* (Farnham, 2015); Oskar Cox Jensen, David Kennerley, and Ian Newman, eds., *Charles Dibdin and Late Georgian Culture* (Oxford, 2018). Useful background can be found in Nicholas Temperley, ed., *Athlone History of Music in Britain in the Romantic Age, 1800–1914*, vol. 5 (London, 1981), esp. chaps. 4 and 6.

² See Paul Dennant, “‘The Barbarous English Jig’: The ‘Black Joke’ in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Folk Music Journal* 110, no. 3 (2013): 298–318; Gerald Porter, “Melody as a Bearer of Radical Ideology: English Enclosures, *The Coney Warren* and Mobile Clamour,” in *Rhythms of Revolt: European Traditions and Memories of Social Conflict in Oral Culture*, ed. Éva Guillorel, David Hopkin, and William G. Pooley (Abingdon 2018), 240–64. Porter claims that “Derry Down” is “strongly associated with the emerging oppositional cultures of the late eighteenth century” (245)—yet sixteen of the twenty-two uses of the tune for political songs between 1789 and 1815 that I have identified were loyalist.

being woven into people's practices and dispositions.³ In this article I explore the nontextual elements of music, dance, and song that moved people both emotionally and physically and integrated the political conflicts of the period into their daily lives. Much historical commentary is directed to what songs were saying about events, and how they were saying it; I argue that we should also be interested in how we are affected by experiences at a less intellectual level and how these less conscious influences shape our commitments and conduct.

In keeping with this approach, I address a range of ways in which music and song and their referents and associations became embedded in people's reading of and reaction to their world, and draw attention to the variety of audio experiences that made up people's lives and how these shaped their social and political responses and activities. I also argue that music and sound, at least in the intense period of political contestation during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, played a powerful role in generating and confirming a disposition to conformity among many sections of the British population.

DANCING IN STEP . . .

Dancing was both a highly disciplined activity and an expressive one. Chivers's 1822 work *The Modern Dancing Master* underlined this by beginning with a set of "Observations on Deportment": "EITHER in *Walking* or *Dancing*, the *Head* should be properly situated, erect and free; the *Neck* and *Shoulders* will than appear in their true proportion and in their proper places, the *Chest* rather broad and full, and the *Back* straight; the whole forming an easy motion to the *Hips*, without which neither the *Knees* or *Feet* can have true command."⁴

The unnamed author of *The Juvenile Guide . . . on Various Subjects, Addressed to Young Ladies* (1807) encourages dancing in its appropriate form, observing that of "all the amusements which prudence allows . . . I know none more calculated to enliven the mind, and give grace to the person, than dancing. When it is free from awkwardness and affectation, it is of all recreations the one most natural to young persons."⁵ A generation earlier, the *Polite Academy* recognized that this freedom was a partial one, within restraint: "Considering the efficacy of the exercise, and that fashion has abolished, or at least confined among the very few, the more robust methods of amusement, it can hardly be excused to neglect cultivating an art so innocent and agreeable as that of dancing; as it at once unites in itself the three great ends of bodily improvement, of diversion, and of healthy exercise."⁶

During the period of the Napoleonic Wars and Bourbon restoration, the character of formal dancing began to change, moving from the widely popular country dances and minuets of the eighteenth century to include the cotillion and quadrille

³ David Hopkin, *Voices of the People in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 2012).

⁴ G. M. S. Chivers, *The Modern Dancing Master: Containing [. . .] Nearly One Hundred of the Most Popular Airs, Arranged for the Piano Forte, Harp, Violin, or Flute* (London, 1822), 23.

⁵ *The Juvenile Guide, in a Series of Letters on Various Subjects, Addressed to Young Ladies* (London, 1807), 18.

⁶ *The Polite Academy, or, School of behaviour for young gentlemen and ladies* [. . .], 3rd ed. (London, 1771), 97.

(introduced by Lady Sarah Jersey at Almack's in London at the end of the Wars), the waltz (ca. 1812), and the polka (ca. 1840). In the process, the very much shared repertoires for dances and music of the eighteenth century became more class inflected as the nineteenth century developed. These changes also saw a shift from the formal and collective character of minuets and country dances toward a more intimate pairing of couples.⁷ Formal dances such as the minuet involved a good deal of intricate footwork but little physical contact between those partnered, with country dances largely restricting contact to the hands. Verbal interaction, especially in long country dance sets, was expected (although Chivers frowned on continuous conversation on the grounds that it would annoy others), but one did not grasp one's partner.⁸ In the waltz, contact with one's partner became much more extensive: early public performances of the waltz were reported to contain hopping, stamping, and throwing one's partner in the air, although the more elite works of the period strongly censured such behavior, and the dance increasingly took on more restrained forms.

At public balls and dances, dancing was a heightened experience in part because it provided a distinctive social experience, an opportunity for fashionable display before one's peers, a degree of competitiveness, and some risk. Getting things wrong, falling, or otherwise making an exhibition of oneself were to be avoided at all cost. Captain Gronow details the humiliation of a rotund Lord Graves falling to the floor when trying to emulate the much-admired *entrechat* (the crossing back and forth of the feet in the air) of his French-taught partner, Lady Harriet Butler, during a quadrille at Almack's—a humiliation that nearly resulted in a duel.⁹ The physical and personal self-control of the dancer that Chivers sought to inspire also extended well beyond the event itself, particularly for women: "Of so great importance is decorum in the female character, at all times, but especially in public assemblies, that an elegant writer has observed, 'women ought to be very circumspect, for a mere appearance is sometimes more prejudicial to them than a real fault.'"¹⁰

Dancing involved mobilization of the body in a performance, accompanied by heightened physical sensation, anxiety, and excitement. Its accomplishment was partly a matter of training and habituation to certain steps and motions, together with more consciously directed physical movements, alongside opportunities for conversation and exchange. In this world, bodily movement was sharply policed—especially for eligible young women—but many found dancing pleasurable, producing a heightened physical and sensory awareness that might give an emotional charge to subsequent memories and also link them with past performances and the events referenced in the tune. It was a chance to practice and display what one had learned from one's dancing master, or from the books of steps that circulated in polite society, yet as is clear from Frances Burney and Jane Austen, it involved a

⁷ Temperley, *Athlone History of Music*, 113–14.

⁸ Chivers, *Modern Dancing Master*, 27.

⁹ [Rees Howell] Gronow, *The Reminiscences and Recollections of Captain Gronow: Being Anecdotes of the Camp, Court, Clubs and Society, 1810–1860* (London, 1900), 298. In Frances Burney's *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, vol. 1 (London, 1814), 178–79, one element in "Ellis's" conduct that persuades people of her respectability is her mastery of the cotillion.

¹⁰ Chivers, *Modern Dancing Master*, 25.

complex mix of expression and control, exhibition and scrutiny.¹¹ Of course, the more formal events clearly raised the stakes to a much greater extent than the quiet, domestic occasions of practice or indulgence in the sheer pleasure of movement. Elizabeth Soane, the wife of the architect Sir John Soane, records several occasions when he was absent from home of going to friends for “a little dance”; her servants too occasionally held dances when she and Soane were out for an evening.¹² For all, the dance was something special.

Dancing in more public contexts was also closely tied up with matters of masculinity, femininity, and the performance of gender. The association of tunes with military themes and the prevalence of uniforms at the dances would have underlined masculine command, with some slippage between combat and engagement on the dance floor: with one’s female partner, in rivalry in the “lists and cards,” and in the formalities of engagement to dance.¹³ These associations would have been coupled with leading one’s partner through the rhythms of the dance, inviting both a sense of partnership and the management of the display of the woman’s performance, and of self-discipline and potentially mastery as a man—coupled for many with an acute sense of the fragility of that mastery.

The occasion of a dance might produce a heightened emotional, physical, and mental experience of self-discipline, bodily coordination, and social and sensual regulation and excitement, but was this effect entirely fleeting? I suggest that the referencing of other elements through tunes and their titles and in the wider marshalling of people’s appearance, dress, and movement added further to its significance. And in that context, the names of tunes might also become embedded in people’s memories, linking them to a particular collective reading of the past and its events. That this is so points to a wider set of experiences in which such associations were forged relatively unconsciously.

BACKGROUND NOISE

For many girls and young women, the introduction to music and dancing was something that parents with any pretensions to gentility would arrange. The Somerset parson William Holland refers frequently in his diary to his daughter “Margaret at her music.” On her fourteenth birthday in November 1799, she was joined for the afternoon and evening by the two Miss Lewises from Stowey:

The young ones had a dance in the afternoon, minuets first and then the Steps and Reel and I myself sung for them. Margaret dances a very good Minuet indeed. Miss Dodwell a most excellent dancer, so neat and nimble in her steps. Miss Lewis sung and played on the Harpsichord very prettily. Edward Selleck and his wife Esther supped here and they and the servants staid at the door to look on. Esther [had] nursed Margaret and was delighted with the exhibition. The servants had a treat of rum and water in the

¹¹ For first experiences of a dance, see Frances Burney, *Evelina*, vol. 1 (London, 1778), 34–36; Frances Burney, *Camilla, or a Picture of Youth*, 3 vols. (London, 1796), 1: 140–42. Consider the importance of dancing in the social worlds of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) or *Mansfield Park* (1814).

¹² Elizabeth Soane, diary (7 January 1806; 15 January 1805), Soane Museum, London.

¹³ See also Matthew McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* (Oxford, 2015), 134, 148.

kitchen. The youngsters were in good spirits, danced themselves quite fatigued and were glad at last to go to bed.¹⁴

Margaret's birthday dancing was a restricted social encounter, but this exclusiveness seems quite common—dancing at Almack's was a similarly narrow if more elite experience.¹⁵ Assembly rooms in London devoted to more open middle-class entertainment developed only in the 1830s and 1840s. Before then, dances usually involved men and women who were relatively clearly situated in relation to each other. Even if provincial balls could be sizable and more socially mixed, this did not necessarily diminish the weight carried by rank and station.¹⁶ On most occasions those with whom one engaged were familiar, while the tunes, the forms of dance, the dress codes (with officers in uniform), and the social encounters served to reference wider events and associations.

The dance and its music also implicated those on the sidelines, both in Holland's informal setting and (perhaps especially) on more formal, elite occasions. Mothers might be anxious about the young people in their party, concerned about the proprieties of social space, attracted by opportunities for social recognition for oneself or one's progeny—each element adding to the intensity of the experience. Holland himself exhibited this alertness when the family attended a Christmas Ball in 1815: "There my wife and I saw our children both dance at the same time and they made a good figure."¹⁷ These observers were unlikely to have been immune to the music or the titles of the tunes, nor would they have been unmoved. Foot-tappers, hummers, and those nodding and swaying in the audience in time would all be implicated, their bodies brought into motion by the music and the movement of others and by the semi-conscious memories of their own past engagements.

The subliminal pleasures of a degree of physicality had the potential to break out in ways that were not entirely under personal control. The poet and novelist Amelia Alderson was an excellent singer and had been taught to dance at Mr. Christian's Dancing and French School in Norwich. After her marriage to the portrait painter John Opie, she recalled an incident when they were showing a friend around the Dutch church in Norwich that captures the way that this disciplined mix of habituated bodily movement and expression might catch one out in relation to other conventions: "I, finding myself somewhat cold, began to hop and dance upon the spot where I stood. Suddenly, my eyes chanced to fall upon the pavement below, and I started at beholding the well-known name of 'Christian,' grav'd upon the slab; I

¹⁴ Jack Ayers, ed., *Paupers and Pig Killers: The Diary of William Holland, a Somerset Parson, 1799–1818* (Stroud, 1984), 19–20.

¹⁵ Almack's had a restricted clientele with strict rules of admission. See E. Beresford Chancellor, *Memoirs of St. James's Street and Chronicles of Almack's* (London, 1922), 208–9. See also Gronow, *Reminiscences*, 42–46.

¹⁶ Jane Fiske, ed., *The Oakes Diaries: Business, Politics, and the Family in Bury St. Edmunds, 1778–1827*, vol. 1, *James Oakes' Diaries, 1778–1800* (Boydell, 1990), 273–74, 285. See entries for Yarmouth on 19, 24, and 26 August 1791, and for Bury St. Edmunds on 12 October 1792, indicating up to eighty couples dancing.

¹⁷ Ayers, *Diary of William Holland*, 267. See also Abigail Gawthorne, *The Diary of Abigail Gawthorne*, ed. Adrian Henstock (Nottingham, 1980), who carefully records her daughter's dances; see, for example, 61, 66, 68, 75, 77, 80, 87, 89, 90, 92, 93, and so on.

stopped in dismay, shocked to find that I had actually been dancing upon the grave of my old master—he who first taught me to dance.”¹⁸

Musical engagements in other more usual contexts could mobilize the body in equally unwitting and overwhelming ways. Consider Dickens’s description of the “Carmagnole” in *A Tale of Two Cities*: “No fight could have been half so terrible as this dance. It was so emphatically a fallen sport—a something, once innocent, delivered over to all devilry—a healthy pastime changed into a means of angering the blood, bewildering the senses, and steeling the heart.”¹⁹ Dickens recognizes that the dance controls the bodies of those engaged, and by mobilizing and controlling it, unleashes deeper, more irrational forces. His representation catches something profound about the way that music can marshal the body and move it through space and time in ways that are in part intentional, partly habitual, partly interactive, and partly involuntary. This sense of incomplete self-mastery and the taking over of the body and the senses by movement and the drama of the occasion is something that reform-minded novelists recognized in highlighting the dangers of the ball and the masquerade (as with Miss Milner in Elizabeth Inchbald’s *A Simple Story*),²⁰ or by having heroines, such as Mary Hays’s Emma Courtney, remain unexposed to dancing in the name of more rational uses of their faculties.²¹ As is clear from her description of Camilla and Indiana’s first public dance in *Camilla*, Frances Burney, in contrast, saw dancing as a significant theater for the demonstration of decorous self-mastery.²²

The involuntary submission to music that might take people out of themselves was also clear in more domestic cases. Sharon Turner, who was to become Britain’s leading Anglo-Saxon historian, was a friend of William Watts, the engraver, and fell under the spell of his daughter. Watts allowed his daughter and several friends, including Turner, to take a boat trip to visit Alexander Pope’s house at Twickenham. They left early one summer morning in a company of eight, violins and voices serenading the party as they were rowed up river with the flow of the tide. As they rowed back, Turner asked them to play Handel’s minuet from *Ariadne*, which he was then learning:

They gave such an expression to its pathetic melody, that the English words which had been applied to it came into my remembrance & I was irresistibly impelled to recite or chant them, for I do not sing, aloud to the notes of the air, continuing to repeat them after the Violins had ceased—“How is it possible, how can I forbear, When so many charms all around you you wear”—I was then reclining below her [Watt’s daughter] as she sat on the Prow. I did not mean visibly to address them to her, tho my feelings did & were the cause of my reciting them as to myself, but these became so excited that I cd not avoid at last looking up to her as I repeated them. She instantly tapped me on my head with her fan & bade me be quiet while the other ladies burst into a laugh & called me the Knight of the Woeful Countenance. I felt that I was deviating from the momentary impulse into a relaxation of my usual self command & was glad that their jokes recalled it.²³

¹⁸ Cecilia Brightwell, *Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie*, 2nd ed. (Norwich, 1854), 29.

¹⁹ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Andrew Saunders, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1988), v, 267–68.

²⁰ Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, 4 vols. (London, 1791), 1:63 and 1:257–75, on the masquerade.

²¹ Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, 2 vols. (London, 1796).

²² Burney, *Camilla*, 1:136–79.

²³ Sharon Turner, “My Autobiography,” 9 July 1794, Add. MSS 81089, fols. 367–68, British Library.

Turner was not in a position to propose and could make no declaration, even as both were well aware of their mutual attraction. But, in this instance, he was undone by the music.

LOYAL TUNES, LOYAL BODIES

From 1794 and thereafter through the 1800s, loyalist songs and loyalist themes and commemoration became hegemonic in many parts of Britain, especially southern England and Wales. Few radical songs (save in association with Ireland around 1797–98, although these were brutally policed) were published in this period, and the names of tunes, the performances in public gardens and concerts, and the collective behavior of crowds at theaters and entertainments included a range of musical forms that invoked a loyalism in relation to the conflict with France and the associated struggle in Britain over the issue of reform and the war. We might see this activity as rammed down people's throats—and it is true that some of the songs of loyalist and Volunteer associations seem rather labored. But that was not a perspective that the vast majority of contemporaries took of their activities.²⁴ Indeed, for many, part of the attraction of the Volunteers and the associations was precisely the collective activities of singing, playing, and moving together—generating a musical and vocal expression of association that matched their motions in marching and drilling, and mirrored and reproduced the emotional identification. Moreover, references to events in titles and their implicit recommemoration in each replaying ensured that the association with the status quo seeped into the background of entertainments and “excitements”—the concert, the theater, the gardens, the assembly. These entertainments created a backdrop painted with a particular narrative that was rehearsed emotionally and bodily by members of the social elite and a wide range of the middling sort in the metropolis and other urban settings. That narrative would have been reinforced in country dances, when hearing the singing of those who reperformed what they heard, in the humming of refrains linked to particular signifiers, in the whistling of tunes in the street that could recall some element of the experience of the felt solidarities of collective experience in a Dibdin entertainment, or, again, in the bodily memory and its invocation through repetition of moves from a dance. All this involved the involuntary evoking of the memorialization embedded in music and dance of the period.

One catalyst for this memorialization process was the titles given to dance tunes. A recent essay by Erica Buurman draws attention to printed dance music with titles commemorating aspects of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars and their culmination in the Battle of Waterloo. Buurman draws on a range of collections published between 1795 and 1819 to show that, in addition to strongly commemorative tunes, especially in relation to Waterloo, titles also served as a “more impassive commentary” that brought the political and military context into the social and cultural life of the nation.²⁵ We can extend this picture by examining some of the manuscript

²⁴ For resistance, see the Diary of William Upcott, Add. MSS 32558, fol. 41r–v, British Library. See also Cox Jensen's discussion of Joseph Mayett and Robert Butler in *Napoleon and British Song*, 67.

²⁵ Erica Buurman and Oskar Cox Jensen, “Dancing the ‘Waterloo Waltz,’” in *Napoleon's Hundred Days and the Politics of Legitimacy*, ed. Kate Astbury and Mark Philp (Basingstoke, 2018), 208–32, at 227.

collections made in the period. For example, Joshua Gibbons, a papermaker in Lincolnshire who developed a local reputation for contributing music to balls, feasts, and various rustic entertainments, compiled a collection of tunes in the early 1820s. It is noteworthy for the number of titles involving reference to the events and personages of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars—"Battle of the Nile," "Battle of Trafalgar," "Brunswick Waltz," "Conquering Hero," "Copenhagen Waltz," "Down with the French," "Duke of Wellington," "Duke of York's March" (and Quickstep), "Grand March in the Siege of Vallengien [sic]," and so on.²⁶ It is worth comparing these tunes with the collection of Joshua Jackson, a North Yorkshire corn dealer and local musician.²⁷ Its start date (1798) is clear but the closing dating is more uncertain, the editors suggesting 1820 on the grounds that dances that became popular around that time—the polka, quadrille, and waltz—are not included. Strikingly, Jackson's collection is relatively free of reference to recent military events, in contrast to the Gibbons manuscript. The compendious digital curating work of the Village Music Project allows us to see that in fact such variation was quite common.²⁸ Many of the extant collections made by individual musicians around the beginning of the nineteenth century involved rather less reference to current or recent events than did Gibbons's or printed editions of music from London. In the latter case, the purpose of such publications was to sell topically referenced dance tunes to a fashionable and predominantly metropolitan clientele; the manuscript repositories suggest that individuals compiled material from across a longer period and with wider interests as a set of tools of the trade with which to work and entertain, and the political inflections of those tools, in their titles and past associations of tunes, would likely have been influenced by a mix of the material they encountered, personal preferences, and the salience of the tunes for, and the demand from, the audiences for whom they characteristically performed.

The contents of the manuscript collections in the Village Music Project suggest that many of the topically titled tunes in printed sources were relatively ephemeral, not transferring to private collections, or becoming lost or reworked for other purposes and probably losing their nominal connection with military events. Individual collectors clearly had their preferences and prejudices: the Carlisle MS²⁹ (ca. 1812) is distinctive in having, alongside many locally named tunes, a number named after events in the Peninsular War: "The Spanish Patriots 1810," "Morgiana in Spain," "Morgiana in L[or]d. Wellington's Camp,"³⁰ and "General Graham's Waltz" (Graham being a commander under Wellington in Spain). One of the collections with the most topical tunes is Richard Hughes's 1823 manuscript (from Shropshire) of 170 tunes, which include "Wellington's Victory," "Blucher's March," "The Walls of Madrid Waltz," two tunes for "Lord Wellington," "Waterloo," "Lord Nelson's Hornpipe," "Lord Nelson's Victory," "General Blucher," "Lord Hill's Quickstep,"

²⁶ Peter D. Sumner, ed., *Lincolnshire Collections*, vol. 1, *The Joshua Gibbons Manuscript* (Rochdale, 1997).

²⁷ Liz Bowen, Robin Shepherd, and Rosalind Shepherd, eds., *Tunes, Songs and Dances from the 1798 Manuscript of Joshua Jackson*, 2 vols. (Ilkley, 1998–2011).

²⁸ The Village Music Project, accessed 29 July 2019, www.village-music-project.org.uk.

²⁹ This manuscript, purchased in Carlisle, formed part of the Frank Kidson collection, now in the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, Cecil Sharp House, London. It was transcribed by Anne Geddes Gilchrist; the original has since disappeared.

³⁰ The Morgiana tunes are spin-offs from Sheridan's *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*.

“Farewell Nelson,” “Says Bonney I’ll Invade You!,” “Admiral Mitchell’s Hornpipe,” “Fourth Dragoon March” (another reference to the Peninsular War), “The Waterloo Dance,” “Lord Moira’s Strathspey,” and “Lady Nelson’s Reel,” making up some 10 per cent of the music transcribed. But Hughes’s collection has a much higher level of contemporary reference than most. In northern collections in the Village Music Project, such as the Irwin collection of 108 tunes from Lancashire (1823), we can see rather different preferences, with “Bonny crossing the Alps,” “Young Napoleon’s Waltz,” “Napoleon’s March,” “Buonaparte’s Coronation March,” a “Loyalist Hornpipe,” two tunes referencing Queen Caroline, and one “Billy Pitt.” These various lists suggest different interests and (probably) political outlook and should alert us that collectors and performers drew on a range of sources influenced in part by their sympathies and their audiences—nonetheless embedding contemporary reference in their repertoires.

The more challenging question is whether it mattered that a dance tune had this sort of title. It is certainly difficult to believe that the steps of a dance and its title had much intrinsic connection. The steps to “Waterloo,” for example, are described as: “Change sides and back again—first couple lead down the middle—up again—pousette at top” (“pousette” being “two couples pass around each other to places”). For “French Liberty,” “Two ladies join hands and pass between their partners—the two gentlemen do the same—half figure your own sides—lead up on couple and set—back to back—turn your partner—pousette at top.”³¹ In neither case does the title seem to be expressed in the movement.

Many dance tunes also had a rather loose connection to their titles. Titles that developed a stronger link were those that, for some conjunction of reasons, embedded themselves in people’s social and cultural environment, encoding a deeper set of memories and associations that would wholly or partly be recalled by playing the tune, executing the dance, or hearing snatches being sung in the streets or hummed in the kitchen. For such embedded tunes, the playing of a snatch of notes could conjure up a range of associations—just as the phrase “Boney was a warrior” can even today summon for many a chain of association that cannot help but culminate in “went to St. Helena” and “broke his heart and died!” This might be equally true of dance music and its titles. By implicit or explicit reference to military victories, Napoleon’s flight, or the structure of the constitutional order in the “Prince of Wales March” or “Quickstep towards the Throne,” tunes and their names could link the dance to the wider political world. Because dance was an exceptional entertainment, a heightened experience, and an encounter with those in one’s wider social circles, the calling of a tune when a dance was announced would, if popular and repeated, serve to link the title’s contemporary reference to a set of subjective experiences, movements, and emotions. As such, the title would gain significance in association with the physical, social, and emotional experience of the dance while simultaneously linking those feelings and memories to a wider political context.

SOUNDSCAPE

We should also recognize people’s embeddedness in the familiar sounds of their communities. In Karl Philip Moritz’s novel *Anton Reiser* (1785), the narrator comments

³¹ Chivers, *Modern Dancing Master*, 49, 44.

that for the first time, as Reiser began his residence in Erfurt, he found the sound of the bells bringing “all his memories of the past gradually. . . to life . . . This continual recurrence of sensory impressions seems to be the main thing that keeps people under control and confines them to a small area.—One gradually feels more and more irresistibly attracted by the very monotony of the circle in which one turns, one becomes attracted to the old and flees from the new. It becomes a sort of crime to step out of these surroundings, which become, so to speak, our second body, enfolding the first.”³²

For a considerable proportion of people in the late Georgian period, in a similar way, the sounds of the bells and the singing of psalms and hymns in church would have served recurrently to summon collective memories and a sense of common place and identity. Most of Parson Holland’s music was experienced in church or from military bands, once his daughter stopped playing (to characteristic parental disappointment). His audio world was then most commonly referenced through comments on the church bells, which rang on almost all occasions from battles to weddings and for announcements of all kinds. Hymn singing too was a physical experience, both in the vocal actions and in the awareness of one’s membership in a body and a sound larger than oneself. Being part of an audience for religious songs could be physically moving: Holland records the fine melodious singing of the neighbors and workmen gathered in his kitchen on Christmas Day 1799, and of “our Church musicians who had serenaded the Family this cold morning at five o’clock.”³³ Not every Christmas recital was so successful—in 1801, Holland recorded, “the Singers at the window tuned forth a most dismal ditty, half drunk too with the most wretched voices.”³⁴

Holland’s dismayed entry points to the occasional fragility of the musical hegemony. In the journal of John Skinner, another Somerset rector working in a mining area of the county, the church choir developed a degree of collective identity that challenged their spiritual director’s authority. On one occasion, being ruled too drunk to be permitted “to chaunt the service” after the first lesson, they clapped their hats on their heads and left the church in mid-service. Their resistance was temporary, but relations remained strained—Skinner wanted a girls’ choir but found himself forced to stick with his male choir because their introduction of a large number of instruments into the church had made them very popular with the congregation.³⁵

Music, the church, and politics were welded together. In May 1800, Holland delivered a sermon for the local loyalist association, remembering, “They marched in great order and parade with Colours flying, drums beating and a band of Musick. After Church they returned in the same order and parade and we all dined at the Rose and Crown. An excellent dinner, a great many Loyal Toasts drunk after dinner and the musick played of God Save the King, and Rule Britannia.”³⁶ In this world there were many moments of quiet—Holland’s son was forbidden his drum on

³² Karl Philipp Moritz, *Anton Reiser: A Psychological Novel*, ed. Ritchie Robinson (London, 1997), 316, 317.

³³ Ayers, *Diary of William Holland*, 23.

³⁴ Ayers, 61.

³⁵ John Skinner, *Journal of a Somerset Rector, 1803–1834*, ed. Howard Coombs and Peter Coombs (Oxford, 1971), 200–2, 398.

³⁶ Ayers, *Diary of William Holland*, 35.

Sundays—but we can appreciate Moritz’s point about sound becoming part of the background to people’s lives. Sometimes it came to the foreground, as at Christmas, and in public ceremonies, but in many cases it was a largely taken-for-granted framer of experience. Occasionally it expressed a very personal response to events. Holland’s shock over Nelson’s death issued, a few days after the news, in the following entry: “I have been busy writing my Song on the Victory of Lord Nelson, and I have sent one off to Mr Northey and one to Mr Ruscomb Poole.” On the official day of thanksgiving for “Lord Nelson’s Glorious Victory,” Holland adorned the church gate with laurel and set the pattern for his own family and those attending church of wearing laurel in their hats: “Our Bells were ringing all this day and illuminations ordered at this House . . . the Town was very lively and on the top of Castle Hill was a Glorious Bonfire and Music.” In the evening the family had supper at the Globe Inn: “At length a song was called for and Mr Northey blabbed that I had prepared one. On this I was called on. I did not relish singing a song of my own making and declined it much. At last I began and it took very much indeed, several bursts of applause at each Stanza and when I had finished they all rose up with Glasses in their Hands drinking my Health and clapping for some minutes so that I began to feel myself a little awkward.”³⁷

Loyalist associations attempted to insist on the unquestionability of the established order, but there was considerable local variation in recruitment, practices, and connections with the wider community, and some areas (such as Norwich) might simply resist involvement if they had strong traditions of opposition—just as the Reverend Skinner’s mining community showed some capacity for getting their own way. Nonetheless, in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth, most musical occasions largely confirmed the status quo, and it is difficult to identify areas of common experience that would have reinforced more reformist aspirations and identities. The sounds, music, and disciplined movement of the complex, hierarchical culture of the Georgian world played an important part in integrating people into their communities in a variety of subtle, if partly negotiated ways. In consequence, resistances were more fragmented, less communally solidaristic, and more individualistic than at the end of the nineteenth century. The dominance of this collective experience elicited more satirical (or cynical or parodic) and reactive but less programmatic responses. That much contention took this form speaks to the socially, bodily, and emotionally embedded character of a basic acceptance of the status quo, against which it was possible to react or resist only imperfectly. One might sing “God shave the pig” as against the usual lines, or interrupt women singers performing loyal songs in Covent Garden,³⁸ or excuse oneself from the dance; one might stay away from Dibdin’s entertainments or heckle in the theater; but such resistance was occasional and took place against a wider sense that the status quo breathed a certain inevitability. Congregating at dinners, in conversational coteries, or in other private spaces could allow people to give free rein to their sentiments, but for many, these individual effusions of the

³⁷ Ayers, 33, 121, 123–24.

³⁸ Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers, Add. MS 16923, fol. 127 r–v, British Library.

mind remained only half articulated rather than the expression of collective commitments.

Until the “Gagging Acts” of 1795, there were political dinners in London in which music and song could play a counter-hegemonic role. Shortly before the arrest of leading radicals on charges of treason, Turner managed to satisfy his curiosity about the political associations by securing himself a seat at the Society for Constitutional Information dinner on 2 May 1794, where he contrived to be sat opposite John Horne Tooke:

There were 402 persons present of all ranks & ages, partly members, partly visitors, a fine band of music played the Marseillaise Hymn—Ca Ira—and several other French Patriotic tunes which the company applauded. . . . When they began to have Songs & Glee of their own Kind from the professional singers who were there, somebody called on Mr H. Tooke for a song. He said he was no musician, but to shew his congeniality with the spirit of the meeting, he wd attempt a short one. He then sang in his way a Jacobin parody on God Save the King to the old tune—of which these 3 lines are a specimen

O George! when wilt thou rise
Open thy stupid eyes
And see thy fall.³⁹

These occasions were rare, especially after the repressive “Two Acts” or “Gagging Acts” at the end of 1795. But we might also ask how far the radicals’ collective singing expressed their sense of opposition without necessarily doing much to develop it. The voicing of opposition through songs and toasts at (the exclusively male) association dinners has more the character of expressive flourish and the frisson of transgression than of deep practical commitment. After Waterloo, in the new urban centers of the North, other collective spaces developed that people like the Lancashire radical and writer Samuel Bamford could draw on, but there is little evidence that these were available on any scale in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and for many of the participants, these occasions went against the grain of their everyday experience.⁴⁰

In a characteristically sharp literary satire of both the loyalist provost and the ardent enthusiasts for the French Revolution, the novelist John Galt gives us the provost’s sanguine view of the impact of revolutionary fervor in his district: “I think, upon the whole, however, that our royal borough was not afflicted to any very dangerous degree, though there was a sort of itch of it among a few of the sedentary orders, such as the weavers and shoemakers, who, by the nature of sitting long in one posture, are apt to become subject to the flatulence of theoretical opinions.”⁴¹ Galt’s comment follows the understanding of the period in ascribing the orientation of the mind to the posture of the body, which gives further ground for us to be attentive to the way people moved around and situated themselves physically, the proprieties of motion in reception rooms, the disciplined allowance of expression in playing music or singing, the rigors of polite interchange, and the rituals of greeting and

³⁹ Turner, “Autobiography,” 2 May 1794, BL Add. MSS 81089, fols. 347–48.

⁴⁰ See Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789–1848* (Manchester, 2016).

⁴¹ John Galt, *The Provost*, ed. Ian A. Gordon (Oxford, 1973), 57.

not greeting in public spaces. The streets of cities could be rambunctious and unpredictable, and as such offered opportunities for transgression, riot, popular justice, and momentary collective activity. Yet these were episodic and uncertain resources—crowds could parade Horne Tooke in triumph after his acquittal at his treason trial in 1794, and others might smash the windows of those failing to illuminate them to celebrate a naval victory. For men and women from the middling orders—whether Upcott, Turner, and his father-in-law William Watts or the literary radicals in London—the resources for radical solidarity and commitment were more private and particular.

CONCLUDING NOTE

A reflective account of the music, dance, and song of this period that considers the disciplining of the body and emotions understands these phenomena less as chosen pastimes and more as embedded and embodied practices through which individuals developed capacities, movements, and emotions in an inseparable mix of the physical, affective, mental, and memorial. This mix played a formative role in identity and locked that identity into a range of signifiers and prompts that evoked a wider identification with the established order. Elite groups associated with the Whigs might have cultivated an oppositional and occasionally transgressive political culture, but they were also deeply implicated in the institutions and procedures of society and government, and few questioned that basic framework. Among the more middling orders, there was some exploration of different ways of being, including a degree of sexual experimentation, an alternative sociability, and new forms of self-presentation—with cut hair, the abandonment of wigs, new codes of dress, and a culture of long-distance walking. But it is difficult to identify opportunities for immersive activities that carried a fully embodied radical experience, in contrast to the wealth of evidence that tacitly confirmed the status quo: in theater, dance, church services, public entertainments, military parades, and exercises. Each of these could involve a range of intellectual, sensory, emotional and bodily experience and could be framed so as to summon components of distinctive collective identity and to evoke elements of a narrative of exceptionalism and national destiny.

To examine the culture of music, dance, and song in these ways offers us a means of seeing the contentious politics of the 1790s and early 1800s as being embedded in a wider set of deep-seated cultural practices. It also gives cultural history its proper place as a fully engaged element within a wider political and social history that takes bodies, movement, vocalizations, laughter, and sentiment as forms through which people experience their lives, and that shape their identities and conceptions of their interests, in ways that give the status quo considerable implicit weight. In the polarizing world of political contention in the years of war against France, this deeper cultural background facilitated the preservation of the status quo, and the marginalization and targeted repression of those who stood against it.