

Diverse Music Listening Modes: Exploring the Historical Interplay between Social Structures, Repertoire, and Cultural Organization of the Senses

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Abstract

Historical studies on music listening have experienced significant growth in recent decades. This essay presents a novel approach to investigating historical music listening by reconstructing “music listening modes” from a cultural perspective. It assesses scholarly debates on three of the most intensely discussed aspects of cultural perspectives on music listening to uncover their potential for reconstructing the focuses and properties of attention during music listening: first, audience social structures; second, the range of musical repertoire accessible to these audiences; and third, the cultural organization of the senses. Subsequently, the study explores the impact of aural educational practices on listening modes using primary sources from the Restoration to the mid-eighteenth century. In-depth analyses of two listening accounts exemplify how the balance between sensory organization, available musical repertoire, and social structures was sensitive to changes in any of these aspects. In conclusion, the essay highlights the complex and dynamic nature of music listening practices in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which continue to evolve in response to shifting social and cultural contexts. By illuminating the intricate relationship between sensory organization, musical repertoire, and social structures, this study contributes to a more profound understanding of the historical development of music listening practices.



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Introduction

Over the past few decades, there has been a significant increase in studies on music listening—one of the broadest fields in musicology. These studies have developed various methodological approaches to historical music listening, primarily (but not exclusively) focusing on Western-European music listening after 1750.^[1] One major methodological challenge addressed in a number of different ways is that traces of music listening are often scarce and hard to “decode”: Prior to the age of sound recording, music performances and listeners’ testimonies were primarily passed on through inherently reductive written sources, such as scores, letters, diaries, and published accounts—if they were passed on at all. Making sense of these sources and filling in the gaps they leave in understanding how music listening was practiced involves considering a range of additional sources. The selection of these further contextual sources enables many different ways to address historical music listening.

In this paper, I propose a new approach to studying historical music listening by reconstructing “music listening modes” from a cultural perspective. In my definition, a music listening mode is characterized by specific focuses and properties of attention during music performance, shaped by physical and mental aspects of dealing with the listening situation. Analyzing these focuses and properties of attention involves examining social and cultural premises of music listening, as well as musical and other sensuous aspects of the experience. Reconstructing listening modes goes beyond binary notions such as “attentive” or “inattentive” and helps to develop a nuanced picture of how people listened to music in different places and at different times throughout history. To argue the benefits of analyzing music listening in this way, I will first explain my approach against the background of scholarly debates from various disciplines. Next, I will exemplify the analysis of music listening modes with two English listeners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who, to use William Weber’s phrase, “paid attention to [music] in ways different from our own.”^[2]

A Cultural Perspective on Music Listening Modes

The most inspiring approaches to cultural perspectives on historical music listening, which can be most usefully applied to analyzing listening modes as defined above, have been developed around three key factors: first, audiences’ social structures; second, the musical repertoire available to these audiences; and third, cultural organization of the senses. Different listening modes can be inferred from the interrelations between the discourses and practices related to these factors. While there are many excellent studies in all these areas, the ways they were employed and combined to make sense of historical music listening are diverse. Naturally, I cannot summarize or build on all of them.^[3] Instead, I will outline some major lines of debate on audiences’ social structures, available repertoire, and cultural organization of the senses separately and evaluate conclusions from these debates for the analysis of music listening modes. While my own reading and handling of these methodological approaches are shaped by my work on music listening in England around 1700, I aim to assess them in a general way before applying them—bearing in mind that any new study would face critical, unavoidable, and ever-fresh challenges in balancing the interrelations between social structures, repertoire, and cultural organization of the senses in order to specify how they might have influenced focuses and

properties of attention within a particular cultural frame.

(1) Audiences' social structures: Naturally, when dealing with music listening, the listener as a social being is of vital importance. The first musicologist to consider historical music listening on a broader level, Heinrich Bessler, already emphasized the significance of tracing social developments to understand the listening audience.^[4] From a contemporary perspective, the extent to which he actually did so may seem somewhat inadequate.^[5] Nonetheless, he inspired many subsequent studies on audiences, which provide valuable information on social contexts wherein listening to musical performances took place.^[6] Understanding the social and financial limitations of access to music helps explain which social groups constituted music audiences. Social power has been made the focus of many studies on music in general. These studies can also help determine who had the most influence on cultural convictions of what to listen for in music and explain how certain groups within an audience established socially dominant listening modes. This applies to audiences of so-called popular music as well as those attending court, liturgical, and any other music at various times and places. Whether argued with Foucault's power of discourse or otherwise, the dynamics between musicians, patrons, entrepreneurs, critics, and certain members or groups of the broader audiences, all of which include gender differences, are crucial for intricate studies on music listening. These dynamics are traceable in discourses as well as in social and cultural practices related to a certain (kind of) performance. Specifically, Christopher Small's concept of "musicking" has raised awareness of how social practices at and around musical entertainments shape attention too.^[7]

(2) Available musical repertoire: It may be a truism that different kinds of music were practiced and listened to at any given time. However, there were (and are) significant differences regarding which spectrum of music was available to a specific listener. This spectrum is crucial for evaluating how listeners approached any particular kind of music within that spectrum and how they learned to handle music listening in different contexts. With respect to music appreciation, most problems within the field of historical music listening arose from methodologically misguided interpretations of such interrelations between listeners and music. In particular, the musical work-concept as understood in the nineteenth century influenced scholarly approaches to music listening well into the late twentieth century.^[8] Its frequently anachronistically or genre-unsuitably applied aesthetic premises explain some judgmental attitudes in Bessler's studies and Adorno's eight types of listeners of 1968. They also made their way into one of the most influential music listening histories to this day, namely James Johnson's *Listening in Paris* from 1995.^[9]

While Johnson did extensive, remarkable, and inspiring work to reconstruct the social structures of different audiences, including audience members' financial backgrounds and different kinds of audience behavior during music performances in Paris from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, he did not examine musical adaptation practices to the same degree. This becomes apparent when he criticizes the French adaptation of Wolfgang Amadé Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*), for example.^[10] Furthermore, his musical analyses sometimes suggest the possibility of "translating" musical structures too directly into audience structures—for which he has been criticized by several scholars.^[11] Still, similar attitudes were widespread at the time and implicit in scholarly opinions that studying music listening was predominantly worthwhile with regard to music from the long nineteenth century onward.^[12] On these premises, and in analogy to the romanticist notion of an "organically" evolving composition, the "proper" listener's attention would have to focus on nothing but the music to enable appropriate understanding and appreciation of its evolvment. While this might to some

extent explain composers' music listening, if only at a certain time, it seems highly debatable whether it could ever have been part of a socially dominant listening mode.^[13] the challenge in defining the interrelations between musical qualities and the social structure of the audience remains a big one. Part of a solution may be to pay more attention to musical practices. In performance practice research, valuable approaches have been developed to understand musical aspects based on, and going beyond, what scores can convey regarding music before, during, and after the nineteenth century.^[14]

(3) Organization of the senses: Music listening is a perception practice closely linked to other perception practices. This is why, on a more general level, studies on the cultural organization of the senses can be helpful in defining music listening modes.^[15] General everyday structures of perception or, to use Andreas Reckwitz's term, "sensuous regimes" ("Sinnesregime") and the way different music listening modes fit into them call for further investigation.^[16] Walter J. Ong's appeal "to think of cultures in terms of the organization of the sensorium,"^[17] as well as even earlier ideas by Helmuth Plessner and Georg Simmel, already pointed in the same direction.^[18] However, similar to the dynamics of the musical work-concept as understood in the nineteenth century, "enlightened" concepts of the senses influenced scholarly perspectives on historical music listening beyond the long nineteenth century. Influential scholars such as Ong and Marshall McLuhan have pointed out that the Enlightenment brought about a new concentration on the visual: the eye became the sole dominant sense of learning, whereas before, it had shared this status with the ear.^[19] This cultural development was sometimes regarded as one factor why even in music listening from the Enlightenment onwards, the ear was somehow obligated to work like the eye in the sense that it was to "see" the whole score inwardly. Or else, as part of a rather opposing listening mode based on a kind of emancipation of the ear from the eye, listening represented a counter-world to the analytical world of the eye, leading to immersion.^[20]

However, sense hierarchies should not imply that only the culturally most important sense had a role to play. Consideration of historical practices suggests the involvement of all the senses during any practice, albeit to different degrees at different places and times and in different situations. Developing a bigger picture also involves defining the roles of senses other than the dominant one. In the quest of broadening perspectives on the cultural organization of the senses, scholars like Murray Schafer and Jonathan Sterne argued that the scientific concentration on the visible had led to an undue neglect of the historical relevance of the audible.^[21] They inspired many subsequent studies on soundscapes, which mostly examine modern and postmodern sonic worlds. Since then, the question of how attention in historical music listening was formed in relation to everyday listening has been the focus of numerous case studies but rarely of more extensive histories that also trace more general developments.^[22]

Furthermore, impressions on senses other than the ear are just as relevant to music listening as bird sounds were to Charles Darwin's bird descriptions in his colorfully illuminated *Descent of Man* (1871). If one accepts the relevance of the whole sensorium for any perception practice, music listening means more than just listening; at the very least, it comprises practices of simultaneous hearing and seeing. Music often was (and is) part of multimedia ventures. Music's role within a variety of arts—depending on the (spectrum of) repertoire—and the effects of everyday sensory impressions on the sensorium need to be defined if one is to understand cultural standards of how much and what kind of attention was to be placed on which musical (as well as other) aspects during a performance. Furthermore, considering music listening as a practice involves considering the whole listening situation with its appeals on all the senses. This entails the design of the places at which music was performed and further aspects which added

sensory stimuli to the entertainment, such as the behavior of different groups of the audience. They all bear witness to cultural structures of the senses.^[23]

With respect to scholarly debates on attention during music listening, sources which ironically emphasize such sensuous stimuli resulting from parts of the listening situation other than the musical work have sometimes been regarded as sources of rather distracted music listening. For example, as caricatures such as William Hogarth's *Laughing Audience* (1733) suggest (see figure 1), audiences might have been just as much concerned with listening to the music as with chatting, flirting, eating, touching, and—considering the mess—probably also smelling a lot of things. If judged and generalized too quickly, such depictions might entice the cultural historian to infer that audiences misguided all their five senses instead of listening attentively. However, while satirical engravings certainly say a lot about who the artist wanted to ridicule, they need to be contextualized much further if they are to actually help explain listening modes. In this case, at the very least, Hogarth's irony of misapplied senses could only have been a powerful one in the case that in his day entertainments were expected to please all the senses, albeit ideally in a morally inoffensive way.



Figure 1: William Hogarth, *The Laughing Audience* (1733), New York, [The Met](#), 17.3.888-262, © OA (Public Domain)

Bearing in mind the various interrelations between social structures, different spectrums of musical repertoire, and cultural organization of the sensorium, there is at least one general conclusion to draw with respect to music listening modes: at any time or place there were more listening modes than just one.^[24] Even when only concentrating on socially dominant listening modes, the questions of *who* considered *what kind of attention* most appropriate to *what kind of music* call for further historical scrutiny—since music as well as attention can have many socially acceptable forms in different regions and at different times.^[25]

Music Listening Modes as Formed by

Educational Practices in Seventeenth-Century England

Two music listening testimonies in letters by noble women will serve to explain how the interrelations between social structures, available repertoire, and cultural organization of the senses influenced music listening modes in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.^[26] At this time, music was largely regarded as part of the education of noble sons and daughters. Nearly all educational, philosophical, and “popular” publications follow a didactic impulse in explaining, praising, or criticizing how music leads to, improves, or corrupts moral forms of behavior. Practicing and thinking about music were supposed to contribute to educating the body and character. Taking music seriously meant accepting the idea that at least “good” music served moral ends.^[27] The success of such education had to be performed at social gatherings.^[28] My two listening accounts in letters by women of comparable social status and educational level, describing typical music listening situations in private homes at their respective times (in the 1660s and the 1740s), hint at fairly different listening modes when compared to a line of further sources which help to define discourses and practices with regard to audiences’ social structures, the spectrum of musical repertoire available to the listeners, and cultural organization of the sensorium. The differences in these two examples are quite distinctive, even though both listening modes correspond to a more general organization of the senses as formed by aural educational practices.

The cultural organization of the senses with respect to aural educational practices was predominantly focused on the ear and the eye, the two “senses of learning.”^[29] Aural forms of teaching would even appeal to the ear more than to the eye. Aural teaching means that the student predominantly learned by listening (i.e., predominantly through the ear) rather than by silent reading (i.e., predominantly through the eye). Of course, there were many written treatises. However, they were read aloud to a group of people more than studied individually. For the most part, students would write down the quintessence of what they heard, as private commonplace books testify.^[30] The higher the learned standard was, the more care was taken to also memorize the author and note down exact quotations. Even so, the focus in practice was on the essence of the contents and, even more importantly, on the skill to apply it in conversation as needed. Since conversation was the most central skill in elitist social life, rhetorical competencies were key. The focus of attention, therefore, was likely directed to the overarching moral and memorable key (moral) aspects of a lecture, which could easily be varied and adjusted in conversation. In the case of private education, which usually was the only option available to women, teaching by private tutors was comparably aural.

What does this imply for music listening? First, it involves the assumption that lectures and musical performances were listened to in a similar manner in terms of the general focus of attention, as described. Both constituted parts of aural educational practices. Since the final third of the sixteenth century, music degrees at Oxford and Cambridge Universities required knowledge of “theory” as well as “practice.” In 1626, William Heather endowed the first professorship for the “exercise of musicke” at Oxford University.^[31] Moreover, degree ceremonies were accompanied by music performances.^[32] Perhaps most notably regarding the comparability of listening to music lectures and listening to music performances, music lectures at Gresham College were bifurcated from 1595 on: one portion for theory, the other for practice.^[33] In the first segment, students would listen to a lecturer talk about ideas such as the power of music to move the passions.^[34] In the second segment, they would listen to music. Presumably, they would focus

at least some of their attention on aspects of the performance that would determine *whether*, and *how*, it aligned with the proposed powers of music. From the perspective of a listener with such education, it was therefore necessary to devote more attention to the effect of the music performance on themselves than to the individual composition's subtleties, which would stay the same, while performances varied depending on the performers and further situational variants. Describing music performances in diaries and letters was similar to summarizing the "lesson learned." Verbal judgments, therefore, were rather brief and abstract—which, considered against the background of aural educational practices, bespeaks a quality of attention of its own.

Music Listening and the Empirical Idiom in the Seventeenth Century

Margaret Cavendish, Marchioness of Newcastle upon Tyne, née Lucas, was the daughter of a landed gentleman and married William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle upon Tyne. She was a rather public figure, actively writing and publishing as a writer and playwright under her own name.^[35] Among her published works is a collection of *Sociable Letters* (1664). According to the genre standards of this time, these letters are not to be considered "authentic" but rather as semi-fictitious models for how a lady should converse on various topics.^[36] This suggests that their aim was to present ideals of the social elite, and, in Cavendish's case, to do so with a mildly socio-critical touch by sharpening contemporary common social practices and manners.^[37] One of these letters is addressed to her former employee, the singer Leonora Duarte, and describes music making during a private meeting with two of Duarte's sisters. Among other things, Cavendish supposedly sang some "old ballads" to them for innocent merriment. Afterwards, they asked her to sing more artful songs composed by Duarte's brother to poems written by Cavendish's husband. Cavendish refused and remembered listening to Leonora Duarte singing them:

I told them first, I could not Sing any of those Songs, but if I could, I prayed them to Pardon me, for neither my Voice, nor my Skill, was not Proper, nor Fit for them, and neither having Skill nor Voice, if I should offer to Sing any of them, I should so much Disadvantage my Lord's [= husband's] Poetical Wit, and your Brother's [= Diego Duarte's] Musical Composition, as the Fancy would be Obscured in the one, and the Art in the other, nay, instead of Musick, I should make Discord, and instead of Wit, Sing Nonsense, knowing not how to Humour the Words, nor Relish the Notes, whereas your [= Leonora Duarte's] Harmonious Voice gives their Works both Grace and Pleasure, and Invites and Draws the Soul from all other Parts of the Body, with all the Loving and Amorous Passions, to fit in the Hollow Cavern of the Ear, as in a Vaulted Room, wherein it Listens with Delight, and is Ravished with Admiration; wherefore their Works and your Voice are only fit for the Notice of Souls, and not to be Sung to Dull, Unlistening Ears, whereas my Voice and those Songs, would be as Disagreeing as your Voice and Old Ballads, for the Vulgar and Plainer a Voice is, the Better it is for an Old Ballad.^[38]

At first glance, this account only holds a few brief comparisons with little insight into how Cavendish's performance of those ballads or Duarte's performance of more refined songs, which Cavendish had heard some time before (possibly as part of music lessons and private performances by Duarte as her servant), actually sounded. However, her description is a perfect—and pointed—summary of a listening situation when examined in the context of the educational practices of the time. The focus of attention in the description is on *whether* and *how* the two singers, Cavendish and Duarte, succeeded in performing their respective songs. The selection of information she points out, mostly with respect to the audible, can convey a vivid

idea of an “ideal” listening mode—if considered along with discourses and practices related to, first, common song repertoire; second, sensual perception; and third, social hierarchies.

First, Cavendish’s description is formed by the discussed song repertoire, for which there were different social standards. Comparing ballads as “low music” and distinguished songs as “high music” summarizes the two extremes of secular vocal repertoire which was sung and listened to in her day. In order to display (or criticize) each genre’s moral connotations, Cavendish demonstrates how an ideal listening process is only possible while listening to the more refined repertoire. Still, she also conveys her understanding of how ballads should sound. Furthermore, she takes into account the sound as well as the sense (the meaning of the words) of both song types (without any details) as part of what to listen for (focus of attention). She treats the music on the same level as the poetry. Accordingly, both music treatises and further educational literature on all arts and sciences of the time suggest that music was most often treated in line with and in large part analogous to other arts. Thanks to analogies, the general qualities of different arts were constantly repeated within aural educational practices and therefore memorized more easily. This means that music was not primarily regarded in its specificities but rather as one form of conveying a transcendental idea of (human) nature which moves the passions just like other arts.^[39] Of course, the different arts moved the passions by different artistic means, but ideally, they all achieved this goal on an equal, analogous level. This is mirrored in Cavendish’s description, since she never fails to treat the notes of the music as well as the words of the text, comparing her husband’s “Poetical Wit,” his poem’s “Fancy,” and Duarte’s competence to “Humour the Words” to Duarte’s brother’s “Musical Composition,” its “Art,” and Duarte’s competence to “Relish the Notes.” This hints at a kind of attention which constantly changes focus between listening to poetry and listening for sound, trying to grasp both to an equal degree.

Second, the way Cavendish judged the difference between her own and Duarte’s singing was further defined by contemporary discourse about the senses and the socially more distinct ways of applying them. Many treatises on the arts and the sciences published in England during the second half of the seventeenth century indicate that the value attributed to sensory perception increased on a general level. This had to do with new empirical methods practiced most famously, but not exclusively, in the Royal Society.^[40] In a partial return to experiments suggested by Francis Bacon at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the role of the senses in the judgment of “truth” and “nature” had increased notably.^[41] As expressed most radically by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), the senses were regarded more and more as the only way for humans to understand anything. Sensuous experience was acknowledged to be the foundation of human knowledge as well as behavior. Accordingly, even noble students were eager to compare subjects of learning to their own experience of them. Witnessing and experiencing acquired a worth of its own. In the case of music, this led to a closer connection between the theoretical and practical aspects of music.^[42]

Cavendish kept up with scientific developments and their participatory impetus.^[43] Among other works, she published *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655; 2nd ed. 1663), and *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668). Her writings earned her the rare right to witness one of the meetings of the Royal Society in spite of her sex.^[44] The educational impetus of experimental testing which spread from the Royal Society to further societies, clubs, and social conversation in general also explains why Cavendish compares Duarte’s singing to her own. Her two main focuses of the performance are the “Voice” and the extent to which it has been trained, the “Skill” of the singer and herself. Her description connects technical matters of

execution with the involvement of the soul during the listening process. Following the empirical idiom, music listening as an educated amateur in the best sense could entail mentally comparing a professional performance to what it would be if one were to execute it oneself, including vocal technique. Accordingly, she is able on the basis of her own experience in singing and listening to judge the quality of Duarte's "Harmonious Voice," which also hints at a certain quality of her own attention while music listening.

Third, social structures play a role in Cavendish's description. What might seem strange at first sight, however, is that Cavendish chooses her own performance as a negative comparison to Duarte's musical expertise: In his study on the influence of aural educational practices on music listening in Italy of the sixteenth century, Andrew Dell'Antonio describes a development from performance-related to deliberately metaphorical descriptions of music as a means put to use by the social elite in order to "prove" their intellectual superiority over their servant musicians.^[45] This rhetorical development is quite contrary to the development in England in the seventeenth century. However, the latter development is explicable since the worth of perception and experience strengthened the importance of the sensorium within educational practices and music listening as one of them. At the same time, Cavendish's social superiority is still secured. She is socially expected not to be as proficient in music making as a professional singer (irrespective of her actual skill, which cannot be inferred from sources with a socially performative character like her *Sociable Letters*). The more significant social accomplishment is that she is the one explaining the relevant criteria related to perception to the singer. The aural aspect of music listening practice is demonstrated in capturing the essence of musical meaning, such as human passion or, in this case, a transcendent effect, while simultaneously grasping the know-how of performance as concisely as possible. Natural philosophy's theories on perception and human understanding were considered areas of knowledge to which few musicians had access. In seventeenth-century English music books written by musicians, only the practical aspects of music were addressed.^[46] Furthermore, musicians were occasionally mocked in learned treatises on music for supposedly not knowing anything about the theoretical side of their arts, including processes of perception.^[47] Cavendish's letter "sociably" proves that she knew how to listen with an ear which recognizes good music and then, fully aware of the physical process of sensory perception, "Listens with Delight, and is Ravished with Admiration" (of the good kind). The music listening process is described in a manner fairly analogous to what a student would write down while listening to a lecture, indicating an equivalent quality of attention.

Interdependence and Change: Music Listening and the Moral Idiom in the Eighteenth Century

I argue that the influence of sensory organization, as shaped by aural educational practices, was generally stable with respect to the music listening modes of the educated audience before circa 1750. However, the balance between the interrelations of the sensory organization, available musical repertoire, and social structures is quite sensitive to changes in any of these factors. Developments in England from the Restoration to the mid-eighteenth century concerning music listening specifically involve social structures of the audiences, social dynamics between patrons and musicians, and available repertoire. Economic growth increased the number of people who could form part of a music audience, as did the development of a public music life with musical offerings in the theatres, concerts with vocal and instrumental music, and, starting in the early

eighteenth century, (mostly Italian) opera beyond the court.^[48] This significantly expanded the spectrum of available repertoire, mostly for the wealthy, who could afford the whole range of entertainment. However, the increase in less costly entertainments made public music listening more accessible to a broader part of the population.^[49] Furthermore, the printing market supplied music which was presented on stage. Sheet music indicating the singer, the entertainment, or the place where the music was staged publicly could encourage amateurs to imitate performances at home.^[50]

Regarding musical practices, stage repertoire had already been printed and sung or played at home, as evidenced by some of the music printed by London-based publisher John Playford from the 1650s onward.^[51] In the 1660s and 1670s, Playford rarely indicated that his scores included stage repertoire—his consumers mostly would have known either way (since they regularly attended public performances). However, pointing to overlaps with public repertoire became a widespread marketing strategy in printed music around 1700. This development could be explained by the growing number of consumers, some of whom needed the extra information in order for them to be able to listen to public performances of the printed music. One of the effects was that increasingly, accounts by highly educated members of the social elite described music listeners attempting to sing songs at home they had heard on stage, even though from the perspective of the writers of these accounts, these socially and, at least by way of depiction, morally “inferior” listeners allegedly did not have sufficient skill for it—the aural practice to repeat what was heard with the help of sheet music was carried too far in the eyes of some.^[52] Furthermore, the musical skill required to imitate stage performances was considerably higher than before when applied to opera performances. Unlike Cavendish, who was clear about what she could and could not sing (officially), the fashion among parts of the “augmented” audience became to sing everything they listened to themselves. Coincidentally, moral (as opposed to sensuous) aspects of the arts and sciences were emphasized with renewed vigor in magazines and more refined writings by gentlemen and men of learning from the beginning of the eighteenth century onward.^[53] Among other goals, they may have aimed to rebuild social barriers that had become somewhat loose for a while.^[54]

These changes in social structures and available musical repertoire had notable effects on accounts of music listening. Towards the mid-eighteenth century, the social elite still acknowledged their own music practice in letters and diaries, but new care was taken to emphasize the gap between writing about their own music-making and writing about professional music-making they listened to.^[55] One example of this is a listening account by Lady Jemima Yorke, *suo jure* Marchioness Grey, to her aunt Lady Mary Gregory. Gregory was only three years older than Yorke. They grew up largely together and enjoyed a distinguished education, including music lessons.^[56] Later, both joined literary circles, most specifically the Bluestocking circle, some of whose female members published writings such as poems and translations of foreign treatises.^[57] In a letter from the 1740s, Yorke described her listening to Italian tenor Francesco Borosini singing at the house of an acquaintance:

Our weekly concert received a great addition last night at L[or]d Delaware's. I don't know whether in your infantine days you were an admirer of Borosini, but in his old age I am grown vastly in love with him. You will wonder to hear (perhaps) he is come into England this winter, for what reason I can't tell for he has left the stage several year's the Emp[ero]r having made him master of the theatre at Vienna & a very great man, so that his singing to us was a great favour, tho' he is indeed extremely civil & ready to oblige. He looks old, & has lost almost all his teeth, which it must be own'd is a great disadvantage in singing, but yet his voice & his manner & the musick, & all together was very charming & totally different from anything our days have produc'd. I am now convinced I never heard a tenor before, for all those that have been called so since him have been as disagreeable as he is pleasing, for they have all endeavour'd to play tricks with their voice, which the compass nor the sound is not suited to, & his is turn'd wholly to the most graceful expression. He sung two of his famous songs in Tamerlane & one in Rodelinda. The composition is as unlike what we hear now as his manner of singing, & (as [Ferdinand?] Weber says) "that is armony"—while this is—nothing, - or mere sound. I lamented with him, (in English—Italian—French) the present degenerate taste in musick, which is as bad in Italy he says for our comfort as here. I am at present very much out of humour with all operas & singers except [Angelo Maria] Monticelli & Borosini.^[58]

In many ways, Yorke's listening situation at this private concert was different from the listening situation Cavendish described at her informal visits. Still, like Cavendish she alludes to social boundaries between her and the singer which define each person's role in the listening situation, compares different singers' singing to explain which singing is suitable to make possible an ideal listening experience, and compares different compositions to explain which she judges to be the best. However, with respect to all these aspects, her description seems to be more focused on musical specifics than Cavendish's.

With regard to repertoire, instead of comparing music of "high art" to music of "low art," as Cavendish had, Yorke compares the same kind of music (Italian opera) from different decades and thereby professes stylistic judgment. She praises Borosini's choice of opera repertoire, which, according to her, was unlike the opera arias currently sung at other venues. Instead, his performance makes her mentally revive her music listening from some twenty years earlier: George Frideric Handel's opera *Tamerlano* was first staged in London in 1724, his *Rodelinda* in 1725. Borosini was part of the original cast in both productions. However, Yorke could hardly have witnessed these original productions, at least not too consciously, since she had been only three years old at the time, her addressee six. Nonetheless, Borosini and his arias from these operas are presented as, first, belonging invariably together and, second, as if the songs and the singer always led to the exact same sonic result in performance. Yorke's whole account is ideologically neoclassicist, marked by comparison to an ideal past, descriptively ignoring the variability of performance—even though, in reality, there surely was a difference in performance given the aged (and supposedly almost toothless) singer and completely different listening situation.

Considering her judgment of Borosini's performance of this repertoire, Yorke points out its qualities by assessing his voice and vocal technique. In this respect, her focus of attention was presumably guided by similar criteria of execution as Cavendish's. However, instead of comparing his singing to her own, she compares Borosini with his fellow professional singers to single him out as the best. She goes into detail about his vocal technique. She describes his singing as graceful since, unlike some of his colleagues, he does not do any unsuitable "tricks" with it. Yorke even maintains that through listening to him, she has now eventually understood what a tenor should sound like in general, even though she has certainly heard many before—again, she points out an ideal kind of sound which leads to her excellent listening experience.

In contrast to Cavendish's description, however, the singer has a say in the question of which music is best for an ideal listening experience, since she has discussed "the present degenerate taste in musick" with him—they supposedly conversed about music on an equal level, while Cavendish had explained things to Duarte. The view on authority over different parts of musical knowledge had shifted notably. This can also be inferred from developments in the London club culture. In the first part of the eighteenth century, several societies and academies were founded that joined musicians and noble amateurs in order to advance the present state of music.^[59] Overall, Yorke takes great care to present Borosini as a man of good manners and respectable status ("his singing to us was a great favour") even though she also elegantly underlines her own superiority by mentioning his odd looks ("which it must be own'd is a great disadvantage in singing"). However, in the end, his singing is evaluated in line with his manner. On a very general but socially relevant ground, "his voice & his manner & the musick, & all together" are presented on the same level of excellence, which seems to make his performance acceptable to move her passions.

Yorke's focus seems to have been almost entirely on the musical part of the performance. At least in her description, she neglects the poetic words. This might be due to the fact that opera music was often not respected because but rather in spite of the words.^[60] Moreover, it might already point in the direction of art-specific criticism, which evolved in the course of the century.^[61] While analogies between the senses were still applied in moral as well as art-specific writings, the extent to which these analogies actually worked, for example analogies between the eye and the ear, also became a matter of discussion. One example of this is Francesco Algarotti's discussion of Isaac Newton's ideas on perception in his *Il newtonianismo per le dame ovvero Dialoghi sopra la luce e i colori* (1737), which was translated into English by Yorke's friend Elizabeth Carter in 1739.^[62] While Yorke's judgment is still brief and pointedly addresses key topics in a way similar to other notions influenced by aural educational practices, it also shows how their influence on forming music listening gradually evolved, probably in conjunction with the improvement of the social status of the musician as well as diversification of critical voices. Yorke's primary focus, as she describes it, is on two aspects: first, the overall moral situation, and, second, the specific details of musical performance and composition. The quality of her attention is characterized by critical comparisons, which help her (and her addressee) recognize the excellence of her experience.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to illustrate how adopting a cultural perspective on historical music listening can help reconstruct basic listening modes by examining the interrelations between social structures, musical repertoire, and cultural organization of the senses surrounding music listening. To do so, I have employed various types of sources to analyze two listening accounts, which primarily represent the surface of their respective listening situations, marking the ideal focuses and properties of (attentive) music listening. Although these accounts are crucial, they could be further refined, particularly through a reconstruction of the practices surrounding such listening situations.

It is important to note that the balance of interrelations between social structures, the common range of music heard, and the organization of the sensorium was quite sensitive, and differences between them can help explain local variances in development. For instance, forty years before

Yorke's letter and any comparable treatise in England, Jean Laurent Le Cerf de La Viéville had already presented ideas on developing specific music listening skills in his *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique française* (Comparing Italian and French music),^[63] while no such ideas are known from England at that time. Differences in social and sense-related scientific developments between France and England likely contributed to these disparities.

Analysis of music listening modes has broad applicability across historical music studies. For example, questions surrounding the expectations of music within specific contexts, the influence of composers on their listeners' attention, and the predispositions formed by aural educational practices are relevant across many time periods. Undoubtedly, the interrelations between audience social structures, varying ranges of repertoire, and cultural organization of the sensorium encompass far more than the points addressed in this essay. Additionally, the wealth of sources available for reconstructing the multitude of authorities in discourse on music listening within the Western European sphere has increased over the centuries, as have sources for reconstructing the surrounding practices. In conclusion, the exploration of music listening modes through a cultural lens not only sheds light on the complex interplay of factors that have shaped the history of music listening but also enriches our understanding of the diverse and ever-evolving landscape of music appreciation.



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11. See several reviews of Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, by Maribeth Clark, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8, no. 1 (1996): 78–81; Mark Everist, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 121, no. 2 (1996): 265; and Mary Ann Smart, *19th-Century Music* 20, no. 3 (1997): 294. See also Wolfgang Gratzer, who criticizes Johnson along with and for his adaptation of Wolfgang Iser's concept of an "implicit reader" (transformed into an "implicit listener") in Wolfgang Gratzer, "Geschichte des Musikhörens," 56. ↑
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