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Now We've Got Our Khaki On: Woman And Music In First World War London

Vanessa Williams

University of Pennsylvania, veewilliams@gmail.com

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Abstract

Scholarship on British perspectives on the First World War now consistently incorporates reflections on wartime labor on the Home Front, particularly on women's roles as nurses, factory workers, philanthropists, and care-givers. However, the creative work that produced the War's popular culture—the material and affective labor of artists and audience members—is still largely absent: artistic responses to the conflict are studied chiefly through masterpieces of elite culture that conveyed appropriately elegiac affects of mourning and that continue to perpetuate modern conceptions of the War as a monolith of male martyrdom and heroism. This dissertation bridges this gap, situating women's music-making within contemporary national debates over the political, economic, and social ramifications of women's wartime work. During the First World War, the affective labor of musical performance and consumption became entwined with medical care, education, social control, and anxieties over wartime gender and class roles. Performers used their musical labor not only to earn a living and provide entertainment but also to extend the possibilities for women's involvement in wartime politics, sometimes in support of state-driven agendas, sometimes in service of alternative political and social standpoints.

Using archival sources, I explore these constellations of music, wartime, and gender through four case studies: the male impersonator Vesta Tilley and her performances in character as a soldier; female musicians in music-hall orchestras, and their relationship with the Amalgamated Musicians' Union; the United Suffragists' Women's Club and its musical activities of concerts, folk dancing, and gramophone records; and Lena Ashwell's Concerts at the Front, whose performers toured across France, Malta, and Egypt. These case studies broaden the scope of scholarship on women's experiences of the First World War, demonstrating both how popular culture was shaped by the conflict, and how performers and audiences used music-making to shape and expand their wartime roles.

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NOW WE'VE GOT OUR KHAKI ON: WOMEN AND MUSIC IN FIRST WORLD WAR LONDON

Vanessa Williams

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Supervisor of Dissertation

Jeffrey Kallberg

William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Music

Graduate Group Chairperson

Carol Muller

Professor of Music

Dissertation Committee

Naomi Waltham-Smith, Assistant Professor of Music

Paul Saint-Amour, Professor of English

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ABSTRACT

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Vanessa Williams

Jeffrey Kallberg

Scholarship on British perspectives on the First World War now consistently incorporates reflections on wartime labor on the Home Front, particularly on women's roles as nurses, factory workers, philanthropists, and care-givers. However, the creative work that produced the War's popular culture—the material and affective labor of artists and audience members—is still largely absent: artistic responses to the conflict are studied chiefly through masterpieces of elite culture that conveyed appropriately elegiac affects of mourning and that continue to perpetuate modern conceptions of the War as a monolith of male martyrdom and heroism. This dissertation bridges this gap, situating women's music-making within contemporary national debates over the political, economic, and social ramifications of women's wartime work. During the First World War, the affective labor of musical performance and consumption became entwined with medical care, education, social control, and anxieties over wartime gender and class roles. Performers used their musical labor not only to earn a living and provide entertainment but also to extend the possibilities for women's involvement in wartime politics, sometimes in support of state-driven agendas, sometimes in service of alternative political and social standpoints.

Using archival sources, I explore these constellations of music, wartime, and gender through four case studies: the male impersonator Vesta Tilley and her performances in character as a soldier; female musicians in music-hall orchestras, and their relationship with the Amalgamated Musicians' Union; the United Suffragists' Women's Club and its musical activities of concerts, folk dancing, and gramophone records; and Lena Ashwell's Concerts at the Front, whose performers toured across France, Malta, and Egypt. These case studies broaden the scope of scholarship on women's experiences of the First World War, demonstrating both how popular culture was shaped by the conflict, and how performers and audiences used music-making to shape and expand their wartime roles.

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Introduction

The *Era*, August 9, 1916, p. 12.

At Coventry Hippodrome last Friday night a party of wounded soldiers visited the first house. One may imagine the surprise of Mr. Syd Howard when he was asked for by the orderly of the party, and informed that a wounded Tommy, suffering from shell shock, which had left him deaf and dumb, wished to thank the comedian for the restoration of hearing and speech. To quote Tommy's own words, "I felt something hurting my throat, when suddenly, during your scene of drinking glasses off a tray, I gave vent to my feelings, and, to my surprise and delight, I found I could speak. I asked immediately for a fag [cigarette], and I got more than one; but wasn't it grand to think in a strange place, miles from home, God was good enough to give back to me these valuable gifts, and in a music hall, too?"

The *Era*, August 16, 1916, p. 16.

Dear Editor,

I, May Henderson, wish you to reproduce the enclosed paragraphs appearing in your last issue of "The Era," where Mr. Syd Howard is claiming the honour of an extraordinary cure, which occurred during my week's engagement at the Hippodrome, Coventry, Aug. 4, first house. On the 5th, Saturday morning, I was 'phoned for, and, of course, went to the hospital, where I met Private Durrant, who thanked me over and over again for restoring his speech and hearing. Also received a handsome bouquet from the management and staff on the occasion of this great event, and I enclose your card from same. From this, with the enclosed copy of the letter from Private Durrant himself, you will see who is really entitled to the honour of the cure. I did not wish to make this into an advertisement, but when others are trying to claim the honour it is only right that people should not be misled.

Yours sincerely,

May Henderson

Copy of Private Durrant's letter: "I personally am sure that you alone were responsible for this remarkable cure, your acting and witty remarks causing me to laugh to such an extent that both my speech and hearing were again brought back to me, although, of course, I must admit that Mr. Howard was also very funny. I had, however, recovered my lost senses before he put in an appearance, therefore I considered you to be wholly the cause of my cure. Sincerely yours, C. Durrant, Pte. (Royal Fusiliers)"

These letters were published in London's leading theatrical newspaper just one month after the Battle of the Somme, in which Britain and its Allies had suffered catastrophic losses on an unprecedented scale. Over 400,000 British and Commonwealth troops had been injured, and over 90,000 killed. Public confidence in the war effort was shaken; and David Monger describes the "intensely emotional response" to the official film, *The Battle of the Somme*, released on August 21.¹ At this nadir of British morale, the idea that music-hall entertainers could miraculously restore the faculties of wounded Tommies was a welcome one.² Private Durrant, like so many other veterans of the First World War, had been "deaf and dumb for some months past as the result of shell shock" and was being treated at Courtauld's Hospital.³ The initial account of the incident in the *Era* suggested divine intervention via the figure of Yorkshire-born comedian Syd Howard in that most profane of establishments, the music hall. What is of particular interest is the letter sent to the Editor of the *Era* for inclusion in the following week's issue, to ensure that credit for the soldier's recovery would be given not to Mr. Howard, but rather to May Henderson, a comic singer who specialized in blackface performance.

In this brief exchange of letters, we see in microcosm one of the constellations of music-making, gender, and labor that forms the basis of this dissertation. Private Durrant's recovery as a direct result of a night at a music hall suggests that during the War, musical performance accomplished more work than that of pure entertainment. We can understand this through the related concepts of immaterial and affective labor.

¹ David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain: The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 20.

² "Tommy," or "Tommy Atkins," was a generic name for British soldiers; the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives examples of its use from 1881. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Tommy," accessed May 24, 2017, www.oed.com.

³ The *Era*, August 16, 1916, 16.

Immaterial labor produces intangible rather than material commodities, expanding the classical Marxist labor theory of value; it encompasses affective labor, i.e. work that produces or modifies the emotions of its consumers. In this scenario, the affective labor of Henderson's act called forth such an emotional response from Private Durrant that he was apparently physically cured. The *Era's* first article describes Private Durrant as experiencing pain in his throat, which he relieved by "venting his feelings" in direct response to the on-stage comedy. The second version of events also traces his recovery to the affective response of laughter that her act evoked in him. During the First World War, music's abilities to heal and provide comfort for soldiers became accepted by military authorities as well as the British public, with increasing numbers of articles on the subject appearing in the press.⁴ The incident on August 4 was not an isolated one.

Private Durrant's change of attribution for his recovery from a male to a female performer also serves to connect musical healing with the traditionally female occupation of nursing. As May Henderson visited Durrant in the hospital, she further blurred the distinctions between performer and care-giver: the article makes no claim that Syd Howard, presumably the next day still under the impression that he was responsible for Private Durrant's recovery, also attended his bedside. The exact components of Henderson's act in Coventry that night remain unknown, although the following year she signed a ten-year contract with a music hall for her blackface act, and a preview of her August 1916 performance in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* describes her as a "dusky comedienne."⁵ Henderson's act not only made audiences laugh, as Syd Howard's also

⁴ Music as healing forms the topic of a large part of Chapter Four: see page 180.

⁵ John Mullen, *The Show Must Go on!: Popular Song in Britain during the First World War*, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series (Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 56. *Coventry Evening*

did, but also united predominantly white music hall audiences in laughter at the colonial “Other,” layering affects of patriotism and community that may have further contributed to an atmosphere in which Durrant could join in and re-discover his voice.

Furthermore, May Henderson’s letter to the *Era* confidently claimed the miraculous cure as her own work, rather than that of a music hall rival. Although professing that it was not intended as an advertisement, of course the publicity would have done her no harm. Her letter is indicative of the self-promotion and assertiveness that female performers needed to ensure that they retained ownership of, and agency over, their work. It also demonstrates the increased worth that women began to attach to their labor during the War. Women’s “dilution and substitution” of the workforce meant that national attention turned to the value of women’s wage-labor, and Henderson’s letter claims added value for her act, for which she was compensated both materially—in the form of flowers from the music hall management—and emotionally, in the form of Private Durrant’s gratitude.⁶

Drawing together these themes, I propose that we understand music-making as a site of expanded formulations of women’s labor during the First World War, both in material terms, i.e. the physical labor of performing musicians, and also in immaterial

Telegraph, July 29, 1916, 4. Blackface performance was still common in music halls in the early twentieth century, although the performers were mostly male (Henderson was unusual in this respect), and drew on racist stereotypes that remain horrifying to modern audiences (see Michael Pickering, “Eugene Stratton and Early Ragtime in Britain,” *Black Music Research Journal* 20, no. 2 (2000): 151; Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton, eds., *Europe, Empire, and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music*, Music in 19th-Century Britain (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 266. John Mullen suggests that during the War years, blackface performers became a more “occasional” part of music hall shows, perhaps due to Britain’s enormous reliance on its colonial troops to win the War (Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, 56). However, attitudes towards troops of color were still very mixed, with public anxiety over colored troops’ interactions with white nurses and civilians (see Chapter Four, page 199).

⁶ Chapter Two explains “dilution and substitution,” and the relationship of these national debates to musical labor. See page 92.

terms, i.e. the emotional and affective labor undertaken by both performers and audiences. Musical labor not only expanded women's roles in a capitalist economy, but also allowed them to comment on and take action in relation to gender roles, political opinion, and class and race differentials. By examining forms of musical production and consumption within the specific political and social climate of First World War Britain, I broaden the scope of scholarship on women's wartime labor, suggesting ways in which the exceptional conditions of wartime both changed, and were changed by, women's music-making.

The remainder of this Introduction contextualizes this dissertation within its two main frameworks: the historiography of women in the First World War, and recent moves in musicology that consider music as labor. I then discuss my rationale for focusing on the music of the War, and the implications for including popular culture in studies of conflict and violence, before outlining the structure of the dissertation and the relationship of each chapter to my overall argument.

Dismantling the monolith: women's labor during the First World War

The overwhelming predominance of male-centered narratives of the First World War in Britain has been countered by many scholars via a focus on women's contributions to the War. Early studies of women's work during the conflict took mainly taxonomical forms, focusing largely on the Home Front: they described women's public contributions to the war effort as volunteer nurses and munitions workers, as well as the more "transgressive" roles that some women undertook at the front lines of the War, as doctors and ambulance

drivers.⁷ These texts often painted a teleological narrative of progress for British women, describing how they were granted the vote in 1918 as a direct result of their entry to the industrial labor markets and their contributions to the war effort.⁸ The danger, of course, was that this narrative in turn became fixed and monolithic, excluding women who were not from the middle- or upper-classes and who were not white, and also ignoring the post-War ousting of women from their newfound positions of employment by the return to pre-War labor norms.

More recent scholarship has begun to move away from describing the War as a purely liberating period for working women, instead interrogating the intersections of female wartime labor with constructions of gender and theories of citizenship. Susan Grayzel was one of the first scholars to explore wartime labor in relation to gender roles, examining the perpetuation of “older varieties of femininity” in Britain and France, particularly the state’s co-option of motherhood as a national duty.⁹ Gail Braybon’s work has also attempted to dismantle progress-driven narratives: her essay “Winners or Losers” Women’s Role in the War Story” critiques literature that presents the War as a

⁷ For example, see David Mitchell, *Women on the Warpath: The Story of the Women of the First World War* (London: Cape, 1966); Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1980); Joyce Marlow, ed., *The Virago Book of Women and the Great War, 1914-18* (London: Virago Press, 1998); Bernard A. Cook, ed., *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2006).

⁸ These claims are disingenuous, as I discuss in Chapter Two; although women were employed in industries like munitions and textiles on a large scale for the first time, these women had mostly already been part of the labor force, in “invisible” industries such as domestic service. Although women were granted the vote in 1918, the provisions of the Act were limited, and the vote was essentially only given to women over 30 who were married to registered voters, those who were university graduates, and female property owners.

⁹ Susan R. Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3, 6. Grayzel’s next book, *Women and the First World War* (London: Longman, 2002), considered women’s war experiences across even more nations, including Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and India. This book integrated the history of women’s cultural productions with government propaganda and legal documentation.

“watershed” moment for women, and that fails to contextualize women’s wartime experiences within pre-War debates on class, age, location, morality, sexuality, and so on.¹⁰ Braybon criticizes writers who use the “vocabulary of ‘gender’” without analyzing it in the specific context of the war, including Margaret Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, whose 1987 essay “The Double Helix” put forward a theory of wartime gender relations that has since been cited in almost every text on war and gender. Higonnet and Higonnet’s “double helix” theory stated that societies at war value categories of masculinity “far more than women’s partially expanded roles,” maintaining the subordination of women in the gender system despite their apparent gains in the eyes of the state.¹¹

Braybon’s call for more transparency in these definitions of “masculinity” and “feminization” has been answered in part by Hämmerle, Überegger, and Bader-Zaar, in their 2014 edited volume, *Gender and the First World War*. Hämmerle, Überegger, and Bader-Zaar make it clear that they consider the incorporation of gender issues into First World War historiography to be an “essential” ongoing project, which is still often ignored; they relate the vocabulary of gender to issues of citizenship and power, asking “what role the concepts of masculinities and femininities, as well as related subjectivities, played for mass mobilization, perseverance, protest, and resistance.”¹² Nonetheless,

¹⁰ Gail Braybon, “Winners or Losers: Women’s Role in the War Story,” in *Evidence, History, and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, ed. Gail Braybon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 86–112.

¹¹ Margaret Randolph Higonnet, ed., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, Mass.: Yale Univ. Press, 1987), 6. The image of the double helix is used to illustrate the separation between the state-ascribed “value” of men and women and their labor, as they remain equidistant, one “behind” the other, despite constantly moving upwards.

¹² Christa Hämmerle, Oswald Überegger, and Birgitta Bader-Zaar, eds., *Gender and the First World War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2. Other key texts on First World War masculinities include R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2005); Joanna Bourke,

within these new scholarly contexts of gender performativity, citizenship, and institutional inequalities, a large part of the literature that continues to be published on First World War labor remains focused on women's domesticized roles as nurses and mothers, and their move into the "new" industry of munitions factories.¹³ Although the field has expanded geographically, with work on Britain's colonies that begins to address issues of race, colonialism, and empire, conceptions of women's labor often remain traditionally delineated in the realm of domesticity and maternal care, described in relationship to men and the male labor of actually fighting the War.¹⁴

Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War, Picturing History (London: Reaktion Books, 1996); and Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹³ Key texts on nurses and female medical staff include Alison S. Fell and Christine E. Hallett, eds., *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2013); Christine E. Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War*, Cultural History of Modern War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Elisabeth Shipton, *Female Tommies: The Frontline Women of the First World War*, 2014. Scholarship on female industrial workers includes Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Totowa, N.J.: Croom Helm, 1981); Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: New York : I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1998). Authors such as Karen Hunt and Maggie Andrews have argued that women's domestic lives and their roles as housewives and mothers continue to be marginalized in First World War study: Maggie Andrews, "Ideas and Ideals of Domesticity and Home in the First World War," in *The Home Front in Britain - Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 73–91; Karen Hunt, "A Heroine at Home: The Housewife on the First World War Home Front," in *The Home Front in Britain - Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 73–91.

¹⁴ One of the key texts on colonialism and empire during the First World War is Santanu Das, ed., *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). The most recent English-language articles on women's war work in countries across the British empire, and less-studied countries in general, include Hannah Clark, "Sisters in a Distant Land: The Exploration of Identity and Travel through Three New Zealand Nurses' Diaries from the Great War," *Women's Studies Journal* 30, no. 1 (July 2016): 17–29; Pamela J. Wood and Sarah Knight, "The Taste of War: The Meaning of Food to New Zealand and Australian Nurses far from Home in World War I, 1915–18," in *Histories of Nursing Practice*, ed. Gerard M. Fealy, Christine E. Hallett, and Susanne Malchau Dietz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 35–51; Ana Victoria Sima, "Being Wife and Husband during World War I: A Transylvanian Cultural Perspective," *Transylvanian Review* 25, no. 4 (2016): 11–27; and chapters in James E. Kitchen, ed., *Other Combatants, Other Fronts: Competing Histories of the First World War* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011).

In response to Braybon, Hämmerle, Überegger, and Bader-Zaar, this dissertation shifts the focus to forms of gendered wartime labor that remain largely absent from the historical record, relating to the production and consumption of popular culture, specifically popular music. I set these case studies in relation to contemporary national debates on women's wartime roles to explore to what extent women's music-making interacted with traditional conceptions of feminized domestic labor and the newly-expanding sphere of female industrial labor. Against this backdrop, I exemplify how musical praxes gained new capabilities for political and social action, both in service of state and institutionally sanctioned political directives and, sometimes, towards more subversive political agendas. Moreover, by considering the constellation of music-making, gender, and labor, this project participates in recent moves to incorporate the creative labor of music-making into feminist critiques of Marxist labor theory, as I will now explain.

Music-making as labor

The material production and consumption of music, and the capacities of musicians as workers rather than artists, has become an increasing concern within musicology. Matt Stahl's 2013 book *Unfree Masters* examined the labor of producing pop music within the context of a neoliberal state, and the concomitant struggles of power and economics.¹⁵ Christina Baade and Susan Fast, in their 2013 conference and 2014 special issue of *MUSICultures*, directed musicological attention to a range of perspectives through which

¹⁵ Matt Stahl, *Unfree Masters: Recording Artists and the Politics of Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

musical labor is made explicit, from the lives of working musicians to discussions of musical agency and intellectual property.¹⁶ Reflections on material musical labor have encompassed a broad range of formulations: for example, Martin Cloonan's work on the relationships between musicians and their unions; consideration of the classical orchestra as labor model by John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw; an enormous variety of ethnomusicological studies, such as Jennifer Ryan's 2011 article on musical labor and authenticity among blues musicians in Memphis; and of course, Carolyn Abbate's seminal article, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" which suggested an array of possibilities stemming from the simple fact that "musical sounds are made by labor."¹⁷

In the last few years, musicology has turned to the concept of "affective labor," a subcategory of immaterial labor as formulated by Hardt and Negri in *Empire* (2003) and *Multitude* (2004).¹⁸ Hardt and Negri describe the "creation and manipulation of affect" as an expansion of the classical Marxist realm of industrial production by way of Foucault's concept of biopolitics; they describe the neoliberal shift from bodily to cognitive labor, and from external to internalized systems of power. For Hardt and Negri, affective labor is fused with immaterial labor, and has become a fundamental, even hegemonic, part of

¹⁶ Christina Baade, Susan Fast, and Line Grenier, "Introduction: Musicians as Workers: Sites of Struggle and Resistance," *MUSICultures* 41, no. 1 (2014): 1–13.

¹⁷ John Williamson and Martin Cloonan, *Players' Work Time: A History of the British Musicians' Union, 1893-2013*, 2016; John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, *The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650-1815* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jennifer Ryan, "Beale Street Blues? Tourism, Musical Labor, and the Fetishization of Poverty in Blues Discourse," *Ethnomusicology* 55, no. 3 (2011): 473–503; Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 505–36.

¹⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

late twentieth-century labor relations.¹⁹ Their work has taken post-Fordist models of labor as a focal point; other scholars have expanded the concept of immaterial labor in relation to creative industries.²⁰ Hardt and Negri cite the association of immaterial, affective labor with “women’s work” in the home tied to the family, and this has formed the basis for important feminist critiques of Marx.²¹ By extending study of the capitalist mode of production beyond the realm of wage-based industrial labor, feminist concerns of gendered labor and social reproduction are able to take a central role alongside classical Marxist issues of class, ownership and power.

The concept of affective labor started to become part of musicological study from around 2012.²² That music produces affect is, of course, not a new idea; what is new is the conception of this process within a Marxist framework of labor, and the idea that performing music involves combining physical work with the immaterial work of manipulating audience’s affects for material results, of constructing political

¹⁹ For example, Hardt and Negri note that the development of immaterial labor has caused changes in material working conditions, making the working day spread beyond hours in the workplace, expanding “to the entire time of life.” Similarly the workplace is no longer clearly defined or delineated: the worker’s commitment to forging a relationship or solving an intellectual problem means they can think and act anywhere. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 111.

²⁰ David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011); Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt, “In the Social Factory?,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7–8 (December 1, 2008): 1–30.

²¹ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 110; Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Johanna Oksala, “Affective Labor and Feminist Politics,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 2 (December 9, 2015): 281–303.

²² See Timothy Dean Taylor, *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016). Other recent ethnomusicological texts that make central use of the idea of affective labor include Kelley Tatro, “The Hard Work of Screaming: Physical Exertion and Affective Labor Among Mexico City’s Punk Vocalists,” *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 3 (2014): 431–53; Christine Bacareza Balance, “How It Feels to Be Viral Me: Affective Labor and Asian American YouTube Performance,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1/2 (2012): 138–52; Ana Hofman, “Music (as) Labour: Professional Musicianship, Affective Labour and Gender in Socialist Yugoslavia,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 24, no. 1 (February 24, 2015): 28–50; Jayson Beaster-Jones, *Music Commodities, Markets, and Values: Music as Merchandise*, Routledge Studies in Ethnomusicology (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

commentary, and of negotiating social hegemonies. The implication of affective labor in musical practice is fundamental both for the continuation of musicology's move away from an insistence on musical works as rarified "objects" that somehow evoke affect while remaining untainted by bodily, economic, and political processes, and also for the reverse case, of understanding how the political and cultural systems of capitalism can be changed or cemented by creative, artistic endeavors. In Attali's formulation, music is a "tool of power"; but if music is a tool, musicians must be the laborers who wield it.²³

By considering the gendered implications of musical labor in the First World War, I highlight the public political capacities of female musicians to comment on and change their precarious situations. Precarity is an inevitable consequence of neoliberalization: it reflects the realities of affective labor, linked with contingent labor, systemic gender and class hierarchies and inequalities, and social exclusion and isolation. It is a term that has taken on specific temporal and geographical linkages to late twentieth-century European political thought.²⁴ However, as I will demonstrate particularly in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation, First World War Britain involved a constant state of precarity for the majority of the female working-class population, who were subject to uncertain employment terms, working conditions, low pay, and government assistance that was dependent on their behavior as surveilled by their peers and law enforcers. By understanding the hardships of wartime as they related

²³ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 19.

²⁴ Gill and Pratt, "In the Social Factory?"; Isabell Lorey et al., *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, Futures (London; New York: Verso, 2015); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

specifically to working-class women as a much earlier, localized emergence of the issues of precarity, I further cement the framework of affective labor in this historical context.

Music and conflict

In his 2016 book *National Myth and the First World War in Modern Popular Music*, Peter Grant suggests that the scale of the War, and the tragic narratives surrounding it, “inhibit artistic expression” and prevent scholars from responding to wartime creativity and entertainment.²⁵ This claim would seem to be immediately undermined by the analyses of wartime literature and visual art that have become cornerstones of scholarship on First World War culture, many of which have dealt with the linkage between the War’s literature and art and the burgeoning of modernism.²⁶ However, much of the attention given to the artistic products of the War has focused on works that depicted the horrors and sufferings of war, rather than on popular culture that was utilized for light-hearted entertainment purposes.²⁷

Treating the conflict as an opportunity to study popular music and entertainment can feel almost naive; as if, by examining the War in terms of creativity and enjoyment, shifting the focus away from the atrocities of the front lines, we risk producing a sanitized

²⁵ Peter Grant, *National Myth and the First World War in Modern Popular Music* (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2016), 1.

²⁶ Major overviews of the art of the period include Samuel Lynn Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, 1st American ed (New York: Atheneum, 1991); Glenn Watkins, *Proof through the Night: Music and the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). More recent works include Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2012); Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Philip Ernst Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism: The Manchester Group and Their Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Nanette Norris, *Great War Modernism: Artistic Response in the Context of War, 1914-1918* (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2016).

²⁷ Hynes, *A War Imagined*, xi.

account that distracts from the “real” lessons of the War. This may well be a factor in what George Robb has described as a “long-standing elite bias” in studies of the War’s cultural productions, i.e. the tendency to focus solely on highbrow literature, poetry, and visual art, as these forms are often treated in terms of their abilities to communicate the scale of the suffering of the War.²⁸ From a musicological perspective, work on the First World War has been largely confined to classical music, and the “poignant, if faded, symbolism of numerous concert pieces... their essential, if now muted, testimony.”²⁹ Popular music, with cheerful music hall choruses and songs that poked fun at wartime hardships, is more difficult to situate within the master narratives of the War, although this has not proved to be the case for other conflicts and political movements through the rest of the twentieth century, which have been well-theorized in terms of their popular music and its political capacities.³⁰

²⁸ George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 182. This phenomenon has also been noted in Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940*, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare 25 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

²⁹ Watkins, *Proof through the Night*, 7. Watkins’s focus, although he makes some mention of popular songs, is chiefly on Allied responses to German classical music. He writes in his introduction, “Because music is related to other cultural markers such as national institutions and international politics, as well as to other arts, these topics are periodically allowed to direct and occasionally even dominate the discussion of the music” (Ibid., 2): an approach that I diametrically oppose in this thesis, as I read these other “cultural markers” as absolutely central to musical analysis. Similarly, Hynes’s work on “English culture” in the First World War mentions only the music of Elgar; for Hynes, culture is confined to literature, poetry, and painting. Other texts on classical music of the War include Toby Thacker, *British Culture and the First World War: Experience, Representation and Memory* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). Lewis Foreman, ed., *Oh, My Horses!: Elgar and the Great War*, The Music of Elgar, v. 2 (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001). Kate Kennedy has commented on the overall neglect of classical music in British First World War cultural scholarship, suggesting that British pastoral diatonicism “just didn’t sound like war” (Kate Kennedy, “Silence Recalled in Sound: British Classical Music and the Armistice,” in *The Silent Morning: Culture and Memory after the Armistice*, ed. Trudi Tate and Kate Kennedy, Cultural History of Modern War (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Pr, 2013), 213.

³⁰ The field is too broad to give a thorough overview here, so I will simply suggest some books which have been of particular personal enjoyment: Dorian Lynskey, *33 Revolutions per Minute: A History of Protest Songs, from Billie Holiday to Green Day*, 1st ed (New York: Ecco, 2011); Doug Bradley and Craig Hansen Werner, *We Gotta Get out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*, Culture, Politics, and the Cold War (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015); Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005). John Street’s work *Music and*

My project suggests that it is essential to consider forms of popular culture with respect to the First World War, and the ways in which they, as politically and socially vital creative acts, can contribute to understanding the conflict and its cultural impact; and that it is similarly essential to avoid relegating them as markers of patriotism and conservatism, or cataloging them typologically according to their types of textual and musical content without deeper contextual analysis.³¹ Popular music was consumed on an enormous scale during the War, and was particularly identified with working-class culture. A refusal to pay attention to it as a cultural product erases the cultural and political work of its producers and audiences, who included otherwise marginalized, disempowered demographics from the British working classes. In this, I am influenced by a number of scholars who have written on the sonic culture of other conflicts, particularly Annegret Fauser, Christina Baade, and Martin Daughtry.³² In particular, Daughtry questions methodologies of representing wartime and studies of war, acknowledging the challenge of creating a work that examines violent situations without turning them into “a voyeuristic or aestheticizing spectacle.”³³ Daughtry ends his introduction: “If we had to solve every ethical conundrum before we could begin writing about the experiences of

Politics John Street, *Music and Politics* (Cambridge, U.K.; Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2012). provides a survey of popular music’s interactions with politics, and vice versa: he places “music” as a sonic object at the heart of his approach, and although he investigates the cultural and social process and paraphernalia that attach, for example, to Woodstock or the Rock Against Racism concert, his concern remains with music as an object of political action rather than as an active process of political change.

³¹ John Mullen’s *The Show Must Go On!* mentions hundreds of songs, and discusses the “favourite themes of the songs,” doing so chiefly through analysis of lyrics. Peter Grant’s work on the myth of the First World War in modern popular music—i.e. popular music since the 1950s—falls further into this typological model. George Robb notes the existence of music halls in , although he confines his exploration to two pages describing their patriotic rhetoric.

³² Annegret Fauser, *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Christina L Baade, *Victory through Harmony: The BBC and Popular Music in World War II* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); J. Martin Daughtry, *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³³ Daughtry, *Listening to War*, 23.

those who endure and otherwise participate in violent acts, there would be no anthropology of violence, no history of warfare, no study of music and conflict.”³⁴

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation focuses on four case studies, each based on a facet of London’s musical culture. My decision to focus on a single city stems again from my attempt to move away from monolithic narratives of the War. The struggle to reconcile the scope of a single text with the scale of the War has tended to result in introductions that make sweeping statements about the enormity of the conflict and its far-reaching global impact; for example, Adrian Gregory writes, “No event since the Black Death, neither revolution, religious upheaval or war, had touched the lives of Europeans in such a general and far reaching manner.”³⁵ Another result has been the many books and edited collections that work on an internationally comparative level, seeking commonalities across the different nations involved in the War in an attempt to make sense of the global scale of the conflict.

I choose instead to focus on a single city, considering the specific economic, political, and cultural circumstances that operated in wartime London to inform my readings of popular music and its performance. In London alone, hundreds of venues existed for musical consumption: music halls, concert halls, private clubs, let alone amateur performances in the home. London was also a multiply liminal space: the city in which Home and War Zones met, as troops left from its train stations for the Fronts and

³⁴ Ibid., 26.

³⁵ Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946*, The Legacy of the Great War (Oxford ; Providence, RI, USA: Berg, 1994), 1.

returned, injured, to its hospitals; a place that was both a haven from the War for troops home on leave who enjoyed its nightlife and transportation links, and also a war zone, as German zeppelins and bombers targeted the city in air raids. By taking several case studies from within a single city, I build a more detailed picture of the multiplicities of music-making in a single geographic and social context.

Chapters One and Two are concerned with the music halls, a defining feature of British popular culture at the turn of the twentieth century. I start with a single performer, Vesta Tilley, one of the most renowned male impersonators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tilley's wartime performances featured multiple soldier characters, including a heroic soldier keen to do his duty; an injured soldier eager to continue enjoying the benefits of his hospitalization; and a confident soldier who enjoys the attractiveness to the opposite sex that his new uniform confers on him. Her performances were directly responsible for audience members' immediate enlistment in the Army, as they provided a model of heroism and duty, and I explore the ways in which her songs, costuming, and stage direction elicited this material patriotic action. Her soldier characters also governed the responses of audience members towards soldiers in "real life," and I explore the different forms of discipline and control that she enacted on civilian and soldier audiences. Finally, I make use of the only surviving recorded oral interview with an audience member whose husband enlisted as a result of seeing Tilley perform, to explore the ramifications of Tilley's performance of wartime masculinities.

Chapter Two moves from the music hall stage to the orchestra pit, to discuss how women's musical labor became directly aligned with national debates over women's labor. A flashpoint came in 1916, when music hall impresario Sir Oswald Stoll hired

female musicians to replace men who were striking over pay and working conditions.

The Amalgamated Musicians' Union's attacks against these female musicians, chronicled in the Union's journal as well as in newspaper reports, tapped into national debates over "dilution and substitution." Concerns over women's newly-expanding position, both in the music halls and in the industrial workforce, were related to physical ability, patriotism, and morality. This chapter allows me to consider the material labor of women's music-making in a distinctly working-class context, and the ways in which it became linked to performances of femininity and citizenship.

In Chapter Three, I shift my attention away from the high-profile public spaces of the music halls to a semi-private venue, a club founded by the United Suffragists in 1914 that supported working-class women. Although the suffrage movement is usually thought of as ceasing its activities for the duration of the War, I use this chapter to demonstrate not only that suffrage work continued, but also that its proponents used musical activities to promote their political and social agendas. The United Suffragists' Women's Club provided a social space for working-class women from one of the poorest neighborhoods of London, giving them access to food and information about the War and the suffrage movement. It also provided them with entertainment and leisure activities, with a diverse program of musical events including formal evening concerts, folk dancing, and free access to a gramophone. I explore the different facets of the Club's musical activities in light of the socialist politics of the United Suffragists, particularly in relation to the politicization of the folk dance and music movement espoused by one of the original United Suffragists, Mary Neal, as well as the educational projects of the Club's formal classical concerts. I then turn to the Club's descriptions of the gramophone as a constant

sonic presence that facilitated the Club's social life. The gramophone functioned as a tool that relieved its listeners of their need to perform the emotional labor of publically supporting the War effort, filling the silence and providing a sonic veneer of patriotism underneath which more subversive opinions could potentially be voiced.

My final chapter brings these different strands together to examine the work undertaken by the performers in Lena Ashwell's *Concerts at the Front*: groups of singers and instrumentalists who left London to perform to troops in France, Malta, and Egypt. Ashwell's descriptions of the concert parties, as well as newspaper accounts and accounts from troops, positioned the performers' work as formulations of medical and educational labor. I contrast these with other accounts from troops and performers to consider the social work that the female members of the concert parties performed, through their repertoire choices and in their extra-musical gendered roles as conversationalists, dinner guests, and dance partners. The circulation of the performers between the War Fronts and Britain's Home Front also led to a unique type of embodied communication between civilian and military audiences. Ashwell's *Concerts at the Front* capitalized on the liminal position occupied by female performers within the military zones to push against the bounds of institutional governance, allowing traditional forms of women's immaterial labor to become re-contextualized in the radical new setting of the Fronts of the First World War.

These case studies elucidate microcosms of musical practice in London during the War. No single narrative governs them; rather, they explore possibilities for musical labor and political engagement that spread across the entire political and social spectrum, from socialist to conservative politics, from individuals to institutions, and from working-class

women whose names remain unknown to women who were honored in the highest circles for their work. As Gail Braybon has called for “people to look closely at small parts of the jigsaw,” in order to create a multi-dimensional, detailed and contextualized history of the War, I offer these case studies in this vein.³⁶ Similarly, Jessica Meyer has described the “more rigorous use of the personal narrative” as a method to investigate marginalized demographics and explore “men and women as embodied beings, workers, citizens, and social actors.”³⁷ I follow Meyer’s model of using a variety of disciplinary approaches within defined geographical parameters in order to contribute to a history of the War that takes an interdisciplinary, rather than a historically-grounded comparative, approach to challenging “potentially monolithic understandings of war’s meaning both for particular groups and for the nation as a whole.”³⁸ I diverge from Meyer, however, as she ends her introduction to her edited volume by stating that “these chapters help us to understand a little more clearly how British culture and society have been shaped by the First World War.”³⁹ This dissertation suggests a more reciprocal relationship, that examines not only how popular culture was shaped by the War, but in turn how popular culture, and particularly the process of musical performance, enabled performers and audiences to shape their wartime experiences.

³⁶ Gail Braybon, ed., *Evidence, History, and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 5.

³⁷ Jessica Meyer, ed., *British Popular Culture and the First World War* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Chapter 1

“I Joined the Army Yesterday”:

Vesta Tilley, Male Impersonation, and First World War Masculinities

In 1964, Kitty Eckersley recalled attending a night at the Palace Theatre music hall with her husband during the first half of the First World War.⁴⁰ They had been given tickets to the show by a friend; Kitty didn't know who would be performing that evening, but it was a “great treat” for them to have a night out. During the interval of the show, music-hall star and male impersonator Vesta Tilley (1864-1952), nicknamed “Britain’s best recruiting sergeant,” led a recruiting campaign. Tables were set up on the stage, with officers seated at them ready to write down the names of the men who volunteered to enlist in the Army that evening. An army band was also on stage to accompany Tilley, who led the audience in the popular song “We Don’t Want to Lose You but We Think You Ought to Go,” as well as “Rule Britannia.” Unusually, Tilley wasn’t dressed in her usual costume as a male impersonator. She wore a “beautiful gown”—Kitty couldn’t remember if it was silver or gold, but distinctly remembered that it was an evening gown—and had a Union Jack wrapped around her.

Tilley left the stage and walked through the audience, up and down all the aisles, and soon a column of young men was following her, ready to walk up onto the stage and enlist in front of the singing audience. As Tilley walked past Kitty and her husband, in Kitty’s words, “she hesitated a bit and I don’t know what happened, but she put her hand

⁴⁰ The interview was conducted by the Imperial War Museum, and is held as a sound recording under catalog number 4089. The interview provides little detail as to exactly which Palace Theatre this was, although based on other places she mentions later in the interview, I believe it may have been in Manchester.

on my husband's shoulder—he was on the end seat—she put her hand on his shoulder and as the men was [sic] all following her down, he got up and followed her too.” Kitty’s husband went on stage with the rest of the men, gave his name, and received the King’s Shilling as a mark of his enlistment. At the end of the evening, Kitty and her husband returned home. She was simultaneously “so very proud that he was going to be a soldier,” and “terribly upset.” He persuaded her that it was for the best; and two days later he left for his training camp in Preston. He was killed in action in 1916.⁴¹

Kitty’s account of her husband’s enlistment places the impetus entirely on Tilley’s performance. “He didn’t have any need to go to the war,” she said: her husband’s type of employment was one that would have exempted him from service. “I wouldn’t have gone [to the music hall] if I’d known, of course [that Tilley was recruiting that night],” Kitty averred. Kitty’s husband was just one of thousands of men who enlisted as a direct result of seeing Tilley perform: one group of 300 men from Hackney all joined the Army together after seeing her act, and were known as “Vesta Tilley’s Platoon.”⁴² However, Kitty’s account of Tilley’s performance is unique among all the literature on Tilley’s career. Tilley was known as one of the foremost male impersonators of the era, performing immaculately-attired stock male characters. During the War, her soldier characters became even more topical and popular, and it was dressed as a soldier that most of her recruitment campaigns took place. The associations of her act with soldier characters were so strong that, at her retirement concert in 1920, she chose her soldier

⁴¹ Upon her husband’s enlistment, Kitty didn’t want to remain in their house alone, and so went back to live with her mother. Her husband returned home from the Army on leave for a few days, after which Kitty became pregnant; but after her husband was killed in action, Kitty began to suffer from severe mental and physical health problems. The interview ends with the birth of her child, and Kitty’s hospitalization.

⁴² From an article in *The Era*, March 1, 1916, 11.

uniform over all her other costumes in which to make her farewell.⁴³ Tilley's act was one of the most successful recruiting acts because soldiers could follow Tilley-as-soldier out of the civilian space of the audience and onto the pseudo-military zone of the stage.

Kitty's account entirely overturns this, as her husband followed Tilley-as-woman instead.

How can we understand a type of musical performance that exerted such power on its audiences that they were literally called to arms? This chapter assesses Tilley's soldier characters within the context of the First World War in order to suggest how her style of male impersonation caused such a fervor of patriotic recruitment. Rather than continuing scholarship on the androgyny of Tilley's style of impersonation, treating her different acts as a homogenous group over the course of her career, I situate her soldier characters within the War's political and social context, thereby examining more closely the exact nature of the affective labor of her act. I explore her wartime acts in terms of constructions of masculinity and military discipline and suggest ways in which she imposed standards of behavior on both civilian and enlisted audience members. At the end, I return to Kitty Eckersley's account to consider how Tilley's recruitment act worked when re-embodied within a female, rather than pseudo-male, body. I will demonstrate that it is only through much closer readings of Tilley's specific performance styles that we can begin to understand the various constellations of power and discipline that imbued her wartime performances: performances that were so powerful that they caused men to enlist in the Army and follow her soldier character into the trenches, often to their death.

⁴³ A description of her farewell concert appears in *The Era*, June 7, 1920, 3. It is also described in Tilley's autobiography: Lady de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1934), 267.

A brief history of male impersonation

The term “male impersonator” was coined in the 1870s, in American vaudeville.⁴⁴ Its first music-hall practitioner was most likely Annie Hindle, a British performer who went to America in 1868, wearing a tailored man’s suit and singing in an alto register. Over the course of her career, her impersonations became increasingly realistic, so much so that she even began shaving her face to encourage a moustache and stubble growth.⁴⁵ Hindle achieved enormous success, inspiring a number of similar acts who were billed as “character-change singers,” “protean singers,” and finally “male impersonators.”⁴⁶

It is unclear whether “male impersonators” really represented a new performance style, or whether they simply were a development of the older tradition of trousers, or “breeches,” roles. Peter Bailey describes male impersonation as an “integral part of the English theatrical tradition,” viewing it as a progression from the breeches roles that had been part of British theatre since the Restoration period rather than deriving it, as Rodger does, from its American roots.⁴⁷ Both arguments lead to the same conclusion: that male

⁴⁴ Gillian M. Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 127–46.

⁴⁵ Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room Sex, Drag, and Theatre* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 329.

⁴⁶ Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*, 127–28. The term “Proteian [sic] Artist” also appears in Dion Clayton Calthrop’s 1925 overview of music hall acts, Dion Clayton Calthrop, *Music Hall Nights* (London: The Bodley Head Limited, 1925). where it described any sort of quick-change act. Calthrop’s description and use of pronouns implies that in his experience, although the quick-change act encompassed both male and female characters, the performers were generally male: however, in the middle of his description, a photo of Vesta Tilley appears. Tilley is not mentioned by name anywhere in his text; but the depiction of a male impersonator within this section certainly implies that they were specifically identified with these “protean artists.”

⁴⁷ Bailey in J. S. Bratton, ed., *Music Hall: Performance and Style*, Popular Music in Britain (Milton Keynes, England; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986), 65. Laurence Senelick’s history of cross-dressing on the stage, *The Changing Room*, begins with prehistoric shamanism; but his more pertinent scholarship on breeches roles begins with the sixteenth-century *commedia dell’arte* troupes that featured actresses who alternated male and female roles (Senelick, *The Changing Room Sex, Drag, and Theatre*, 207). In Britain, actresses began appearing on stage during the Restoration period, under the rule of Charles II. They played the roles of boys, and Senelick considers that “the breeches role was first and foremost an effective means of sexual display” (Ibid., 211). Actresses dressed in male clothes that emphasized their

impersonation became a genre in its own right, featuring a woman performing stock male characters for comic effect, particularly the character of the “swell,” or “fast man.”

The figure of the “swell” is crucial to the history of male impersonation. It was a performance type that appeared throughout the history of British music hall, forming a particular feature of the acts of the male *lions comiques* in the mid-1860s such as George Leybourne and Alfred Vance. Bailey describes the swell as “a lordly figure of resplendent dress and confident air, whose exploits centred on drink and women; time, work and money scarcely intrude...”⁴⁸ Derek Scott describes him as “the exhibitionist toff or swaggering ‘man about town,’”⁴⁹ while Martha Vicinus adds that the swell is “dedicated to fashion, drink, and nights with the boys.”⁵⁰ Swell songs provided opportunities for lavish costumes, stage business, and innuendo, and were also vehicles for parody and satire, as performers played up the overblown sexuality and egoism of the characters: their characters were admired by some sections of the audience, ridiculed by others. Class issues were key, as populist parodies designed to appeal to core working-class audiences ridiculed the aspiring upper-class swell.⁵¹ Swell characters not only

female bodily attributes; their appearances mainly in comedies allowed for scripts to make puns and innuendos about their female bodies that the audience knew lay underneath their male clothing. By the turn of the nineteenth century, it was the rule for the roles of boys in “legitimate” theater to be played by women (J. S. Bratton, “Irrational Dress,” in *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre, 1850-1914*, ed. Vivien Gardner and Susan Rutherford (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 82). Eventually, women played all roles of boys and young men, as the breeches role expanded from the genre of comedy into serious theatre and *opera seria*. Bullough and Bullough make a case for the breeches role reaching its peak in the nineteenth-century extravaganza: “a combination of burlesque, ballad opera, French revue, and fairy tale” (Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 226).

⁴⁸ Bratton, *Music Hall*, 65.

⁴⁹ Derek B. Scott, “The Music-Hall Cockney: Flesh and Blood, or Replicant?,” *Music and Letters* 83, no. 2 (May 2002): 245.

⁵⁰ Martha Vicinus, “Turn-of-the-Century Male Impersonation: Rewriting the Romance Plot,” in *Sexualities in Victorian Britain*, ed. Andrew H. Miller and James Eli Adams (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 191.

⁵¹ Music hall entertainment had been associated with the working class for decades, even after the first Royal Command performance at the Palace Theatre in 1912 had given the royal seal of approval to the

undermined middle- and upper-class social ideals, satirizing their tendencies towards frivolous over-spending and over-indulgence, but were also depicted as failing to meet basic standards of “working-class manhood,” reinforcing the audience’s confidence in their own working-class respectability.⁵² John Mullen points out that even though music halls were beginning to attract more middle-class audiences at the turn of the twentieth century, these audiences were relatively low-salaried government clerks and shop workers: still a far cry from the “swells” who were the figures of fun on the stage. Bratton’s analysis of the swell song demonstrates the ways in which it formed a nexus of engagement with the audience “through a wealth of social, material and stylistic connotations, encapsulated within the part realistic, part idealized, part parodied, but instantly recognizable persona of the *lion comique*.”⁵³ This stock character served as a shorthand for a huge range of social and political connections, enabling the audience to be united against the character on stage whose economic power and class status, for once, was the object of laughter.

The swell song was one of the first stock items to form the basis of the male impersonator’s repertoire. Laurence Senelick writes that Bessie Bonehill, another early proponent of the male impersonation style, “accomplished the necessary transition [from America to London] by grafting on to the Hindle/Wesner fast man the freshness of the principal boy.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Bailey gives the example of Nellie Power as one of the

variety show, and Oswald Stoll’s attempts to improve the standards of music halls by including excerpts from operas and highbrow plays, and forcing performers to remove the more vulgar jokes from their acts (Felix Barker, *The House That Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1957).

⁵² Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*, 129.

⁵³ Bratton, *Music Hall*, 63.

⁵⁴ Senelick, *The Changing Room Sex, Drag, and Theatre*, 334. Principal boys were, and continue to be, one of the key elements of British pantomimes: the genre of fairy-tale stories, with stock comic characters often

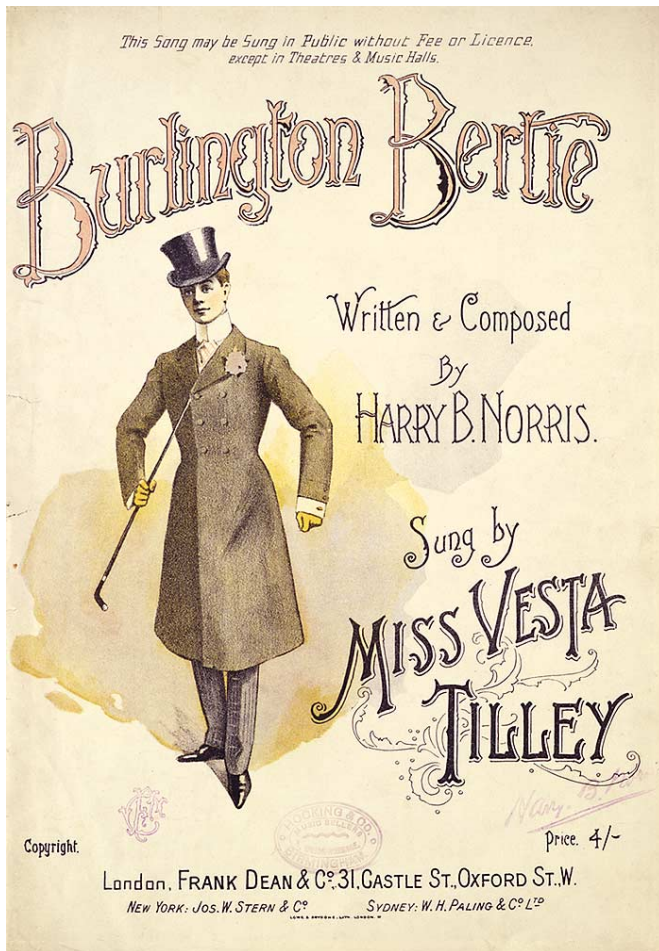


Figure 1-1: sheet music for Vesta Tilley's "Burlington Bertie."

earliest female music hall stars: she became famous in the late 1860s doing impressions of George Leybourne, before having her first independent hit with a “swell” song. The swell’s integration into the repertoire of male impersonators lent it a further level of parody: the character became emasculated not only through his dandified appearance and over-compensating posturing, but through his very embodiment in the underlying form of a woman.

One of the most famous swells of all was Burlington Bertie, performed by Vesta Tilley, who by the turn of the twentieth century had become one of the most famous male

including a “pantomime dame” played by a man, and the lead “principal boy” played by a woman, that incorporates other traditions such as audience participation, slapstick comedy, and the interpolation of well-known songs with re-written lyrics. Bullough & Bullough’s description of the extravaganza clearly provides a foreshadowing of pantomimes: thanks to its fantasy and burlesque elements, the extravaganza was a safe genre in which to challenge gender stereotypes, and although actresses played the leading male roles, they did not have to make realistic attempts to mimic male behavior. Styles of the principal boy in pantomimes, reflecting both fashion and “the expectations of the female form,” changed over the years, but the design of the costumes always emphasized the female body underneath the male clothing (Millie Taylor, *British Pantomime Performance* (Bristol, U.K.; Chicago, IL: Intellect, 2007), 117–18). J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, which premiered in 1904, created a star vehicle for principal boys that bridged the pantomime and serious theatrical traditions; the role of Peter was played exclusively by women, famously by Nina Boucicault and Mary Martin. Marjorie Garber provides a lengthy analysis of the ways in which Peter, as played by a woman, became a disruptive element, signifying undecidability, a split vision between adult woman and young boy: see Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 175–77.

impersonators on the music hall circuit.⁵⁵ “Burlington Bertie” was one of her most well-known songs, detailing a litany of the character’s frivolities. Bertie, the swell, spent enormous amounts of money simply to attract the attention of women he encountered; the women knowingly used him for his money, and he was ultimately the dupe of the song. This song was later parodied by another famous male impersonator, Ella Shields, in a version titled



Figure 1-2: sheet music for Ella Shields' "Burlington Bertie."

“Burlington Bertie from Bow.” In

Shields’ version, Bertie is a homeless man, laboring under delusions that he is an aristocrat (“I’m all airs and graces, correct easy paces / So long without food I forgot

⁵⁵ Vesta Tilley’s career began at a young age, under the supervision of her father, who was himself an actor and music hall manager. Even as a child, she performed dressed as a boy. After touring regional venues, she began performing at halls in London, and took on the role of principal boy in pantomimes, with a season as principal boy at the prestigious Drury Lane theatre cementing her career. She toured America, and by the 1890s was closely associated with music-hall impresario Sir Oswald Stoll and her future husband, Walter de Frece. Tilley became established as the greatest male impersonator of her time, and bought the sole singing rights to thousands of songs in order to secure the uniqueness of her act, as well as enabling her to constantly introduce new songs to keep her act fresh. She commanded enormous salaries for her performances. With Walter de Frece, she organized philanthropic events and gave charity performances. Tilley retired in 1920, with a final performance that apparently received a forty-minute ovation, and a farewell speech from actress Ellen Terry. Maitland writes, “That night she disappeared absolutely and forever. From the dressing-room Lady de Frece emerged, the gracious wife of the Conservative MP.” (Sara Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, Virago Pioneers (London: Virago, 1986), 43. See also Tilley’s memoir, de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley*.)

where my face is...”).⁵⁶ Shields’ version not only creates a parody of Bertie, but also of Tilley, implying that Tilley might have thought she was a cut above the other male impersonators, but that in reality she was no better.

As the tradition of male impersonation became an integral part of variety shows and music hall performances, more stock characters were added to performers’ repertoires. Judges, curates, policemen, sailors, and soldiers were all common acts, and a music hall “turn” would incorporate several of them in the course of a single slot. Not only were these characters all figures in various positions of power, whose depiction on the stage would have given the audience an opportunity to laugh at them and, for a moment, up-end the power relationship between the character and the audience, but they were also all determined by very specific modes of dress. As I will discuss in more detail later, a key component of the impersonators’ act was their attention to detail, and their ability to perform quick changes between songs. The choice of characters was therefore not only made for comedic purposes, but to allow the performer to demonstrate the accuracy with which they could depict very distinguishable characters. The audience would have been able to compare the impersonation with their knowledge of “real-life” versions, and instantly establish for themselves whether or not the impersonation was an accurate one.

It is this reliance on stock characters that defines the act of the male impersonator, setting it apart from the theatrical and operatic traditions of breeches or trouser roles.

⁵⁶ This song became more iconic than Tilley’s original. Julie Andrews immortalized the performance tradition for this song in the 1968 film *Star!*, in which she portrays the British actress and singer Gertrude Lawrence. In the film, Andrews as Lawrence performs this song with a slapstick comedy routine typical of the comedy of the music halls (although with a few extra camera tricks). The routine can be viewed online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOJp_oJgMTM (accessed October 4, 2016).



Figure 1-3: Publicity photographs of Tilley dressed as a judge (top L), curate (top R), swell (bottom L), and a policeman (bottom R) (both undated). Photographs by Vanessa Williams, at the British Music Hall Society Archive

Rather than playing a specific character, they depicted generalized stereotypes, with any number of assumptions and jokes already attached to them in the minds of the audience. These stock characters enabled a shift away from the tradition of comic song as a narrative, towards an episodic format that represented situations or moments in time.⁵⁷ The episodic format allowed the male impersonator to interact with the audience with comic patter between the verses of their songs: no longer needing to drive a narrative, they could take full advantage of each scene to play directly with the audience's expectations of their character. The emphasis was entirely on the character being portrayed, rather than on the character's actions within the frame of a larger narrative.

However, apart from work on the "swell," scholarship on male impersonators has tended to overlook the characters depicted by the impersonators and their concomitant political and social connotations, in favor of focusing on the juxtaposition of the male characters with the female body of the impersonator, heeding Marjorie Garber's call to look at, rather than through, the cross-dresser.⁵⁸ Stemming from Judith Butler's formulation, cross-dressing becomes a subversive practice that highlights the performativity of gender, that "effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity," with levels of signification that are uncontrollable by the performer.⁵⁹ This quest to identify cross-dressing with subversion becomes problematic when applied to turn-of-the-century male impersonation, which was a mainstream genre set in the traditionally conservative venues of the music-halls, bound

⁵⁷ Bratton, *Music Hall*, 67.

⁵⁸ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 9.

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006), 186.

up in the politics of working-class respectability.⁶⁰ Attempts to reconcile male impersonation with Butler's and Garber's concepts of the subversiveness of cross-dressing have led to theorizations of the impersonators' androgyny as the only means by which these performers can be imagined as challenging early twentieth-century social norms. Specifically, Tilley's androgyny, and ensuing challenge to gender performance, is read through the juxtaposition between her male attire and her feminine body, between her male characters and her female singing voice. Her performances of masculinity and femininity have been studied through simple readings of publicity photographs, and to what extent they work—or fail—to convince the viewer of the masculinity of the character.⁶¹ References are made to her soprano voice, but with little analysis of recordings and the different modes of singing and speaking that she used.⁶² Although attention has been given to the shape of Tilley's female body underneath its male clothing, little time has been spent on uncovering sources describing how she used her body on stage, and the ways in which she actually performed her characters. If the "success" of a male impersonator comes through subverting gender norms and exposing the essential performativity of gender, opinions are divided as to how successful Tilley's

⁶⁰ The particularly close association of Vesta Tilley with music-hall impresario Oswald Stoll pushes her act even further into the realms of respectable, "safe," performances. Stoll managed his music-halls unlike any others, making sure his performers conformed towards his high standards of morality. He removed any acts who violated his rules of propriety, giving them warnings as to exactly which jokes or double entendres he found unacceptable. For further discussion of this, see Chapter Two.

⁶¹ "Her presentation of herself in male clothes is smart, immaculate, precise—feminized, or at least liminal... The emphasis is on order, rather than disorder; restraint, rather than excess; little, pretty people, wearing attractive clothes." (J. S. Bratton, "Beating the Bounds: Gender Play and Role Reversal in the Edwardian Music Hall," in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, ed. Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 100).

⁶² "...Because she never sang 'false bass' but always her own tremble, the vital 'breaking of continuity'—the gap between her persona and her person—had already occurred..." (Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, 108). Maitland also asserts that Tilley never used her speaking voice on stage: a statement that is probably false, as I will address later in this chapter.

act was. Alison Oram feels that Tilley's "anodyne" performances successfully disrupted celebrated forms of masculine behavior; Elaine Aston suggests that Tilley's "slender, potentially androgynous figure" undercut the "womanly" stereotype presented by the majority of female music-hall performers; and J.S. Bratton disagrees with both, writing that Tilley's male characters were undermined "by a parade of essential womanliness" both on and off the stage.⁶³

The expression of sexual identity is often entwined with formulations of gender performance and subversion, with histories of early twentieth-century male impersonators bound up with histories of lesbianism and "deviant" sexuality. Martha Vicinus reads the male impersonator's androgyny as a "visual icon of the possibility of alternative sexual desire," immediately equating gender indeterminacy with expressions of lesbianism.⁶⁴ Even Gillian Rodger, who emphasizes in her work that male impersonation was not risqué, but rather a very mainstream mode of performance, still entwines the history of male impersonation with descriptions of the performers' sexualities, describing Annie Hindle's and Ella Wesner's relationships with women as defying "gender-appropriate behavior."⁶⁵ In the case of Tilley, who was married to a man, her sexuality could not be equated with the gender subversion of her on-stage performance. This forms another piece of evidence for scholars who view Tilley's act as a failure of gender play, removing another route through which her act could have been subversive and therefore further neutering its political effects as read through a twenty-first century lens.

⁶³ Alison Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!: Women's Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture*, Women's and Gender History (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 29; Elaine Aston, "Male Impersonation in the Music Hall: The Case of Vesta Tilley," *New Theatre Quarterly* 4, no. 15 (August 1988): 247; Bratton, "Irrational Dress," 78–79.

⁶⁴ Vicinus, "Turn-of-the-Century Male Impersonation: Rewriting the Romance Plot," 187, 190.

⁶⁵ Rodger, *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima*, 128–29.

What happens if we consider the possibility that the work done by Tilley's performances was not always that of subversion, but of alternative forms of engagement with Edwardian politics and social norms? If we set aside the need to treat androgynous gender performance as the principal site of political work in the acts of male impersonators, what other forms of affective labor might we uncover? A focus on specific stock characters within a defined historical context can locate more informed ways in which these acts worked towards political or social ends. In the rest of this chapter, I examine the soldier characters that Tilley performed during the First World War. In analyzing her vocal style, her appearance, and her performance style within the context of the War, I will argue that her soldier characters were entrenched in firmly masculinized rhetorics, and that suggestions of androgyny were few, if any.⁶⁶ However, this does not remove political or social engagement from her act; rather, Tilley's performance of her soldier characters enacted forms of discipline and control on her audiences, perpetuating the values and ideals of the war-centered, conservative, state.

⁶⁶ The other main category of scholarship on gender performance during the First World War has examined female impersonation within the Army: the entertainers that formed a crucial part of the Army's own concert party entertainments. Over the course of the War, more and more official Army resources were put into these divisional concert parties, once officers realized how important their performances had become to the men abroad on active service. By the end of 1916, nearly every division of the Army had an official concert party, giving performances nearly every night in rest camps or touring out to camps and villages (J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press, 1990), 96). The parties were made up of members of the Army, who were then excused from most of their duties behind the lines. The female impersonators sang sentimental songs, "asserting the idealized stereotype of soft and vulnerable romantic femininity." They "generated considerable sexual excitement," and dressed glamorously, even down to alluring lingerie (Ibid., 106). The characters were not purely comic ones, or figures of fun. They were meant to be believable, and as far removed from androgyny as possible. In J.G. Fuller's account of the female impersonators' work, they provided an outlet for troops' sexual desires. Quotations from troops recalled how a good impersonator could create "an upsurge of amorous feeling;" Fuller records how often the "realism" of the female impersonators, and the ensuing feelings of the "sex-starved troops," is recorded in journals and memoirs. Here, androgyny was not a measure of "success": the female impersonators were considered to perform a vital service for the troops, and functioned as an integral part of Army life.

Tilley's vocal style

One of Tilley's most popular soldier songs was "The Army of Today's All Right," which she began performing soon after the outbreak of the War.⁶⁷ The song was sung by a new recruit to the Army, a "Tommy" starting on the lowest possible rung of the military ladder. The soldier recalled how the Army used not to be strong, until he enlisted; the tag-line of the chorus was, "I joined the Army yesterday, so the Army of today's all right." Tilley's song emphasized how important it was to join the Army, and how the reputation of the Army had changed from "yesterday" to the current moment. Prior to the First World War, a large proportion of the general public held Army volunteers in contempt; the low pay, difficult postings across the Empire, and poor prestige formed a vicious circle that attracted a "generally poor standard of recruit."⁶⁸ Tilley's mission, in this song, was to renew the image of the soldier, placing him on a pedestal as an emblem of patriotism and respectability. The hegemonic masculinity, in R.W. Connell's term, of the male soldier during the War was defined in terms of heroism, physical health, and moral strength.⁶⁹ Jessica Meyer describes how the figure of the "soldier hero" "was one of the most potent and widespread images of idealised masculinity in cultural circulation."⁷⁰ He was defined by "qualities of endurance, adaptability, courage and duty," and stood as an

⁶⁷ *The Era* refers to performances of "The Army of To-day's All Right" in reviews on November 25, 1914 and December 9, 1914, in which the song was described as "a new recruiting [song]" and "an inspiring [sic] appeal which has brought many hundreds of recruits to the colours."

⁶⁸ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918*, 32.

⁶⁹ R. W. Connell, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 1, 2005): 829-59.

⁷⁰ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5. The term "soldier hero" is explored by Graham Dawson in *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), in relation to British adventure stories and masculinity.

emblem of idealized masculinity.⁷¹ Tilley's soldier character took center-stage as "soldier hero," presenting to the public the changing face of the Army, as the "physically degenerate" working classes and "morally degenerate" middle classes were transformed into "men" through the masculinizing experiences of fighting and violence.⁷² Tilley's character did not need to be transformed by the Army: rather, the Army was transformed by the soldier, and his idealized masculinity.

The British Library holds recordings of two different versions of "The Army of Today's All Right." Both were apparently recorded in 1915, although there are key differences in their lyrics that make one a far more overt recruitment song.⁷³ For example, the second verse describes the Tommy meeting a Colonel, who is despondent over the state of the Army. In what I am describing as Version 1, the Colonel says, "What we want here is ginger," but in Version 2, he says, "What we want is more recruits."⁷⁴ The two versions also differ in their choruses, with a direct reference to Lord Kitchener in Version 2: "Who said the Army wasn't strong? / Kitchener proved them wrong on the day he came along," compared to Version 1's "I thought the Army wasn't strong / Everything was wrong till the day I came along."⁷⁵ It seems likely that Version 1 was the

⁷¹ Ibid., 6. Meyer traces the history of the figure of the "soldier hero" from its imperial origins, placing it alongside accounts from soldiers during the War and balancing their narratives of alienation and isolation with the need to appear heroic.

⁷² Ibid., 3.

⁷³ Both have the same record catalog number, Regal G7079. In recordings of this era, the original discs would often wear out in the process of duplication; re-recordings were made under the same catalog number. It is therefore impossible to ascertain the exact chronology of these two recordings.

⁷⁴ The sentiment was essentially identical: "ginger" had been well-established since the mid-nineteenth century as slang for "mettle" or "spirit," stemming from descriptions of "ginger" horses as being showy and fast. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "ginger," accessed May 8, 2017, <http://www.oed.com>.

⁷⁵ Lord Kitchener was a senior figure in the Army, and the face of a famous recruiting campaign: the 1914 poster of his face and finger pointing directly at the viewer, with the text "[Lord Kitchener] wants you" underneath, has become an iconic symbol of the First World War and its recruitment drive; it was famously imitated by the United States Army, with Kitchener replaced by Uncle Sam.

original version, which Tilley first performed soon after the War's announcement. By the time its popularity and its ability to recruit soldiers had solidified, Tilley changed the words to those of Version 2, so that audiences would have the message to join the Army emphasized to them through a song with which they were already familiar.

In both recordings, Tilley's overall vocal register is pitched lower than in her earlier recordings, for example, when compared to "The Girl I Left Behind Me" from 1913 and "Following in Father's Footsteps" from 1910.⁷⁶ Version 1 of "The Army of Today" is in G major; the highest note of the melody, if sung along with the melody played by the orchestra, would be the C an octave above middle C. However, Tilley speaks rather than sings this note, situating it almost an octave lower. Version 2 is lowered by a half step into F sharp major, with the highest note therefore being B above middle C. The change in key between the two versions of "The Army of Today" cannot, as many other recordings can, be put down to a voice that has aged between the two recording sessions. Tilley consciously spends much of the song in both recordings using a lower speaking voice far more than her higher singing voice; and so perhaps the lowering in pitch of the second version was part of this effort to achieve an overall lower pitch. Compared to other songs, far more of "The Army of Today" is spoken rather than sung, and her speaking voice is placed deliberately, even forcedly, low in her chest register, which emphasizes the "maleness" of her character's voice.

Figure 1-4 gives a transcription of the different versions, with the words that are spoken rather than sung marked in bold.

⁷⁶ Although Tilley was fifty years old when the War broke out, which could explain her lower voice, these recordings are still noticeably lower than those made just a few years before.

Figure 1-4: text transcriptions of “The Army of Today”

<u>Version 1</u>	<u>Version 2</u>
<p>When people tell you that the army's not complete That goes to show that they don't know. I say the army's simply perfect, can't be beat. I know it's true - because I do. Some time back it seemed to me Things weren't all they ought to be: There was one thing that was wanted, only one, And of course that thing was done.</p> <p><i>For it's all right, it's all right now, there's no need to worry any more.</i> <i>I thought the army wasn't strong:</i> Everything was wrong till the day I came along, <i>And then the band played, they all hoorayed,</i> <i>The guns fired a salvo of delight.</i> I joined the army yesterday so the army of today's all right!</p> <p>I found the Colonel of the Regiment in the dumps, I said, “What for?” He simply swore. Oh my! the language! well he let it out in lumps, It was a shock - it stopped the clock. When his breath came back a bit He explained the cause of it: “What we want here is ginger, sir” said he, I said, “That means you need me.”</p> <p><i>For it's all right, it's all right now, there's no need to worry any more.</i> <i>I thought the army wasn't strong:</i> <i>Everything was wrong till the day I came along,</i> <i>And then the band played, they all hoorayed,</i> Kitchener looked at me with such delight. I joined the army yesterday so the army of today's all right!</p>	<p>When people tell you that the army's not complete That goes to show that they don't know. I say the army's simply perfect, can't be beat. I know it's true - because I do. Some time back it seemed to me Thing's weren't all they ought to be: There was one thing that was wanted, only one, And of course that thing was done.</p> <p><i>So it's all right, it's all right now, there's no need to worry any more.</i> <i>Who said the army wasn't strong?</i> Kitchener proved them wrong on the day he came along, <i>So let the band play and shout hooray!</i> <i>We'll all show the foeman how to fight.</i> I joined the army yesterday for the army of today's all right!</p> <p>I found the Colonel of the Regiment in the dumps, I said, “What for?” He simply swore. Oh my! the language! well he let it out in lumps, It was a shock - it stopped the clock. When his breath came back a bit He explained the cause of it: “What we want is more [pause] RRRRRECRRRRRRRRUITS” said he, I said, “That means you need me.”</p> <p><i>For it's all right, it's all right now, there's no need to worry any more,</i> <i>Who said the army wasn't strong?</i> Kitchener proved them wrong on the day he came along, <i>So let the band play and shout hooray!</i> I'll show the Germans how to fight! I joined the army yesterday for the army of today's all right!</p>

Tilley's spoken style is declamatory, rhythmic, and evocative of a martial style, and is in a low register. When she alternates between singing and speaking within a single line, she highlights the differences between these vocal registers even more extremely: for example, in the second verse in both versions, the line "When his breath came back a bit," the words "when" and "breath" are sung at the top of the vocal range, but the other words are spoken in a low register, giving the comedic effect of someone gasping for breath.

If vocal register is a marker of an impersonator's androgyny, Tilley consciously adopted a lower vocal register in these recordings in order to remove, or at least lessen, the disconnect between her male persona and her female singing voice. Despite Maitland's claim that Tilley never sang "false bass," Kayte Stokoe's insistence on Tilley's singing voice as "high, close to soprano, and delicate," and Gillian Rodger's descriptions of male impersonators' use of a speaking voice only in "brief moments," "The Army of Today" undoubtedly proves that, on occasion, Tilley adopted a deeper vocal range, achieved mainly through speaking rather than singing.⁷⁷ Although Tilley never achieves an astonishingly low vocal register, the fact that she consistently gestures towards a low one is enough to mark her speech style as masculine, or at least as more masculine than in her other character songs. It is also pertinent to note that Alison Oram, in her study of women who lived as men at the beginning of the twentieth century, suggests that vocal register was less of a marker of masculinity than might be expected.

⁷⁷ Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, 108; Kayte Stokoe, "Are Drag Kings Still Too Queer for London? From the Nineteenth-Century Impersonator to the Drag King of Today," in *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London, c.1850 to the Present*, ed. Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 100; Gillian M. Rodger, "'He Isn't a Marrying Man': Gender and Sexuality in the Repertoire of Male Impersonators, 1870-1930," in *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, ed. Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 123.

Just because a person who otherwise dressed and behaved as a man had a higher-than-average speaking voice, they were not immediately marked as un-masculine. Oram quotes a report given on a 32-year-old married man who was called up for service in 1916, who had to confess that he was in fact a woman: “The voice was soft and rather gentle... but no notice was taken of that. Plenty of young fellows—and she looked like a young man of twenty-four—have effeminate voices...”⁷⁸ Vocal quality was subjugated by performance of “masculine qualities, character and social role,” as well as the relational establishment of gender.⁷⁹ Tilley’s higher voice could simply be read as indicative of the relative youth of the soldier she depicted: a reflection of the Army’s acceptance of 18- and 19-year-old boys for this War, and of the further 250,000 children under the age of 18 who managed to enlist by lying about their age.⁸⁰ The combination of using a speaking voice in the first place, and of consciously pitching the speaking voice in a low register, demonstrates that Tilley used her vocal range as much as she could to emphasize the nature of the character that she was performing. The fact that Tilley made these vocal gestures implies that she was conscious of the marker of her voice; for this character in particular, she made a particular effort to remove this marker of femininity.

In these recordings, Tilley speaks the majority of the words when she is reporting direct speech, for example between the Colonel and the Tommy, and also in the choruses where she refers to herself, or her character, in the first person. In Version 1, she declaims the word “I” at the beginning of the line “I thought the Army wasn’t strong,” singing the

⁷⁸ Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, 32–33.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁰ John Oakes, *Kitchener’s Lost Boys: From the Playing Fields to the Killing Fields* (Stroud: The History Press, 2009); Richard van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War: Their Own Stories for the First Time* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

rest of the line in her normal singing register. Her masculine-styled speaking voice draws attention to her character as the subject of the song: it is not Tilley the performer who thought the Army wasn't strong, but her Tommy character. The character never sings "I-statements" in the upper soprano register: each one is coded as masculine and authoritative. Similarly, in the final chorus of Version 2, the line "I'll show the Germans how to fight" is entirely spoken. This is the song's fundamental message, and Tilley's performance emphasizes that it is her character, this working-class Tommy, who is going to single-handedly win the war. His hegemonic masculinity is never in question; the point of the song is not to laugh at the comic juxtaposition of a woman dressed as a man who intends to win the war, but rather to applaud and imitate this plucky new male recruit.

Tilley also plays with her pronunciation and vowel sounds, dropping the voiceless fricative at the beginning of "Who said the army wasn't strong," making it "Oo said..." Her Tommy is a working-class Cockney, using a London-specific accent that was known in music-halls all over the country to signify a determined, hard-working, member of the working class.⁸¹ There is just enough Cockney in Tilley's performance to make that association, but not so much as to veer into either obscure rhyming slang that would have alienated non-London audiences, or to fill the song with an accent that would cross the border of respectability. To further heighten the distinction between the Tommy and the Colonel, rather than pushing the Cockney accent further to its extreme, Tilley instead

⁸¹ The Cockney accent, and its associations with particular modes of humor, a tough determination, and forms of working-class employment, had been highlighted particularly through Charles Dickens' novels, particularly Sam Weller in the *Pickwick Papers* in 1836. The music-hall Cockney became a particular character type, sometimes combined with the character of the swell and sometimes appearing in other guises: Derek Scott argues that ultimately the Cockney character on stage became replicated to the point where performers no longer imitated "real" Cockneys but instead already-existing imitations, conflating the real and the imagined (Scott, "The Music-Hall Cockney: Flesh and Blood, or Replicant?").

emphasizes the Colonel's style of speech, mimicking his clipped upper-class vowels ("ginger" ends up sounding more like "gin-gah," and the word "recruits" in the other version is drawn out, with elongated rolled r's). I do not read this as necessarily mocking the Colonel, in the way that swell songs mocked the upper classes, although it is impossible to surmise whether it was accompanied by any actions that would have done so. Instead, the class differential is set up in order to emphasize that it is the working-class Tommy that wins the war, rather than the generals and politicians. Tommy answers the call for more recruits, and shows the Germans how to fight, solving the problems that the Colonel is facing through lack of manpower.

Tilley's over-acting on the words "ginger" and "recruits," in the same place in the two different versions, also draws attention to the fact that she is performing those words to caricature the Colonel. Although she speaks them, it is not in the simple declamatory style in which her Tommy speaks: this is an over-emphasized parody of a high-ranking officer. By drawing attention to the fact that it is not a real Colonel speaking, she heightens the contrast between the Colonel and the Tommy even further. Her Colonel is a performed character, but her Tommy is a realistic depiction of a real-life "every-man." Thus, in this song, the *real* man is the Tommy, and the fake man, imitated by a woman, is the Colonel. Tilley's character does not invoke androgyny: she does everything possible to emphasize the masculinity of her Tommy. This was vital to the mission of her song, to get the men in the audience to enlist then and there in the Army by identifying directly with the soldier character. There could be no question of the accuracy of her depiction, or of the heroic masculinity that she was depicting: the men in the audience had to entirely believe in her creation, in order to emulate his actions.

Uniform and the disciplined male body

A large part of the descriptions of Tilley's acts, both from herself, contemporary sources, and modern biographies, focuses on her enormous attention to detail in her costuming, something that Sara Maitland describes as "a quality of almost exhibitionist obsession."⁸² In her autobiography, Tilley related stories of watching real-life versions of the characters she performed in order to perfect her mimicry of their gestures. When her car was pulled over for speeding, she apparently leaned out of the window and asked the policeman to put his hand up to stop them again so that she could study his gesture.⁸³ One often-repeated story from during the War concerned Tilley watching the troop trains arrive at Victoria Station in order to study how the troops got in and out of railway carriages while carrying their various bags. She reproduced this scene in her performance of "Six Days' Leave," which, according to *The Era*, involved a "special scena" of the station.⁸⁴ She insisted that her knapsack, rather than being filled with straw, be filled to the regulation weight in order for it to swing correctly.⁸⁵ This attention to detail was not unique to her act: Hetty King, for example, also claimed to have spent hours watching a navy dig up a road, or a sailor at the docks cutting and rolling his tobacco.⁸⁶ Even acts who were not impersonators still devoted great attention to their costumes: Marie Lloyd's elaborate dresses were "the work of a perfectionist... The workmanship was too fine to be properly appreciated on the stage, even from the stalls."⁸⁷

⁸² Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, 123.

⁸³ de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley*, 129.

⁸⁴ *The Era*, March 14, 1917, 14.

⁸⁵ de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley*, 137. Also quoted in Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, 122, and Barker, *The House That Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre*, 127.

⁸⁶ Daniel Farson, *Marie Lloyd & Music Hall* (London: Tom Stacey Ltd, 1972), 142.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

Beyond underlining the quality of her act, Tilley's constant references to the accuracy of her costumes, fortified by newspaper reviews that lauded her appearance over all other aspects of her act, seem to have been in service of underlining the authenticity of her male characters.⁸⁸ The addition of gender-specific props also helped reinforce her characters' masculinity: often her characters would smoke a cigar, a habit that was part of the "whole masquerade of masculinity" in this period.⁸⁹ Other props include walking sticks, swords, and pipes, which Billie Melman has described as "phallic accouterments" that functioned as "shorthand for masculinity."⁹⁰ Sexual innuendo was an integral part of music hall humor, from the early *lions comiques* with their perfectly-timed popping champagne corks to the renowned singer Marie Lloyd's songs, so full of double entendres that she had only to add her "famous wink" to transform an apparently innocent song into one that would attract the wrath of the censors.⁹¹ Tilley's frequent use of props is demonstrated in her publicity photos: see for example the image of the curate in Figure 1-3 of this chapter, in which an umbrella is prominently placed to one side. Even though Tilley is holding another prop in this photo, the umbrella was clearly so closely associated with this act that it could not be omitted from the photograph. Figure 1-5 shows another publicity postcard, with Tilley in dress uniform with a cigar in

⁸⁸ Alison Oram's work on women's gender-crossing at the turn of the twentieth century emphasizes the crucial attention to detail given to clothing, and other elements of their appearance, by women trying to pass as men. See Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman!*, 19.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹⁰ Billie Melman, ed., *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 180.

⁹¹ See Bratton's chapter on "Champagne Charlie" for a note about the "ejaculatory flourish" of the champagne cork (Bratton, *Music Hall*, 63). Derek Scott discusses Marie Lloyd's encounters with the censors and the "highly intricate patterns of innuendo" that were enhanced by Lloyd's particular performance style: Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 78.



Figure 1-5: Tilley in dress uniform with cigar; publicity postcard from c. 1907. Photograph by Vanessa Williams at the British Music Hall Society Archives.

her mouth. Without further evidence, it is unclear whether Tilley used her props to add layers of innuendo to her performances, or simply to reinforce the masculine “stage-business” of smoking a cigar; either way, the addition of props was in further service of emphasizing the masculinities of her characters.

In her memoir, Tilley occasionally included anecdotes in which her characters were exposed as fictions because of an error in costuming; but she was always able to explain these

away, either with reference to an unavoidable lack of preparation time or with a deeper character-based explanation. For example, she described the first time she performed “A Bit of a Blighty One,” deciding on the day of the performance to procure a walking stick for a prop, which needed to be shortened. There was no time for the rubber ferrule to be put back on the bottom of the stick; and sure enough, after the performance, “a couple of wounded boys in blue came behind to see me. They thoroughly approved of me, but said

I had made one big mistake and, as they always expected me to be quite perfect, had felt they had to come and tell me about it. I had forgotten the rubber ferrule for my stick!!!”⁹² She also included an anecdote about her performance of “The Army of Today’s All Right,” in which she marched around the stage “in the rather exaggerated manner of a very new ‘rookie.’” A dozen soldiers came to her dressing room to show her how to march properly; but she explained to them that her character had only “joined the Army yesterday,” and so wouldn’t have their expertise.⁹³

Audiences were keen for Tilley’s costuming to succeed in its realism, particularly during the War, when a large part of the audiences for her acts in London’s music-halls was made up of soldiers on leave, or recovering from injuries. Soldiers would often help her to make her costumes even more realistic: one soldier stole a rifle from his barracks for her, after seeing how frustrated she was when her fake wooden rifle wouldn’t make the right sound when she slammed it on the floor. Other soldiers provided her with ties and handkerchiefs, which could only be issued directly by the Army.⁹⁴ Her soldier characters in particular moved from wearing costumes to being dressed, at least in part, in real Army-issued clothing, upping the stakes of accurate impersonation. Tilley’s soldiers were also set against realistic backdrops, something that reviews of few other male impersonators mention but which seems to have been another element crucial to Tilley’s act. Not only was her song “Six Days Leave” set against a backdrop of Victoria Station, but her 1918 song “London in France” was set in the trenches. *The Era*’s reviewer wrote:

⁹² de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley*, 141.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

Vesta Tilley gave us a new military scena, “London in France.” Dressed as a Tommy, and placed in the trenches—an attractively arranged scene with “Piccadilly,” “Savoy Hotel,” &c—she sings a song, as only Vesta can, which contains the lament, “Where’s the Stuff, the Bits of Fluff? They’re all Na-poo.” Up to the production of this song scena I have always been able to find fitting words of praise for this wonderful lady. But she’s left me at the post this time.⁹⁵

Once the War had begun, Tilley’s soldier characters began to look quite different from their previous incarnations. The khaki uniforms that were so much a part of the visual palette of the First World War—and persist in the Army to this day—were a relatively new innovation, adopted in 1897. A description of Tilley performing a soldier act in 1905 demonstrates that at this point, she was still wearing the “crimson cloth” of the nineteenth-century uniforms.⁹⁶ However, as the War started, Tilley’s switch to khaki reflected the new uniform’s symbolism of modern warfare. As Jane Tynan has traced, khaki embodied new approaches to warfare and what it meant to be a member of the Army.⁹⁷ It became ubiquitous almost instantly, because rather than purchasing their own uniforms as had previously been required, recruits to the First World War Army were issued with khaki uniforms, as an attempt to ensure immediate uniformity and discipline for a body of untrained civilians. Even the poorest recruit, previously unable to enter the Army because of the prohibitive cost of the uniform, could now enlist and look no

⁹⁵ The *Era*, January 23, 1918, 1. “Piccadilly” and “Savoy Hotel” referred to names given to trenches at the Front, which were often named after famous streets in London as well as towns and villages across the country; see Peter Chasseaud, *Rats Alley: British Trench Names of the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006). “Napoo” was British Army slang for “gone” or “finished,” deriving from the French phrase “n’a plus.” See Peter Doyle and Julian Walker, *Trench Talk: Words of the First World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2012).

⁹⁶ Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, 116.

⁹⁷ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

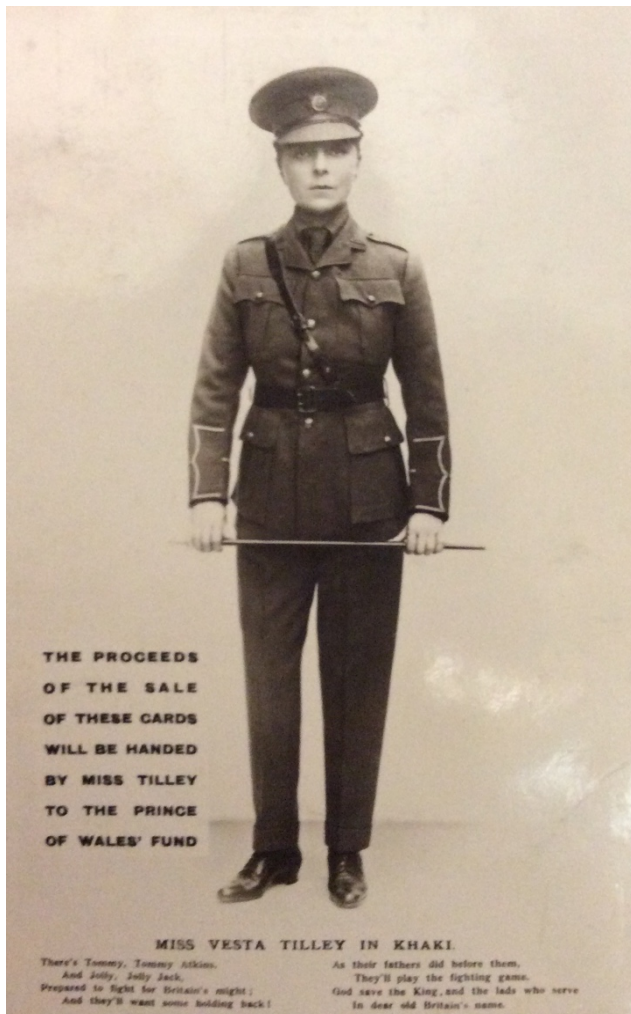


Figure 1-6: "Miss Vesta Tilley in Khaki": publicity postcard. Photograph by Vanessa Williams at the British Music Hall Society Archives.

different to any other soldier. Marie Lloyd's song "Now You've Got Your Khaki On" described how the addition of a khaki uniform transformed an ordinary working man ("I stood 'im 'cos he used to make me laugh") into a much more attractive prospect: "Up he rolls in khaki, I says, 'Luvvy, ain't you grown? / You've altered but you've altered for the best.'"⁹⁸

Khaki also became a powerful psychological tool, inextricably linked with heroism and duty. Images of men wearing khaki were the focal point of recruitment posters, often juxtaposed against men in civilian clothing (see

Figure 1-7 and Figure 1-8). Even comparing the publicity photographs in Figure 1-5 and Figure 1-6, we can see that Tilley's expression while wearing her khaki uniform is much more serious than in the pre-First World War uniform. This soldier's attitude towards his uniform is no laughing matter.

⁹⁸ Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, 83, 112. The chorus of Lloyd's song emphasized the physical attraction caused by the khaki uniform: "I'm going to give you an extra cuddle tonight!" The song was Lloyd's only number directly related to the First World War, and her decision to sing one focused on khaki uniform was particularly interesting given her famous song from during the Boer War, "The Girl in the Khaki Dress," which mocked women who were obsessed with the War and its paraphernalia ("What say? Too much khaki? That's just where the fun begins! / What about my sister, eh? Just had khaki twins!") (Ibid., 81).



Figure 1-7: recruitment poster. Accessed via Bournemouth News & Picture Service



Figure 1-8: recruitment poster. Accessed via Bournemouth News & Picture Service

If khaki uniform was a method of disciplining a disparate body of civilians, turning them into a homogenous fighting force of men, then Tilley's accurate costume situated her immediately within this disciplined body. As Foucault suggests in *Discipline and Punish* that "the soldier has become something that can be made," Tilley was fashioned into a true soldier on stage thanks to her perfect subjugation to the military



uniform.⁹⁹ But her uniform was more irreproachable and immaculate than the majority of soldiers in her audience: their uniforms would have suffered wear and tear on active duty, and even before they joined, there was no guarantee towards the beginning of the War that they would receive standard Army-issue uniform, due to shortages in supplies.¹⁰⁰ Even in "Six Days Leave," pictured in Figure 1-9, although she apparently added mud to her

Figure 1-9: Vesta Tilley in "Six Days' Leave." Photograph by Vanessa Williams at the British Music Hall Society Archives.

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 135.

¹⁰⁰ Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, 47.

uniform as though she was fresh from fighting in Flanders (“Flanders mud was still on her boots; her uniform was creased; the sheepskin jerkin was a winter issue in the trenches”¹⁰¹), she still appeared immaculate compared to the uniforms of those soldiers who were stepping off the train at Victoria Station immediately home from France, let alone to those uniforms sent back to families whose loved ones had been killed in action (“the tunic torn front and back by the bullet, a khaki vest dark and stiff with blood, and a pair of blood-stained breeches slit open at the top... Everything... was damp and worn and simply caked in mud... The mud of France that covered them was not ordinary mud; it had not the usual clean pure smell of earth, but it was as though it were saturated with dead bodies...”¹⁰²). Tilley was not simply a realistic soldier, but rather an “ideal” one, whose immaculate presentation reflected both only a heroic pride in the uniform and a successful record of service in the conflict, emerging from the battlefield with barely a trace of the War marked on his clothing.

This uniform was not simply another costume to identify a stock character, but a political tool, one that enacted its control over Tilley’s body and that in turn was used by her to enact discipline—through the medium of recruitment—over others. Dressed in her uniform and singing songs meant specifically to recruit men, Tilley wielded the power of her uniform and the military machine that it represented in order to immediately place eligible men into position of non-patriotic, non-uniformed bystanders. This was further exemplified in the routines in which she appeared alongside real soldiers. Although it is impossible to trace the exact number, it is documented that for some performances of

¹⁰¹ Barker, *The House That Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre*, 127.

¹⁰² Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 251–52.

“Six Days’ Leave” Tilley was accompanied on stage by soldiers in uniform. These were members of the Guards, who had been given special permission from the War Office to appear with Tilley.¹⁰³ This permission pulled Tilley’s act further into the mechanisms of the war machine, as she received permission from the highest authority to use the power of her uniform—and those of real soldiers—to recruit potential soldiers.

Although it is not possible to reconstruct the exact way in which the Guards appeared alongside Tilley, it is clear that they sang along with the last chorus of “Six Days’ Leave,” thanks to an extant sound recording, which features male voices alongside Tilley’s on the final chorus.¹⁰⁴ Tilley also recollected in her memoirs that the act required her at one point to “bring her rifle to the floor with a bang”: a move as part of rifle drill that suggests that she was performing it alongside the Guardsmen.¹⁰⁵ (It was the poor sound that her fake wooden rifle made against the ground that prompted one of the soldiers to bring Tilley a regulation rifle, as described earlier. Even the non-musical sounds made by Tilley’s props had to be as authentic as possible for her act.) As Tilley performed military drill in step with real soldiers, wearing the same uniform, her character became further subsumed into the military machine. Even differences in the octave in which they sang, and the relative size of the diminutive Tilley against the “huge” Guardsmen, would not have necessarily undermined this uniformity. If Tilley’s size and vocal pitch continued to be read in the vein of “young man” or “boy,” Tilley was simply depicting a young recruit alongside more experienced members of the Army.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley*, 137.

¹⁰⁴ Columbia 1153; accessed at the British Library, catalog number 1CL0050245.

¹⁰⁵ de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley*, 137.

¹⁰⁶ Her size relative to the Guardsmen could also be read in light of the “bantam” regiments that were created during the First World War, reducing the minimum height requirement from 5’3” to 5’0” in order to boost the number of men eligible to join the Army.

The uniformed male body of Tilley's soldier characters remained in line with the requirements of the government and military to enlist, to dress in immaculate uniform, and to engage in arms drills. All that was missing from the on-stage depiction was, of course, the actual fighting and bloodshed: the one facet that would serve to discourage, rather than encourage, recruitment.

Uniform and the undisciplined female body

Tilley's appearance in immaculate uniform also reinforced a different type of discipline, if we consider the phenomenon of "khaki fever" that was rampant during the first months of the War. "Khaki fever" referred to the "excitement which reportedly gripped young women at the sight of troops in towns, cities and near army camps," affecting adolescent girls in particular.¹⁰⁷ This was not a phenomenon new to the First World War: "scarlet fever," a play on words prompted by the scarlet jackets worn by troops, had been commented on in the mid-nineteenth-century (epitomized by Lydia Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*, and her fascination with the officers stationed in her town that led to an elopement that scandalized her family). However, "scarlet fever" was a term applied chiefly to prostitutes who followed soldiers: a play both on the color of the uniform and on the outward manifestation of sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁰⁸ "Khaki fever" was not quite such a sordid affair: young working-class women were its chief sufferers. However, these women became known for being "blatant, aggressive and overt in their harassment

¹⁰⁷ A. Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (January 1, 1994): 325.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 326.

of soldiers.”¹⁰⁹ Their behavior became a public cause for concern, and blame was placed entirely on them for their actions, rather than on the soldiers on whom they fixated.

Khaki fever was combatted by women police and patrols, who used this as an opportunity to enter the historically-male police force. The Women Police Service and the National Union of Women Workers’ Women Patrols Committee were formed in 1914; they imposed curfews, patrolled public places, and moved along young women whom they thought to be at risk of engaging in promiscuous behavior with soldiers.¹¹⁰ They were made up of middle-class women, generally of middle age; the same kind of women who formed the voluntary philanthropic societies that Peter Grant reads as attempts at middle-class social control over the working classes.¹¹¹ Woollacott describes the middle-class women who formed these patrols as “agents of cultural hegemony,” even though they were themselves challenging traditional roles for women by the very act of entering a police force. The women police believed that they were protecting the women against whom they took physical action, saving them from disorderly, immoral behavior; but they represented a “visible flexing of state power in the face of perceived gender and sexual disorder.”¹¹²

Tilley’s soldier characters actively courted the attention of young women. “Girls, if you’d like to love a soldier, you can all love me!” was the rousing conclusion to the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 335–36.

¹¹¹ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, Routledge Studies in Modern British History 10 (New York ; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 14–15. The formation of the Women’s Police Service was led by women who had been associated with organizations of militant suffragists prior to the War.

¹¹² Woollacott, “‘Khaki Fever’ and Its Control,” 337. Woollacott describes the contrast between this and the nineteenth-century women who campaigned to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, who fought against political agents of power including the police and military authorities.

chorus of “Jolly Good Luck to the Girl Who Loves a Soldier.” The song advised girls to choose the proper sort of uniformed man to admire. “Men who sail the sea, they’re regular flirts – wives in every port!” admonished the soldier. Despite inviting the girls in the audience to stroll by his side, promising them that he was always ready to do his duty, this soldier was also open about his promiscuity, concluding “Perhaps you won’t believe what I’m about to say, / I was true to one girl all last week.” Despite his flaws, women responded to the invitation to love him. Tilley had many female admirers: she noted in her memoirs, “girls of all ages would wait in crowds to see me enter or leave the theatre, and each post brought piles of letters, varying from an impassioned declaration of undying love to a request for an autograph, or a photograph, or a simple flower, or a piece of ribbon I had worn.”¹¹³ Again, this was not a phenomenon that only Tilley experienced; other male impersonators also reported many female admirers. The difference is that Tilley appears to not have minded the women who sent her gifts and followed her from town to town. For example, Tilley kept a diary that an admirer had sent her in 1920, writing that she still had it in her possession in 1933, and that she would often meet up with this admirer on her visits back to England.¹¹⁴ Conversely, Hetty King said in an interview that some of the letters she received from female admirers frightened and sickened her, and would slam the door when her fans tried to see her backstage.¹¹⁵ As someone who, although she did not necessarily encourage the attentions of women and girls, did not dismiss them or shame them, Tilley publicly sanctioned the tendency of women to ascribe sexual attraction to her performances.

¹¹³ de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley*, 233.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 233–34.

¹¹⁵ Richard Anthony Baker, *British Music Hall: An Illustrated History* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005), 188.

The complex manifestations of gender and desire that female audience members attached to Tilley are beautifully demonstrated in a publicity postcard from 1907.¹¹⁶ The postcard has a message on the back from a woman who went to see Tilley perform: “If you heard her singing “Following in Father’s Footsteps” you would know she was a woman as her husband owns the Tivoli in Liverpool. She sang it dressed as a college boy. Charles & I went to see her, but still I love him” (see Figure 1-10). This short message contains an enormous amount of nuance: the writer first of all traces Tilley’s underlying femininity to her singing voice, but then immediately qualifies it by writing of Tilley’s husband, implying that it is also this knowledge that dispels the illusion of Tilley as a man. The writer went to see Tilley with “Charles,” but the “but still I love him” seems to attach to Tilley rather than Charles. Although the writer went to see “her,” i.e. Tilley, the

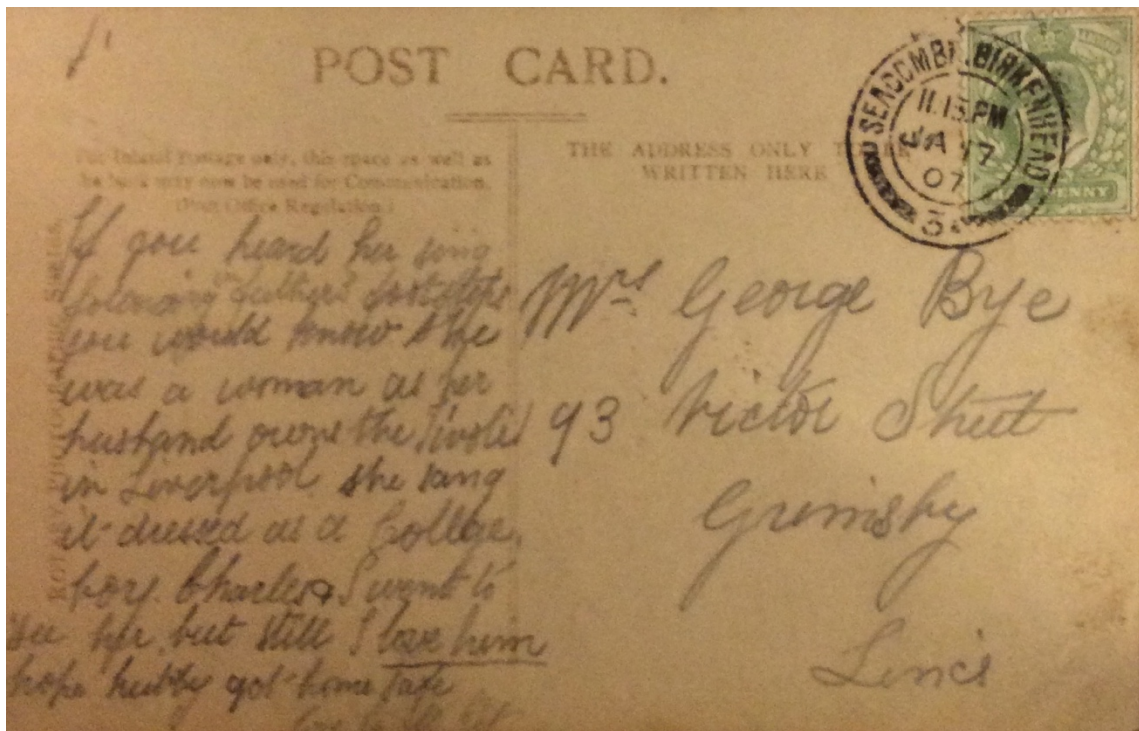


Figure 1-10: back of publicity postcard. Photograph by Vanessa Williams at the British Music Hall Society Archives

¹¹⁶ Held in the British Music Hall Society Archives, accessed with kind permission of David Reed.

performance did not prevent her from attaching romantic feelings to the male character that Tilley played.

It was “safe” for women to be in love with Tilley’s characters; they would never be in any danger of actually engaging in dangerous—i.e., sexual—behavior with a man, thanks to Tilley’s underlying female body. Of course, women’s admiration need not have been sexually driven: Maitland suggests that Tilley offered a “model of where the New Woman might be going—a new sort of possibility for freedom of movement and expression...”¹¹⁷ But when Tilley’s character sang directly to the women in the audience, telling them that if they

have to love a soldier, it should be him, some form of romantic or sexual desire between the women in the audience and the character was being openly addressed. In the light of “khaki fever” and its accompanying policing of women’s morality, Tilley’s song engaged



Figure 1-11: autographed publicity postcard of Tilley. Photograph by Vanessa Williams at the British Music Hall Society Archives

¹¹⁷ Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, 128.

in the patriarchal project of safeguarding female morality by providing an outlet for a more appropriate kind of sexual desire for a soldier—i.e. a soldier who was fundamentally sexually unthreatening, because of the audience’s knowledge that they were played by a woman. Tilley’s soldier characters could be the subjects of heterosexual desire, thanks to her emphasis on the characters’ masculinity rather than androgyny; but this was neutered by her female body underneath the khaki uniform that was the fuel for this desire. Although she was not forcibly removing the girls from public spaces where they admired soldiers in the way that the female police officers were doing, she still provided a sanctioned route for them to displace their affections, acting as a different kind of agent of patriarchal, hegemonic authority and participating in another form of disciplining the audience through the “respectability politics” of the music halls.

Normalizing the injured body

It was not just the virile, uniformed male body that Tilley depicted in her soldier acts: she also appeared in character as a wounded soldier, in “A Bit of a Blighty One.” The song describes a soldier in hospital, who has been injured as the result of shrapnel from a shell. The slang term “Blighty one” referred to a wound that was severe enough to require recuperation in England rather than in a French field hospital, but not so severe as to permanently disable.¹¹⁸ Despite the soldier’s injuries, he isn’t “feeling blue”: in the hospital ward, he gets plenty of food, jokes with his friends, and is “tucked in” bed by a “saucy little nursie.” In fact, he’s glad that he has been injured, and dreads returning to

¹¹⁸ Martin Pegler, *Soldiers’ Songs and Slang of the Great War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 39. “Blighty” referred to England, deriving either from the Hindi word “bilaik,” meaning “foreign place,” or the Arabic word “beladi,” meaning “my own country;” *ibid.*, 38.

his dugout at the front. The extant recordings of “A Bit of a Blighty One” show it to be typical music-hall fare: a jolly tune in 6/8, with Tilley’s usual mix of singing and speaking accompanied by rollicking brass and woodwind.¹¹⁹ Tilley sings the majority of the song. Her speaking voice is reserved for depicting troops on active duty, who are participating in the current military operation; the wounded soldier, who is recuperating in the hospital, wearing hospital blues rather than military khaki, does not need to speak with such a militarized voice of authority. He is on hospital leave from his duties, and therefore does not force his vocal style into the military “command voice.”

Maitland has described Tilley’s rendition of this song as normalizing the wounded bodies of soldiers, making them into figures of heroism rather than failure: “it was because of her delicate burlesque that the rather hideous hospital blue, the red tie and khaki cap became a fit habit for heroes.”¹²⁰ Soldiers with missing limbs became a common sight around the United Kingdom during the War; previously, people missing limbs were usually factory laborers, or children from poverty-stricken homes.¹²¹ Civilians underwent an enormous change of attitude towards these maimed bodies, as the sight of a missing leg or arm now had to become associated with sacrifice for one’s country rather than with menial work and an impoverished background. Tilley’s soldier was injured but still cheerful, and still had the ability to sing and—most importantly—make the audience laugh. By the end of the War, wounded soldiers learned that, in order to receive the sympathy and charity of the public, they had to be conspicuously cheerful: “No one

¹¹⁹ Track 9 on *Laughter on the Home Front—Songs and Comedy during the Great War*. Flapper 7047, 1994. The CD liner notes give the date of Vesta Tilley’s recording as 1917, recorded by Weston/Lee.

¹²⁰ Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, 118. Maitland is quoting Sudworth, *The Great Little Tilley*.

¹²¹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 37. See also Meyer’s chapter, ‘“Fit only for Light Work”: Disabled Ex-Servicemen and the Struggle for a Domestic Masculinity’ in Meyer, *Men of War*, 97–127.

wanted to support a malcontent, a depressive, or an amputee who mourned his lost limb.”¹²² Their cheerfulness made visible the fact that their masculinity had not been wounded along with their body, signifying a “masculine autonomy that transcended physical limitations.”¹²³ The resilience of Tilley’s wounded soldier gave voice to this cheerfulness, providing not only a model for how civilians should behave towards soldiers—showing them that a wounded soldier was nothing to fear or to pity—but also a model for how wounded soldiers should behave in front of an audience of their peers. As many wounded veterans attended music-hall performances while they were recuperating, Tilley’s character literally showed them how they should behave in order to receive the applause and admiration of the civilians around them.

Tilley’s decision to give her character a leg injury was more practical than anything else, according to her memoir: she related that she hadn’t decided whether to have a leg injury or her arm in a sling, but discovered that her quick change didn’t allow enough time for the sling to be added.¹²⁴ The opportunity to incorporate a walking stick into her act may also have facilitated her stage business; although no records of how exactly she performed this song remained, it is easy to imagine the transfer of the swell’s walking stick routines to this new character. Moving past the practicalities relating to the staging of the act, we can consider the specifics of the character’s injury in the broader context of the War. Soldiers who were injured in the line of duty received different pensions depending on the type of injury they received. If Tilley’s injured soldier had had

¹²² Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 130.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹²⁴ de Frece, *Recollections of Vesta Tilley*, 141.

the lower part of his leg amputated, he would have received a 50% pension; above the knee, 60%; and amputation at the hip, 80%.¹²⁵ Similar percentages applied to the various possible degrees of amputation of the arm. For wounded soldiers in Tilley's audiences, the soldier's injury was not a matter of choice, dependent on what was most convenient for a quick change: it was a representation of a possibly life-altering moment, a lasting reminder of the violence that they had faced at the Front. After the War, ex-serviceman received no state support in terms of employment opportunities or family pension allowances, "never fully rehabilitated either as workers or as citizens."¹²⁶ Disabled soldiers were dependent on philanthropy, including a number of charity schemes closely linked to the music halls: for example, Sir Oswald Stoll set up a foundation to provide employment and housing for disabled servicemen, which still exists today.¹²⁷ Stoll's and Tilley's close working relationship suggests similar political and social ideals: Stoll's private dedication to providing assistance for disabled veterans was allied with Tilley's on-stage rehabilitation of the wounded soldier.

Tilley's wounded soldier was not, however, permanently crippled. His "Blighty one" had put him in hospital for a relatively short period of time; sooner or later, he would have to return to his dugout. Bourke describes how it was the missing limb, more than any other injury, that allowed veterans to be viewed as heroes: "the absent parts of men's bodies came to exert a special patriotic power. In the struggle for status and

¹²⁵ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 66., quoting a Ministry of Pensions leaflet.

¹²⁶ Cohen, *The War Come Home*, 102.

¹²⁷ www.stoll.org.uk. Stoll also allowed the Coliseum to be used for numerous charity performances. Other theatrical charities included the Actresses' Franchise League, which helped form the British Women's Hospital Committee in 1915, putting on hundreds of charity performances to raise money for the Star and Garter Home, which provided therapeutic as well as medical services: see *Ibid.*, 130–40. However, these charities often had goals of social reform, with expectations for how veterans would behave that ranged from curfews to banning community-organized self-help programs.

resources, absence could be more powerful than presence.”¹²⁸ In “A Bit of a Blighty One,” no part of Tilley’s character’s body was permanently missing, so the character’s injury did not immediately position him as a hero, martyred for his country. One of the fears of the wounded male body was that it had become de-masculinized: “injured more easily, moving differently and sometimes requiring specific aids to facilitate function.”¹²⁹ During the War, this fear was so prevalent that disabled soldiers had to exhibit their unhindered masculinity through public sports games and tournaments: events that were irrevocably associated at this time with manhood.¹³⁰ Tilley’s portrayal of a wounded soldier could have deepened this public association of the injured male body with an underlying lack of manhood. However, Tilley’s character speaks of his enjoyment of his nurse’s attentions, as she tucks him into bed and mops his brow, as well as his forthcoming return to the Front and active service. Even though this soldier is injured, and played by a woman, he is still virile and manly.¹³¹

Tilley’s routine once again performed a service to society in terms of shaping public attitudes towards soldiers. Rather than directly calling men to serve their country, or dissuading young women from engaging in sexual relationships with soldiers by

¹²⁸ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 59.

¹²⁹ Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: “Soul of a Nation”* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2011), 56. Anderson traces the ways in which discourses of masculinity have been interpolated into disability studies, using R.W. Connell’s seminal concept of hegemonic masculinity. The First World War has provided a key area for examining masculine identity, disability, and war: see R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2005); Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*; Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Wendy Jane Gagen, “Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during the First World War, the Case of J. B. Middlebrook,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D’histoire* 14, no. 4 (December 2007): 525–41.

¹³⁰ Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain*, 56–64.

¹³¹ Beth Linker’s work on rehabilitation of wounded soldiers in First World War America demonstrates a similar preoccupation with restoring the “social order” of “making a man manly.” See Beth Linker, *War’s Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 4.

asking them to turn their attentions to her instead, she “saved” wounded soldiers from negative reactions from civilians to their wounded bodies. Tilley provided a model both for soldiers and civilians: she showed soldiers how to perform their injuries, and she showed civilians that the body of the injured soldier was still “safe,” ensconced in its exhibition of masculinity.

The undisciplined singer

The final verse of “A Bit of a Blighty One” is the element that complicates Tilley’s message of heroic masculinity and patriotism. The soldier relates his fears of returning to his dugout, and we understand from the song that his overall situation in the hospital is so pleasant, we can’t be sure what measures he will take to stay there (“When I think about my dugout / Where I dare not poke me mug out / Oh, I’m glad I’ve got this bit of a Blighty one”). “Blighty ones” were not always accidental, but were courted by some men as a valid reason to escape the trenches. One soldier recalled that his colleague in the trenches in the winter of 1914 “deliberately invited a bullet through his hands” while bailing out the trench; some soldiers would “actively court a nice clean bullet wound.”¹³² Other wounds were even self-inflicted, a sign of desperation. This attitude was of course not sanctioned by the military authorities: if discovered, a self-inflicted injury would be penalized by death by firing squad.¹³³ To openly discuss one’s delight at being injured and removed from the trenches was to admit to fear and even hint at a dereliction of duty.

¹³² John Hughes-Wilson and Nigel Steel, *A History of the First World War in 100 Objects* (London: Cassell Illustrated, 2014).

¹³³ Nidhi Maheshwari and Vineeth V. Kumar, eds., *Military Psychology: Concepts, Trends and Interventions* (Los Angeles, California: SAGE Publications, 2016), 127.

Tilley's song painted a picture that undermined official discourse about patriotic service and heroism, but which would have perhaps struck a chord with wounded soldiers in the audience, giving them a space in which to feel as though their possible relief at being away from the trenches was a valid, accepted reaction. Stories were printed in newspapers about the healing powers of music hall acts, even for soldiers with "invisible" injuries of shell-shock and trauma: remember Private Durrant's miraculous recovery thanks to May Henderson's act, described in the introduction to this dissertation. Whether or not these propagandistic tales about the miraculous recoveries taking place in theatres and music-halls were true, there were surely wounded soldiers who benefited from seeing representations of themselves on stage, in a space where they could hear their qualms and fears about returning to the Front voiced.

Further references to attitudes that were not in line with the official military position appear in other songs. In "Six Days' Leave," we learn that the soldier's sweetheart demanded a souvenir of a German helmet. He has concocted a story about how he won it: "There's my girl, she says bring home a German helmet, / Well I brought one and a tale about it too, / How I fought and showed no fear just to win this souvenir, / She'll expect a tale like that, so that'll do." Heavily implied here is the fact that this soldier did not win this souvenir; he hastily comes up with a very generic explanation, which will suffice to impress his girlfriend. The helmet appears as a focal point of Tilley's publicity photographs for this song, forming the center of her attention. Without



Figure 1-12: Vesta Tilley in "Six Days' Leave." Photograph by Vanessa Williams at the British Music Hall Society Archives.

the lyrics of the song, the image is one of pure heroism, as Tilley's soldier proudly regards the helmet he has brought back from the Front (see Figure 1-12). With the addition of the lyrics, the soldier's smile is transformed from one of pride in his heroism, into pride in his creative exaggeration of how he came to possess the object. The lyrics, however, were fleeting and impermanent, existing only as long as the performer sang them. The publicity photographs were the concrete remainder of the act; and they gave the "party line" of heroism and patriotism. Even the printed sheet music omitted any patter or stage business that would have further subverted the patriotic image on the front. Any subversion in Tilley's songs was made possible because the sentiments only existed as long as the songs were sung.

Not only Tilley's lyrics but her vocal style may also have reflected this tendency to undermine a patriotic image with more subversive sonic content. Little evidence remains as to whether she incorporated patter into her act; the surviving records do not demonstrate her live performance style, as they were curtailed by the length of the recording medium. They also remove the rhythmic play that Maitland describes: "Another element, much commented on by those who saw her, but completely lost in the available recordings, was her (not unique) counter-timing: distorting the 'natural' musical rhythm of her songs by dragging out or speeding up different passages for dramatic effect."¹³⁴ What we hear in these recordings are brass fanfares, martial rhythms, and a strict adherence to the base meter of the song; but from what we know of music-hall performance, Tilley would have been able to play with these to greater extremes, particularly when playing accompanied by an orchestra who knew her routines well and

¹³⁴ Maitland, *Vesta Tilley*, 108.

who could adapt to her playing with tempi. Despite the sonic aura of military discipline that surrounds these recordings, it is possible that Tilley was able to subvert the martial rhythms, providing a sonic counterpoint to the visual displays of discipline in her act. This could have been particularly effective in the songs in which she was accompanied on stage by real soldiers, marching in step with them: either keeping pace with them vocally as well as physically, or using her skill as a vocal performer to insert a modicum of individuality and subversion by singing against their rhythms. But these sonic traces are lost: all that remain are the material artifacts of publicity photographs and printed sheet music, and these cannot convey any subversive sonic content inherent in the performance. The only direct recollections of Tilley's performance, that come from a personal place rather than from edited, collated newspaper reviews, are from recorded memories of performances, like that of Kitty Eckersley.

Conclusion: androgyny displaced

Let us return then to Kitty Eckersley, and her experience of watching Vesta Tilley recruit her husband to the Army. Despite everything that we have read about Tilley's male impersonation, and the emphasis on her recruitment act particularly through the song "The Army of Today," in Kitty's story, Tilley was dressed in a glamorous evening dress. She was performing in the intermission of the variety show; perhaps explaining why she wasn't in character, as she wasn't officially "on the bill." It is even possible that Tilley was performing her act elsewhere in the city that night, and drove over to a different music-hall to recruit men in the intermission; it was not uncommon for artists to perform

at multiple venues on the same evening, although this model had become less common by the time of the War.

What does it mean for our interpretations of Tilley's act if we know that she also performed recruiting songs out of costume? We have no means to ascertain whether she changed her style of performance, whether she removed her masculinized vocal mannerisms and sang in her regular soprano register, whether she maintained her



Figure 1-13: publicity postcard of Vesta Tilley with her husband, Walter de Frece (1917). Photograph by Vanessa Williams at the British Music Hall Society Archives

marching style or moved more freely. What is clearly suggested is that Tilley's performances had become so firmly associated with her recruitment drive that they no longer depended on the voice and persona of their characters to have their desired effect. Tilley's performance of her soldier's masculinity had been so firmly cemented that, even singing dressed in an evening gown, she was still able to inspire soldiers to march behind her. Perhaps Tilley's soldier characters were so steeped in the heroism and masculinity of the male recruit, that it was only when she

performed in her evening gown, as a woman, that the audience was confronted with the characters' androgyny. Perhaps it was here, rather than in her male characters, that Tilley's performance became androgynous in its performance of gender: the body and voice of her soldier were now dressed in women's clothing. Furthermore, Tilley's feminized (in terms of dress, at least) performance may have served not only as a call to arms for many of the men in the audience, and for their wives, girlfriends, and mothers to prompt them to military services, but was also a call to arms directed at the women, providing them with the impetus to find ways to serve their country in whatever capacity they could. Perhaps seeing a woman, rather than a male character, calling them to arms was an even more effective call to action for potential recruits; they were not being shamed into joining the Army by one of their male peers, but by a woman. The impetus to recruit became transformed from pressure to join one's peers to a need to defend one's country, emblemized by a female figurehead.

Kitty was only able to sit and watch as her husband followed another woman onto the stage, and in doing so transformed their lives forever. The touch of Tilley's hand on his shoulder is the moment that, for Kitty, marked the turning point of his decision to follow Tilley—and the other men—onto the stage. In effect, Tilley had seduced him. How would this experience have been different for Kitty if Tilley had been dressed in her usual male costumes? Was Kitty more upset that her husband followed another woman into war, rather than staying with his wife, than she would have been had her husband simply followed a male soldier?

Ultimately, we cannot know how Tilley's performances out of character were read by her audiences: whether they were happy to disassociate these performances from

her usual characters, or whether the associations were so strong that the costuming no longer mattered. However, what is clear is that Tilley's soldier characters cannot be read as part of the standard narratives of male impersonators' androgyny, at least during the political context of the First World War. The project of recruitment and sustaining a positive attitude to the War required the whole-hearted support of public entertainers like Tilley, particularly in the working-class music-halls; depictions of these soldier characters were politicized through their engagement with projects of discipline and public order. Tilley's political engagement, and the politicized narrative of male impersonation, moved beyond the androgyny and gender play of her earlier characters, to encompass multiple modes of militarized masculinity and the accompanying forms of discipline enacted on the audience and the performer. It is through close readings of these enactments that we can begin to understand how a traditional genre of performance—in this case, male impersonation—can become a life-changing, politicized instrument.

Chapter 2

Blacklegs or patriots? Female musicians, music hall orchestras, and the Amalgamated Musicians' Union

The period of the First World War produced far-reaching changes in the British workforce. Trade union membership increased dramatically as workers sought secured wages and, for those joining the Army as volunteers and conscripts, guarantees that their jobs would be kept open for them after the war had ended. The British government intervened in the politics of the labor market and trade unions for the first time. It encouraged large-scale industries to employ women to fill the void left by male recruits, creating legislation concerning women's "dilution and substitution" within the workforce. Simultaneously, it attempted to appease the unions with guarantees of protected jobs for skilled union men and exemptions from army service for war-related civilian employment. The number of women in industrial workplaces increased, dramatically so after conscription was introduced in 1916. Economic concerns over job security and pay rates were entangled with paternalistic arguments over women's physical abilities, their morality, and suitability for work.

Analysis of women's changing position in the workplace as a direct result of World War One has traditionally been confined to examinations of large-scale industry, in particular the munitions and textile industries. Despite the entertainment industry continuing its work during the war, with attendance at music halls and variety venues strengthened by the vast numbers of troops home on leave eager for amusement, entertainment unions have remained notably absent from analyses of wartime labor

trends. Yet from its inception in 1893, the Amalgamated Musicians' Union (A.M.U.) campaigned alongside other militant trade unions for wage increases, better working conditions, and job security; and during the War it faced the same internal struggles over the rights of women to play a bigger role in previously male-dominated workplaces.

This chapter positions women's musical labor within the broader picture of women's labor and relationships with trade unions during the war. I examine a crucial moment of industrial dispute: a 1916 conflict between the A.M.U. and music-hall impresario Oswald Stoll that resulted in women being employed in music hall orchestras for the first time. I begin by outlining the history leading up to the strike, both in terms of the history of the A.M.U. and Stoll and also the national discussions of women's "dilution and substitution" in the workforce. I then examine descriptions of the 1916 dispute, and the debates surrounding it relating to economics, physical ability, patriotism, and morality, comparing them to critiques of women's labor from other industries. In doing so, I demonstrate that the A.M.U. drew on the ongoing "dilution and substitution" debate in order to more effectively argue their case against the female musicians employed by Stoll, firmly situating the work of the musicians within the purview of material, physical labor.

The Amalgamated Musicians' Union and Sir Oswald Stoll

By the late nineteenth century, music was considered to have become an "overcrowded occupation."¹³⁵ Anyone could bill themselves as a performing musician or teacher and

¹³⁵ Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 123.

compete for work, with no governance of their standards. There was also no regulation of the musicians' employers or working conditions. Musicians playing in music hall orchestras were considered to be "sweated" laborers, as they played for four hours a night without breaks, plus rehearsals, and rarely earned more than 30s. per week.¹³⁶

Tuberculosis was rife among them, as were muscular problems.¹³⁷ Although social reformers had begun to campaign for better working conditions and a minimum wage for the sweated workers of the clothing industry, with members of the Fabian Society and Liberal and Labour MPs organizing a "dramatic" exhibition of sweated labor in the West End of London in 1906, other areas of employment, including that of musicians, were ignored.¹³⁸ Local musicians' unions were started in London, Birmingham, and Manchester in 1874, but soon collapsed.¹³⁹

Change began in 1893, when not one but two organizations were established to support musicians' working rights: the Amalgamated Musicians' Union (A.M.U.), and the London Orchestral Association (L.O.A.). Cyril Ehrlich describes the polarized aims of the two organizations. The L.O.A. was confined to London, and was concerned with creating an organization for professional musicians that would reflect their genuine vocational pride. In Ehrlich's words, "It would have nothing to do with amateurs and part-time professionals."¹⁴⁰ In contrast, the A.M.U., under the leadership of Joseph

¹³⁶ Prior to the introduction of the decimal system of currency in the U.K. in 1971, there were 12 pence in a shilling, and 20 shillings in a pound. Shillings were abbreviated as "s." and pence were abbreviated as "d."

¹³⁷ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 143–44.

¹³⁸ For a thorough history of the changing attitudes towards sweated labor, set within the contexts of local labor markets, see Sheila Blackburn, *A Fair Day's Wage for a Fair Day's Work?: Sweated Labour and the Origins of Minimum Wage Legislation in Britain*, Studies in Labour History (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

¹³⁹ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 145.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

Williams, opened its doors to any musician who would pay a membership subscription, professionals and amateurs alike.¹⁴¹ As a result, it quickly became a national organization that campaigned for wage increases, “closed shops” (venues that would only employ Union members), and better working conditions. It set up a Benevolent Fund to assist members unable to work through illness or external causes, funeral grants for families of deceased members, and instrument insurance funds.¹⁴² Two years after its inception, it was represented at the 1895 Trades Union Congress.

Around the same time as the formation of the A.M.U. and the L.O.A., trade unionism across Britain was undergoing major changes. At the end of the 1880s, the sweeping brand of “New Unionism” opened up unionization to semi-skilled and unskilled men who had previously been excluded from craft unions.¹⁴³ These unions, such as the Dockers’ Union and the Gas Workers’ and General Labourers’ Union, were characterized as “militantly socialist organisations of low-paid, unskilled workers, quite distinct in membership and demeanour from the earlier, skilled craft unions.”¹⁴⁴ Between 1910 and 1914 strike levels across Britain were four times higher than in the previous decade, with the New Unions leading disputes over wage demands, work practices, unfair

¹⁴¹ Joseph Williams was working as a theatre musician and clarinet teacher by the age of sixteen, and in 1893 (at age 20) began organizing musicians at the theatre in Manchester where he worked. As well as his position as founder and first General Secretary of the A.M.U., Williams was on the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (the national federation of trade unions in England and Wales) for thirteen years, was Chairman of the T.U.C. General Council for one year, and a member of Manchester City Council. After his death, the Journal described him as “a born pioneer and fighter.” Details of Joseph Williams’ life can be found at <http://www.muhistory.com/>.

¹⁴² More detail can be found on the website for the A.H.R.C. and E.S.R.C. funded research project, *The Musicians’ Union: A Social History*, run by Martin Cloonan and John Williamson: <http://www.muhistory.com/>.

¹⁴³ For a detailed discussion of New Unionism, see John Charlton, *“It Just Went like Tinder”: the Mass Movement and New Unionism in Britain, 1889: A Socialist History* (London: Redwords, 1999).

¹⁴⁴ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 150.

treatment by managers, working conditions, and victimization of workers.¹⁴⁵ This style of union was completely at odds with the L.O.A.'s notions of gentility and professionalism, and its emphasis on musicianship as a craft rather than a job of work.¹⁴⁶ The A.M.U., however, stood behind its affiliation with this new brand of militant trade unionism.¹⁴⁷ Its members and organizers worked alongside those of other unions, for example receiving vital support from the Boot and Shoe Operatives in one strike in Leicester.¹⁴⁸ 1911 saw Joseph Williams urging A.M.U. members to “emulate the solidarity of railwaymen and dockers” after the disruptive, and occasionally violent, strikes that had taken place that summer.¹⁴⁹

The A.M.U.'s relationship with music hall impresario Oswald Stoll had always been a tumultuous one. In 1907, the A.M.U. famously joined forces with the Variety Artists Federation and the National Association of Theatrical Employees to campaign for better working conditions and wages from music hall owners, including Stoll. Williams also used this opportunity to demand closed shops, and a minimum wage of 36s. per week for London musicians.¹⁵⁰ The resulting strike affected twenty-two theatres, with

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 182; C. J Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 49.

¹⁴⁶ The L.O.A. was eventually forced to follow the example of the A.M.U., becoming a trade union in 1912 and changing its name to the National Orchestral Association. The rivalry between the two unions would continue, exploited by music hall owners, until the merger of the two organizations in 1921. The merger resulted in the Musicians' Union, which continued to be a major force in the U.K.'s trades unions. It battled over the introduction of the “talkies,” and the subsequent mass unemployment of musicians. It worked closely with the Phonographic Performance Limited royalty collecting agency and the British Broadcasting Corporation over the second half of the twentieth century, negotiating limitations on the use of records as opposed to live performances in broadcasting. Today, it remains a key union in the United Kingdom, representing over 30,000 musicians.

¹⁴⁷ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 150.

¹⁴⁸ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, August 1914, 15.

¹⁴⁹ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 182. G.D.H. Cole gives an account of these strikes: G. D. H Cole, *Short History of the British Working Class Movement: 1900-1937* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁵⁰ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 170.

around 2,500 pickets, and made headlines because of the unprecedented participation of major music-hall stars including Marie Lloyd and Little Tich.¹⁵¹ In 1912, the A.M.U. went head-to-head with Stoll, spending ten months negotiating for a higher minimum wage. Stoll maintained that the dispute was not about pay, but was another attempt to force him to employ only Union members. As Stoll claimed the musicians had broken their contracts, he brought claims against them for damages. In December 1912, members of the A.M.U. went on strike from Stoll theatres in six cities, including London: this walkout lasted until August 1914.¹⁵² It was an expensive undertaking for the Union, and pleas for members to pay their monthly Union subscriptions on time appeared in the monthly reports: “The fight with Stoll is going all right, but it will prove an expensive one. The victory will be worth all the money spent on it, however.”¹⁵³ The A.M.U. reported the settlement of this dispute in the monthly publication sent to all members, the *Musicians’ Report and Journal* (henceforth referred to as the *Journal*) in August 1914, after the personal intervention of Ramsay MacDonald, with Joseph Williams describing it as “the biggest fight the A.M.U. has ever entered into.”¹⁵⁴ Stoll withdrew his damages claim, and the musicians were reinstated as soon as vacancies were created. The A.M.U.’s notification of the settlement read:

¹⁵¹ The participation of these high-ranking solo acts forced the employers to eventually agree to arbitration to break the strike. More than 100 witnesses appeared at the hearings, 67 of whom were produced by Williams (Ibid., 172). Although Williams was not successful in his campaign for closed shops, the final award guaranteed minimum wages of 30s per week for London players (except for drummers, who received two shillings less): when balanced with supplementary earnings and seasonal unemployment, Ehrlich estimates that this minimum wage worked out to slightly more than that of the average semi-skilled industrial worker.

¹⁵² Ibid., 183.

¹⁵³ A.M.U. monthly report, March 1914, 1.

¹⁵⁴ The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, August 1914, 4. Also printed in the Daily Citizen and the Daily Herald.

Both sides to the dispute have come out of it with added respect for each other and with the satisfaction that they have concluded an honourable peace in which neither side can claim a victory and neither can say they have suffered defeat. ... Our reputation as a fighting organisation has been enhanced, and our position as a union rendered stronger than ever. The cost of the fight has been a great one, but the improved position we have gained as an organisation has been worth the thousands of pounds expended.¹⁵⁵

The pride with which the A.M.U. reported their victory was due in part to Oswald Stoll's reputation as one of the most powerful figures in music hall history. Stoll owned a nationwide chain of music halls, and estimated that he entertained 90,000 people every day.¹⁵⁶

Felix Barker, in his biography of Stoll, describes that by 1904, "he was already a great, if not the greatest, power in the music-hall world... his sovereignty stretched to nearly every provincial city."¹⁵⁷ Still, not satisfied with practically controlling the music hall industry, Stoll was also determined to revolutionize the nature of music hall and its audiences. Music hall owners had already become concerned with raising the tone of their establishments in line with rising standards of living, the petitions of temperance and social purity campaigners, and a demand for public entertainments suitable for women to attend.¹⁵⁸ Local authorities targeted audience drunkenness and the presence of

¹⁵⁵ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, August 1914, 4.

¹⁵⁶ Barker, *The House That Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre*, 41.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 40. From humble beginnings, Stoll had joined forces with Edward Moss and Richard Thornton and became managing director of the Moss Empires chain of halls, controlling venues across the country. Stoll eventually split with Moss Empires, creating his own music hall syndicate. See also Oliver Double, *Britain Had Talent: A History of Variety Theatre* (Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 39.

¹⁵⁸ Dave Russell, Michael R. Booth, and Joel H. Kaplan, "Varieties of Life: The Making of the Edwardian Music Hall," in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 62. Dave Russell suggests that the hard work on the part of the managers to "create an aura of refinement" in fact indicates an opposition to these changes on the part of the audiences (*Ibid.*, 72). The genre of music hall had undergone drastic transformations since its inception in a "primeval swamp of tavern singing, broadside ballads and catch-and-glee clubs in the mid-nineteenth century" (Double, *Britain Had Talent*, 39). By the 1880s, it had been transformed from a low-class entertainment based around drinking and bawdy songs, to become a more legitimate form of entertainment, increasingly known as "variety theatre." As the previously strong links between music halls and alcohol consumption were sundered by the denial of drink licenses for new halls, high-quality entertainment now became the

prostitutes, through the reduction or removal of alcohol licenses. Stoll took these reforms even further: he imposed strict penalties on any artist caught drinking alcohol, or anyone he suspected of being drunk for their performance; he vetoed any jokes or songs that he deemed unsuitable; and it was said that “he was heard to swear only twice in his life.”¹⁵⁹ Stoll’s attempts to re-brand music hall culminated with the opening of his flagship venue, the Coliseum theatre on St Martins’ Lane, London in December 1904.¹⁶⁰ The Coliseum’s original motto was “Pro Bono Publico”: “For the Public Good.”¹⁶¹ The venue would not

chief attraction; and with the rise of theatre chains like Stoll’s, star acts could tour chains of music halls across the country, cementing their reputations while ensuring sold-out houses for the syndicated halls. New large-scale halls with fixed seating, balconies, boxes, and carpets, enhanced the genre’s new-found allure. The Royal Command Performance in July 1912 at the Palace Theatre, attended by King George V and Queen Mary, was a promotional tactic that symbolized “the death of the old tradition and the victory of the new.” (Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan, eds., *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage* (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 65–66.)

The increasingly-respectable music halls began to attract a larger female audience, mainly young unmarried women who attended with groups of their friends, or newly married women with their husbands. The move to a twice-nightly system, and the introduction of matinées, also played a part in the rising numbers of female audience members; and the later of the two evening performances also attracted an increasingly middle-class audience segment, whose members did not have to rise at 4 a.m. the next morning for work. The twice-nightly system meant that each music hall would show the same program twice in one evening, one beginning around 6.30 p.m. and the second around 9 p.m. Female audience members could attend the earlier show and still be home by a decorous hour; the late-night show could therefore be attended by young men who may have spent the earlier part of the evening drinking.

¹⁵⁹ Barker, *The House That Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre*, 53. Stoll was also renowned for his taciturn nature and stubbornness: traits that would play a major role in his negotiations with the A.M.U. Despite his stern exterior, which proved difficult for many people to tolerate, Stoll was committed to philanthropy. During the war, he hosted multiple charity matinees at his venues; he also founded the War Seal Foundation in 1915, which provided housing for wounded soldiers and sailors, allowing them to receive medical treatment while living with their families. It was for this charity work, rather than his services to the entertainment industry, that he was knighted in 1919. See *Ibid.*, 46, 126. The charity, under the name of the Stoll Foundation, is still operational today.

¹⁶⁰ Now world-famous as the home of English National Opera, it was originally a music hall like no other: designed by Frank Matcham, it was the first venue in London to have a revolving stage and electric lighting. The Coliseum stood out not only in terms of its amenities, but also in its branding as a bastion of morality; according to Felix Barker, “It was to conform to [Stoll’s] own fastidious tastes, assume his high standard of morality; it was (in a phrase which always seems a little hard on these particular relatives) a place to which you could safely take your maiden aunt.” (Barker, *The House That Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre*, 54.) Stoll never asked Marie Lloyd to perform at the Coliseum, for example, even though she performed in his other venues; he hung notices in artists’ dressing-rooms stating that coarseness and vulgarity would not be tolerated; and he directly reprimanded audience members for dropping cigarettes on the carpet (Richard Anthony Baker, *British Music Hall: An Illustrated History* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005), 70).

¹⁶¹ Information about the venue’s history is found on the Coliseum’s website, at <https://www.eno.org/your-visit/london-coliseum/history-of-the-london-coliseum/>.

only provide a service to the public in terms of its extraordinary spectacles and big-name stars, but would also attempt to raise their standards of behavior and improve their artistic taste. Stoll's high-minded moral stance would attract the ire of the A.M.U. in due course, offering an irresistible line of attack through which the Union would attempt to malign his unimpeachable reputation.

Female musicians and the A.M.U.

Despite Stoll's principled vision for his music halls, his venues still operated in the same way as every other hall around the country. Each hall had a permanent orchestra in the pit—in larger halls, the orchestra could be upwards of twenty musicians—and the orchestra had to be ready to accompany the new acts that appeared on the stage each week. They would learn their music almost instantly (singers owned the orchestral parts to their songs, and would give them to the orchestra at their one and only rehearsal), and adapt to each performer's idiosyncrasies.¹⁶² In many halls, the orchestras also played classical overtures and excerpts of art music interspersed throughout the evenings. In the 1870s, one music-hall owner in Leicester made all of his orchestra members perform regular solos to demonstrate their playing abilities to the audience.¹⁶³ Orchestras had the potential to make or break an act; they were often crucial in cuing applause, and could affect whether the act would appear on stage at all.¹⁶⁴ One music-hall agent complained

¹⁶² Listening to recordings of music hall stars such as Vesta Tilley (see Chapter One), it is evident just how much the entertainers played with tempi, even in these short recordings which have all the patter and stage business removed.

¹⁶³ Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1997), 106–7.

¹⁶⁴ Double, *Britain Had Talent*, 151.

that when he sent two “girls” to a music hall in Manchester for a trial they were not hired, and the agent suggested that “the band had queered their performance.”¹⁶⁵ According to the A.M.U., of course, “the band in a temple of variety is often the best part of the entertainment.”¹⁶⁶

Traditionally, music hall orchestras had been a male domain. Female musicians who wanted to earn a living playing music, rather than by teaching it (a poorly-paid and difficult profession), often performed in ensembles engaged by restaurants and department stores to attract customers, who would not only be attracted by the novelty of a female orchestra but by the allure of watching young women perform, often in beautiful costumes.¹⁶⁷ Pier-side entertainments at seaside resorts were also a staple for female orchestras in the summer months. The limiting of female orchestras to these kinds of venues was not for lack of ability: music conservatories had begun to admit female students in the 1880s, and as a result a “serious and relentless glut of solo pianists and violinists” was on the market for musical employment. Shut out from male-dominated orchestras and ensembles, the female musicians formed their own.¹⁶⁸ Many of these orchestras performed concerts to raise money for charity, remaining within the realm of amateur philanthropy that was deemed suitable for middle-class women.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, February 1915, 8.

¹⁶⁶ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, January 1914, 5.

¹⁶⁷ Margaret Myers, “Searching for Data about European Ladies’ Orchestras, 1870-1950,” in *Music and Gender*, ed. Pirkko Moisala and Beverley Diamond (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 200–201.

¹⁶⁸ Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England 1870-1914: Encroaching on All Man’s Privileges*. (S.I.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 190.

¹⁶⁹ In 1882, Countess Radnor founded a ladies’ string orchestra that raised £850 for the founding of the Royal College of Music. Support for the ensemble from the establishment was such that Hubert Parry wrote a piece of music for the ensemble (Derek Hyde, *New Found Voices: Women in Nineteenth Century English Music*, 3rd ed (Aldershot; Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1998), 41).¹⁶⁹ Rosabel Watson, one of the first professional female double-bassists in the U.K., founded the Aeolian Ladies’ Orchestra, which also received a certain amount of acclaim.

A select few instrumentalists made it into the ranks of Henry Wood's Queen's Hall orchestra: 137 female violinists applied for positions in 1913, and Wood appointed four female violinists and two viola players, giving them the same wages as the male musicians and their own dressing room. Ehrlich writes that "the importance of this advance can hardly be exaggerated."¹⁷⁰ Women musicians also began to form part of the enormous orchestra at the triennial Crystal Palace Handel Festival: in 1891, eight women were part of the ensemble of about 2,500 players; by 1903, 110 women participated in the orchestra (although this still only accounted for approximately 5% of the orchestra).¹⁷¹ However, despite the apparent prowess of the female string players who managed to make it into professional orchestras, critical opinion maintained that they were inferior to male players because of their lack of power and attack. An article in the *Gazette* in 1894 asserted that this weakness was "inescapable" because "according to physiologists, there is one muscle entirely absent from the female arm."¹⁷² Another hindrance to the acceptance of women in professional ensembles was the lack of female woodwind and brass players. Conservatories accepted female violinists, harpists, and pianists—all instruments associated with the domestic sphere—but wind and brass instruments were considered to be "a threat to a woman's decorous allure—particularly when they necessitated contortion of the face."¹⁷³ Even with the rising phenomenon of female-only orchestras, it was sometimes necessary for male wind and brass players to bolster their

¹⁷⁰ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 161.

¹⁷¹ Gillett, *Musical Women in England 1870-1914*, 192; Hyde, *New Found Voices*, 44.

¹⁷² Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 158. These attitudes towards the physical inabilities of women musicians continued well into the twentieth century, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

¹⁷³ Katharine Ellis, "The Structures of Musical Life," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 361.

numbers. However, female instrumentalists on these hitherto male-dominated instruments were beginning to attempt to enter professional life, with six trombonists and four timpanists listed in the *Musical Directory* in 1900.¹⁷⁴

The turn of the century saw the rise of picture houses as new places of employment for female musicians, as the proprietors needed musicians willing to provide long hours of music for very little pay. With an overabundance of musicians willing to play for the new silent films, wages were appallingly low. In 1916, the A.M.U.'s London Organiser reported that musicians were playing at these picture houses from 2.30pm until 10.30pm, without a break, for a maximum of 25 shillings per week, often much less. It was mainly women musicians taking on this "sweated" labor, and in one case a child was found playing in a picture house for just 4 shillings a week.¹⁷⁵ Although it is difficult to compare these rates to the average Union wage, because this varied according to the venue and the instrument played, as a general comparison in 1916 the A.M.U. was asking for principals at the London Hippodrome (a large, acclaimed music hall) to be paid £4 4s. per week and seconds to be paid £3 18s.¹⁷⁶ Even with their willingness to agree to low wages, some picture house owners were still unwilling to hire female musicians. Joyce Marlow quotes the experience of an anonymous experienced female violinist who tried to find work at some of the largest "cinema theaters" in London: she was turned down by all of them, on the basis that they simply did not employ lady musicians, no matter how good their playing skills and references were.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 161.

¹⁷⁵ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, March 1916, 4.

¹⁷⁶ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, October 1916, 1.

¹⁷⁷ Marlow, *The Virago Book of Women and the Great War, 1914-18*, 96.

Rosabel Watson, a double-bassist, suffragist, and leader of the Aeolian Ladies' Orchestra, was particularly prominent in her calls for equal pay for female musicians. She believed that once women had achieved the same level of proficiency on their instruments as men, they should never settle for anything other than equal remuneration.¹⁷⁸ However, faced with very few other opportunities for work, female musicians had little choice. Becoming members of the A.M.U. would have helped to guarantee them equal pay: but although the A.M.U. reported that many of the women working in picture houses were dissatisfied with their working conditions, the 21 shilling entrance fee required to join the A.M.U. "frightened" them.¹⁷⁹ This is little wonder, as the entrance fee was more than a week's wages: in comparison, the National Federation of Women Workers had a minimum membership fee of a penny a week.¹⁸⁰ By July 1916, this description of the fee "frightening" them had been transformed into the ladies "refusing" to join the Union.¹⁸¹ Certainly the entrance fee was one barrier, but the attitudes of many male musicians may also have deterred women from joining. Rosabel Watson felt that the Union did little to support female musicians: in a letter to another female musician, she is quoted as writing: "I know by experience that the Union is not out to help women players, but only to restrict their opportunities of employment."¹⁸² Managers also had the power to prevent female musicians from joining the Union,

¹⁷⁸ Gillett, *Musical Women in England 1870-1914*, 192.

¹⁷⁹ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, March 1916, 4.

¹⁸⁰ Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921*, 31. The N.F.W.W. had six classes of membership, with the most expensive costing 6d. per week, equivalent to 26 shillings a year: this would entitle members to strike pay of 7s. per week, as well as sick pay and a marriage dowry. However, even the 1d. per week membership gave members strike pay of 6s. per week.

¹⁸¹ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, July 1916, 7.

¹⁸² Quoted in the *Musicians' Report and Journal*, October 1918, 1. The article quoting Watson describes her as one of the chief recruiters of female musicians to undercut male musicians and to break the strike against Stoll.

probably through threatening to fire them. The A.M.U. *Journal* quoted a music hall manager: “If I allow my lady pianist to join your Union she will want more money.”¹⁸³

Prior to the war, the A.M.U. claimed to support female musicians in principle, as long as the women were not undercutting the male Union members.

A new cinema house has just opened with a ladies’ orchestra. We don’t object to ladies’ orchestras! We don’t object to ladies! We are pleased when they join our ranks. If they demand and get the same rates as men—no one can reasonably object. Men should not mind fair competition. It is unfair competition that upsets us. We have quite a large number of lady members, and they set a good example to many members of the opposite sex. Unfortunately, it often happens that lady musicians are exploited—engaged more as a novelty than anything else, and are paid such salaries that a man couldn’t accept.¹⁸⁴

This disingenuous statement by the AMU cynically ignored the fact that women never commanded the same salaries as men, not only in the music industry but in all avenues of employment. Cathy Hunt cites social reformer Sidney Webb, who estimated that in 1906 the average adult woman’s net weekly earnings were just under 11 shillings, compared with 25s. 9d. for an adult man.¹⁸⁵ Mary Macarthur’s estimate was even lower, putting the average female wage at 7s. 6d. per week.¹⁸⁶ In the case of the musicians, it was up to individual Branch Secretaries to approach women who were undercutting male musicians, and persuade them to join the Union, although reports of these instances read somewhat threateningly. In December 1914, the Dewsbury Branch Secretary reported that he had “had an interview” with the six women hired at the Batley Hippodrome, and

¹⁸³ *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, July 1916, 7.

¹⁸⁴ *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, April 1914, 2.

¹⁸⁵ Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921*, 16.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

that “after a discussion with them they all decided to join the Union. They are all receiving the Union terms.”¹⁸⁷

Summarizing the national picture, the first decade of the twentieth century saw an enormous increase in the number of female workers taking up membership across the trade unions.¹⁸⁸ In 1874 the Women’s Protective and Provident League had been formed; later, the National Federation of Women Workers was established in 1906 by Mary Macarthur, to support women workers who either had no union to join or who were excluded from male unions. By 1907 there were approximately 200,000 female union members across the country: hardly an enormous number, to be sure, when considering the number of women at work, but double the figure from 1890.¹⁸⁹ The Trade Boards Bill of 1909 established a legal minimum wage for four particularly low paid industries that mainly employed women.¹⁹⁰ This minimum wage provision was extended in 1913, and again in 1918. Despite its initially limited scope, Sidney and Beatrice Webb (social

¹⁸⁷ *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, December 1914, 5. When women did join the Union, it certainly seems that they received the Union’s full backing. The A.M.U. interceded on behalf of at least one women’s orchestra to argue for fairer terms: in December 1913, Lillie Feldman wrote to the Secretary of the Plymouth branch to say that they had been paid a week’s salary that was due to them, and an additional week in lieu of notice. “The ladies of the orchestra, together with myself, wish to thank you and your colleague for your prompt attention.” (*The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, January 1914, 6.)

¹⁸⁸ For general histories of women’s involvement in trade unionism, see Gill Kirton, *The Making of Women Trade Unionists, Gender and Organizational Theory* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Pub, 2006); Norbert C. Soldon, “British Women and Trade Unionism: Opportunities Made and Missed,” in *The World of Women’s Trade Unionism: Comparative Historical Essays*, ed. Norbert C. Soldon (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1985), 11–34. Cathy Hunt gives a specific history of the National Federation of Women Workers: Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921*. Also of particular interest is Sidney and Beatrice Webb’s 1920 *The History of Trade Unionism* (London; New York; Toronto: Longmans Green and Co, 1920).

¹⁸⁹ Webb and Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, 494.

¹⁹⁰ Jessica S. Bean and George R. Boyer, “The Trade Boards Act of 1909 and the Alleviation of Household Poverty,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 47, no. 2 (June 2009): 240–64. The increase in minimum wage affected not only single women and widows, but also wives and daughters of low-income male workers. Bean and Boyer’s analysis contends that this Act played a significant part in alleviating poverty among certain sub-sections of working-class families, although it is unclear as to how effectively the new minimum wage was enforced, particularly among those women completing piece-work in their homes.

reformers and founding members of the Fabian Society) suggested that this bill stimulated organization among women whose status in their industries had been raised as a result of the wage increase.¹⁹¹

The Webbs wrote that it was the First World War, and the unprecedented demand for extra labor described later in this chapter, that caused women to join unions in their hundreds of thousands.¹⁹² Membership of the National Federation of Women Workers rose to over 80,000 by the end of the War, and Kirton estimates that the female membership of trade unions in general was just over one million by the end of 1918, i.e. about 17% of the total membership.¹⁹³ Smaller, female-only trade unions had also been established, such as the Society of Women Acetylene Welders.¹⁹⁴ However, the Webbs traced the bulk of women workers' organization to the established trade unions that admitted both men and women rather than to the smaller female-only unions, with thousands of women registered to unions such as the National Union of Railwaymen, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, and the National Union of Printing and Paper Workers.

No female-only union existed for musicians. In December 1916, rumors circulated that a Union of Lady Musicians had been formed, although enquiries at the registered address failed to find anyone with any knowledge of the new Union.¹⁹⁵ Despite

¹⁹¹ Webb and Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, 495.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Cathy Hunt's history of the N.F.W.W. examines the difficulties in tracking accurate numbers of members of the N.F.W.W. A conservative estimate gave membership in December 1914 as 10,000; October 1915 at 20,000; and by December 1918, 80,000. See Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921*, 11, 43. Also see Kirton, *The Making of Women Trade Unionists*, 28-29.

¹⁹⁴ Webb and Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, 495.

¹⁹⁵ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, December 1916, 1. The comments made about this potential new Union were clearly linked to the dispute with Stoll, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

the trend towards women joining trade unions, and the A.M.U.'s policy towards admitting women in order to protect its members against undercutting, many members of the A.M.U. and the L.O.A. remained extremely biased against female musicians, seeing them as “the very embodiment of inferior, cheap labour.”¹⁹⁶ With the A.M.U. maintaining a less-than-welcoming attitude towards female musicians, the increasingly competitive female sector of the music industry's workforce was primed to seize any opportunity to find further paid employment, even if that meant going head-to-head with the Union; and this opportunity came two years into the First World War.

1916: the fight with Stoll

As soon as Britain declared war against Germany, musicians raised concerns with the A.M.U. over salary reductions and venue closures.¹⁹⁷ Williams made the decision that Union members would accept salary reductions in lieu of reductions in the number of musicians employed in orchestras, which contributed to the ability of the music halls to

¹⁹⁶ Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century*, 153. The L.O.A. would exclude women completely for the first two decades of its existence.

¹⁹⁷ The London Organiser wrote of the immediate impact of the war in the September 1914 issue of the *Journal*, reporting that the owners of all the large music hall syndicates in London—including Stoll—had called for substantial salary reductions across all departments, having already suffered losses during the Bank Holiday weekend prior to the declaration of war on Tuesday August 4 (*The Musicians' Report and Journal*, September 1914, 6). The variety artists agreed to accept 50% of the weekly gross takings from the halls, to be divided pro rata among them depending on their salary list; the remaining 50% of the weekly takings was to be used to meet the standing expenses of the halls, including the salaries of the orchestra musicians. However, if the musicians were to keep their salaries at pre-War rates, the music hall owners would have had to vastly reduce the numbers of musicians they employed. Instead, the A.M.U. agreed to reductions in salaries, in place of reductions of the number of musicians employed in the halls. Joseph Williams, coming under criticism from many Union members who felt that he had made this agreement without consulting them, emphasized that this deal would not stand for the duration of the War, but rather “till matters resume a normal condition.” Difficulties came with the speed with which the decision had to be made. Rather than having the time to consult with Union members, Williams took this decision on his own. As a result, he was “inundated” with letters from Union members. Some members seem to have supported his decision, while others condemned it: the overarching sentiment was that he should not have acted on his own, without speaking to the Union members. His defense was that he had to consider the membership as a whole, rather than the effects on individual branches and members.

remain open, at least in the early months of the war. By March 1915, an equilibrium had been reached, and the salaries of music hall musicians in London had been restored to their pre-war levels.¹⁹⁸ In fact, the entertainment industry continued to do such good business that the following year, Union branches were campaigning for further salary increases, with one calling for a 20% “war bonus.”¹⁹⁹ It was this campaign for a further wage increase that caused the A.M.U.’s next major conflict with Stoll. Although Stoll had previously been amenable to restoring Union members’ salaries to their pre-War levels, this attempt on the part of the A.M.U. to use the economic conditions of wartime to lobby for increased salaries was a step too far.

The November 1916 edition of the *Journal*, under the title “United,” gave the first lengthy history of what had been an ongoing dispute for nearly a year. Essentially, Stoll had ignored the A.M.U.’s petition for salary increases, despite other music hall owners agreeing to the new conditions.²⁰⁰ On September 30, 1916, the musicians at Stoll’s music

¹⁹⁸ *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, March 1915, 2.

¹⁹⁹ *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, October 1916, 7. The A.M.U. Organiser, W.H. Lowkes, believed that a war bonus should exist as long as “high prices maintain”: i.e. as long as the cost of living remained above normal levels. In these terms, Lowkes said, a “war bonus” was another term for a “permanent increase.”

²⁰⁰ In December 1915, when the General Secretary applied to Stoll, among others, for salary increases, he received no answer for months. Stoll’s Musical Advisor, Mr. Dove, refused to grant salary increases as long as other halls—notably the Hippodrome, the closest equivalent venue in capacity to Stoll’s Coliseum—were paying lower wages. In October 1916, the management of the Hippodrome agreed to the wage increases: but Stoll refused to do the same. Arbitration was suggested, and Sir George Askwith was approached to facilitate this by the Entertainment Protection Association. The A.M.U. refused this suggestion, preferring to have a meeting with Stoll before entering arbitration. Stoll, having remained incommunicado from December 1915 to September 1916, then wrote five letters in five days, one of which accused Joseph Williams of inciting this strike to exact revenge for the 1913-14 wage dispute. This accusation caused consternation among musicians across London, such that even the N.O.A. joined forces with the A.M.U. to repudiate it. October 1916’s issue of the *Journal* suggested that Moss Empires’ latest actions on the same issue of raised wages, where they gave an increase to N.O.A. members but not to the A.M.U., had been designed to create a further rift between the N.O.A. and the A.M.U. Given Stoll’s previous involvement with Moss Empires, it is plausible that the directors of Moss Empires had attempted to set the two unions against each other in order to help their old partner and friend, Oswald Stoll.

halls in Chiswick, Hackney, New Middlesex, Shepherd's Bush, Wood Green, and at the Coliseum, gave their notices. By October 8, the A.M.U. had barred all of Stoll's London music halls to its members.²⁰¹ The *Era*, which provided the most detailed report of the strike, wrote that around 180 male musicians had resigned their positions, after asking for a 50% increase in salary.²⁰² The National Orchestral Association (N.O.A., which the L.O.A. had been re-named in 1912: see footnote 146) for once came out in support of the A.M.U., frustrating any possibility of Stoll hiring N.O.A. musicians in place of the A.M.U. ones.

The November 1916 "United" article ended with a call to arms:

The finger post of hope points to a glorious future for the musicians. The certainty of the ultimate victory of our common cause should strengthen and fortify us for the present fight. The bitterness of the past has been swallowed up in the brightness of the future. Faith in the justice of our fight and hope in the new spirit that our coming together has engendered will secure a status for our profession that few of us ever dreamed possible in our lifetime.²⁰³

The language used in this declaration of war against Stoll was more hyperbolic than that used by the government to inspire the British public on the outbreak of the First World War.²⁰⁴ At this midway point in the conflict, British morale was at an all-time low. The

²⁰¹ Minutes of A.M.U. General Committee Meeting, October 8, 1916.

²⁰² The *Era*, October 15, 1916, 15.

²⁰³ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, November 1916, 3.

²⁰⁴ British trepidation at the outset of the War had been cautiously counteracted by Edward Grey in his speech at the House of Commons, which was a calculated, logical deliberation on the reasons for declaring war. Catriona Pennell describes how, in the first decade of the century, demonstrations of enthusiasm for war (which had reached a public peak after the relief of Mafeking in 1900, during the Boer war) "morphed into concerns that the British public had been dangerously out of control in its lust for war." (Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.) The government had to embark on a propaganda campaign to convince people of the need to volunteer for the Army to support the cause; and eventually, formulaic language began to be used to describe the need for Britain to enter the war. Pennell quotes a children's book by Elizabeth O'Neill, *The War, 1914: A History and an Explanation for Boys and Girls*, the tone of which is similar to Williams's call to arms: "The soldiers of the Allies went out to battle... like knights of old, full of anger against an enemy who was fighting unjustly, and full, too, of a determination to fight their best for justice and right." (Ibid., 64).

war had lasted longer than foreseen; and Alan Simmonds describes the perfect storm of the introduction of conscription, rising prices, higher taxes, food shortages, industrial unrest, and a lack of faith in the government's and military's abilities to win the war.²⁰⁵ The rhetoric of this article in the *Journal*, presumably stemming from Joseph Williams, was calculated to rally Union members for a fight that was on the Home Front, that was winnable, and that would provide a symbolic victory during a moment in which the broader conflict hanging over the nation's heads seemed unwinnable. Williams saw this as the ultimate conflict that would allow the A.M.U. to triumph over Stoll, reach a peace with the N.O.A., and consolidate their position as a powerful Union. By drawing on the climate of wartime patriotism and fervor, how could they possibly lose?

Stoll, however, had a back-up plan. The November issue of the *Journal*—the same issue that first provided an extended account of the dispute—contained a much shorter notice hidden towards the back, that Stoll had hired “lady orchestras” to replace the male musicians who had left his employ.²⁰⁶ This move was not entirely unforeseen: the possibility of hiring female orchestras over male ones had been used as a threat for years to dissuade unrest and strike action.²⁰⁷ However, Stoll's decision to hire women as direct replacements for men was the first move of its kind in the industry.

²⁰⁵ Alan G. V. Simmonds, *Britain and World War One* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 239–40.

²⁰⁶ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, November 1916, 7. A woman known as Madame Walters was acting as booking agent for the female musicians. Minutes of the London Branch Meeting held on October 10, 1916 show that the A.M.U. was in correspondence with Walters's solicitor, presumably in an attempt to force her to stop supplying musicians; unfortunately, details of the correspondence are not extant. Walters's name would reoccur a year later, in a separate dispute with the Marlborough Theatre in Holloway, London: on this occasion Walters was again responsible for supplying musicians to replace Union men who had been unfairly dismissed. On this later occasion, Walters was found to be working with the local Royal Artillery Band to supplement her ladies' orchestra; the A.M.U. was able to work with the Army bands to “foil” Madame Walters “in her attempt to cripple the efforts of [the] organization.” See the *Musicians' Report and Journal*, November 1917, 9.

²⁰⁷ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, January 1917, 1.

The lady orchestras caused outrage among members of the A.M.U. They were seen as “blacklegs,” a derogatory term for strike-breakers.²⁰⁸ By crossing the picket lines and working for Stoll, these female musicians were considered to undermine the work of the A.M.U. and its campaign for better wages for its members. Stoll, on the other hand, was determined to portray his employment of female musicians in a patriotic light, framing it within the broader context of women entering the workforce and participating in forms of skilled labor that had hitherto been confined to male workers. The A.M.U. would take a number of approaches to persuade the public of the injustice of Stoll’s new hiring practices, all of which tapped into the national discussions around women’s labor that had taken place during the first two years of the War.

Dilution and substitution

The middle two years of the First World War marked the first major interventions of the British government in the labor market. The state had become an employer with the formation of the Ministry of Munitions in 1915: headed by David Lloyd George (who would become Prime Minister in 1916), the department had close links with private businessmen, and oversaw all elements of the rapidly-expanding munitions industry.²⁰⁹ The munitions industry needed mass labor, as did other industries that were increasingly hard-hit by the loss of men to the Army. The government therefore began a “well-organised advertising campaign” to recruit women to war work.²¹⁰ Women were

²⁰⁸ The etymology of the term is unclear; the Oxford English Dictionary traces its first use to 1844 in the *Times*. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “blackleg,” accessed April 23, 2017, www.oed.com.

²⁰⁹ Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, 55.

²¹⁰ Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 132.

employed in factories producing chemicals, shells, bullets, and other military equipment, as well as textile factories producing uniforms for the troops. They moved into clerical work in banking, finance, and commerce; they worked on the railways and in post offices. It is impossible to reach an accurate figure as to how many women joined the wartime workforce: the government's figures from shortly after the War estimated that the female workforce grew from 3,277,000 in 1914 to 4,940,000 in 1918, increasing the proportion of women in the workforce from 24% to 37%. These figures are distorted by the exclusion of the field of domestic service; Ian Beckett arrives at a final figure of 7.3 million women employed during the war, an increase of 1.4 million.²¹¹

The government created the Treasury Agreement of March 1915, which was revised into the Munitions of War Act in July 1915. The Act was designed to force employers to hire women workers where possible, while at the same time pacifying unions by protecting "skilled" labor. The Act stated that skilled men should only be employed in skilled positions, not in positions that could be filled by less-skilled men or by women; women should be employed in all classes of work for which they were suitable; and semi-skilled and unskilled men should be employed wherever skilled men were not necessary and women were unsuitable.²¹²

²¹¹ Ibid., 129–30; Ian Frederick William Beckett, *Home Front, 1914 - 1918: How Britain Survived the Great War* (Kew: National Archives, 2006), 81.

²¹² Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, 51. The Munitions of War Act also meant that unions had to agree to a cessation of strike action for the duration of the War, and to compulsory arbitration in case of disputes. Clearly, the government was unable to enforce this. Large-scale strikes continued to take place during the War, such as the South Wales Miners' Strike in which 200,000 men went on strike. September 1916 saw the introduction of a further Substitution Scheme to increase female labor; but in 1917, when the government proposed extending dilution to private factories, a wave of strikes led to the abandonment of the plan.

Two words were at the heart of this legislation: “dilution” and “substitution.” Dilution referred to jobs that qualified as “skilled” labor that were split up into several less-skilled components, each of which could be carried out by an unskilled female employee. Substitution related to the direct replacement of a male worker by a lesser-skilled female one.²¹³ Dilution was advocated by the government, and meant that women were now entering a workplace that, in Alan Simmonds’ words, “had been redesigned to accommodate their inexperience.”²¹⁴ Unions were suspicious of both dilution and substitution. While unskilled women were being hired to complete components of tasks previously completed by skilled men, there was no real threat to the skilled male workers—their post-war path back to their original job was clear—as long as the dilution did not prove more efficient than the original mode of operation. For male workers employed on similar tasks to female workers, the threat was larger, and tension directed against the new female workers was palpable.²¹⁵

Furthermore, the principles of dilution and substitution had implications for women’s rights to equal pay. If women were directly substituting for men, it was difficult to argue that they should not receive the same pay. If women were diluting skilled jobs previously performed by men, completing smaller proportions of the work, then they would only be entitled to lower wages. The trades unions held a variety of positions on

²¹³ Various forms of substitution have been cataloged by Gail Braybon, including indirect substitution (a woman replaced an unskilled or semi-skilled man, who moved on to carry out skilled work), and group substitution (several women replaced a smaller number of men). In Braybon’s description, group substitution is akin to dilution. *Ibid.*, 61.

²¹⁴ Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 138.

²¹⁵ Concerns over women’s labor diluting the workforce were illuminated in Clydeside in late 1915: when women began working in the local engineering industry, they were met with a “flurry of resistance” (Alastair J. Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain’s Trade Unions* (London; New York: Allen Lane, 2004), 179).

the topic. Some argued that dilutees should be paid at the same rate as the skilled men that they replaced, in order to protect the wages for the male workers.²¹⁶ Some campaigned for women to receive equal pay in order to dissuade employers from hiring them, figuring that if women cost the same as men to employ, employers would choose the male union members. Others used dilution as an excuse to claim that women were not entitled to the same wages as men, as they were simply unable to perform the same tasks.²¹⁷

The distinctions between dilution and substitution were never entirely clear, with overlap between definitions of the two terms. The exact definitions of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labor were also never codified, although the terms related to the hierarchies of the older craft unions (such as the engineering and printing unions) that had established regulations governing membership, with apprenticeship programs resulting in skilled workmen. Members of these unions would have been “skilled” workmen. “Skill was deemed a property of the male worker,” writes Carol Morgan, and even where women were able to serve apprenticeships, they were not guaranteed raised pay upon completion.²¹⁸ In contrast, the A.M.U., from its inception, had no such regulations of the skill level of its members; it had specifically been open to anyone who would pay the membership fee.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, 5.

²¹⁷ Lloyd George’s own position on the equal pay question was a vague one. In October 1915, Circular L2 stated a minimum wage for women employed at piecework or “skilled men’s work.” Employers could simply avoid giving women piecework job in order to avoid paying them the minimum wage. Lloyd George saw the equal pay question as “undesirable to attempt during war time” (Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 140).

²¹⁸ Carol E. Morgan, *Women Workers and Gender Identities, 1835-1913: The Cotton and Metal Industries in England*, Women’s and Gender History (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 11.

²¹⁹ One brief comment in the *Musicians’ Report and Journal* implied that examinations of ability had been proposed for Union members. In the report that contained the rumor of a female musicians’ union, the writer wondered “whether they will be required to pass an examination as to ability, such as has been proposed for men!” (December 1916, 1).

The A.M.U. steered clear of the dilution/substitution terminology to describe the women employed by Stoll during the strike: instead, they considered the women to be “blacklegs” for crossing the picket line of the strike. Hilda Thompson, writing for the socialist paper *The Clarion*—normally a bastion of support for workers and women’s rights—also repeatedly described the women as blacklegs.²²⁰ To have referred to the women in terms of dilution and substitution would have legitimized their work, bringing them within the remit of legal working practices, and the A.M.U. wanted to avoid this. However, the *Journal* reprinted an article from the *Musical Opinion* in January 1917, which stated that the phenomenon of women working in Stoll’s orchestras could not be considered “dilution,” but rather “barefaced substitution.”²²¹ “Dilution” in this case would have implied that the job had been restructured, allowing lesser-skilled women to perform component tasks; by simply substituting women into the orchestras, these women were doing the same job as the presumably-skilled male musicians, and—in the eyes of the *Musical Opinion*—doing it poorly, forcing down standards.

Deborah Thom suggests that the theory of dilution and substitution was based around presumptions that women were “weaker, undisciplined and uninterested in technical knowledge”: the implication is that to be skilled required physical strength, mental and physical discipline, and technical expertise.²²² The A.M.U.’s arguments against female musicians in music hall orchestras followed these claims almost to the letter, only adding that they were unpatriotic, opposing the government’s assertions that

²²⁰ Quoted in the *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, December 1916, 2; Thompson also confirmed in her article that the women would receive the same wage as the men.

²²¹ *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, January 1917, 5.

²²² Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, 55.

women's employment during the War was the patriotic course of action. The second half of this chapter outlines these arguments, setting the A.M.U.'s versions alongside their industrial counterparts.

Physical ability

The A.M.U.'s first line of defense against the female orchestra members related to their physical abilities to complete the work satisfactorily. Mr. Jesson's (the London Organiser) paragraph in the November *Journal* regarding the female orchestras was brief and dismissive, attacking the abilities of the female musicians to produce enough volume of sound, as well as critiquing the limited number of instruments typically played by women: "There can be no doubt that Mr. Stoll is not going to set the Thames on fire with his lady orchestras."²²³ Jesson continued: "if each orchestra contained double their present number they would not be heard at the back of either of his halls. The violins are the best, but I would guarantee that one good violinist (male) would produce more tone than four lady violinists at the Chiswick Empire."

Jesson was somewhat careful not to entirely impugn every female musician, by noting that many of the female musicians who had a degree of musical skill were Union members, and were therefore on strike alongside the men. However, a further report the next month made no such distinction between the abilities of the female musicians who were Union members and the non-Union members who were crossing the strike lines, tarring all female musicians with charges of inadequacy ("Lady orchestras at picture houses and in certain restaurants and theatres are successful, but lady orchestras in music

²²³ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, November 1916, 7.

halls is a very different proposition”).²²⁴ The report claimed again that two “ordinary,” i.e. male, first violins could produce more sound than the six violins currently playing at one of Stoll’s halls. By comparing the number of men and the larger number of women required to produce the desired level of sound, Jesson immediately brought the debate into the national discussion on dilution. It is clear from Jesson’s description that he did not consider Stoll’s experiment to be working, and that the six female violinists still did not match two male ones. The implication was that dilution practices that would allow the women to produce the same volume as the men would result in an impractical number of musicians in the pit, and therefore the principle of dilution could never work in the music hall industry.

Jesson’s initial article also commented on the lack of diverse instruments played by women, who were mainly confined to the violin and other string instruments. He wrote that the female orchestras had little or no brass, and that, “with one or two exceptions, the wood wind is hopeless... How long Mr. Stoll will be able to run his music-hall orchestras without trombones and cornets remains to be seen.”²²⁵ December 1916 saw a comic poem published in the *Journal*, inspired by the fact that Stoll apparently couldn’t find any female bassoonists. The poem’s premise was not that female bassoonists were few and far between, but rather that women simply could not play the bassoon. It compared the bassoon to other forms of labor that women were successfully taking up at this point in the War:

²²⁴ The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, December 1916, 6.

²²⁵ The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, November 1916, 7.

She is driving a van just as well as a man;
She presides o'er an oyster saloon;
She can hustle the "rubes" from the lifts in the Tubes;
But, alas! she can't play the bassoon.²²⁶

The poem implied that to play the bassoon was far more skilled a task than van driving, ticket clipping, or even "running a machine" in a factory. Its comic tone made the idea of women even attempting to play such a cumbersome wind instrument laughable; and situated the bassoon, and by extension any instrument previously confined to male performers, firmly in the realm of skilled and/or physically demanding labor. The poem implied that even direct substitution was not possible for some instruments, even if it was possible in other, less-skilled industries.

These criticisms had been foreshadowed six months earlier in June 1916, by an article in the *Journal* titled "Ladies First," which took the form of a lengthy diatribe against female musicians.²²⁷ This anonymous article argued that ladies were without question, "in the majority of cases, a very bad second as instrumentalists." The author claimed that this was entirely due to their lack of physical strength necessary to perform the "hard labour" of a workday that included a morning rehearsal, an afternoon matinee, and two evening performances. The details of this rigorous performance schedule, and the article as a whole, seems focused towards music hall orchestral musicians, rather than those "playing in a select orchestra." The article continued with an anecdote that seems to have inspired the entire tirade, concerning an example of a male orchestra being "displaced by an orchestra of ladies." The review was thoroughly excoriating:

²²⁶ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, December 1916, 12.

²²⁷ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, June 1916, 1.

Their playing was undoubtedly ladylike, but that is as high as we can praise it. To the unmusical, there was an indefinable something lacking. To the musician the defect was immediately apparent. The string players were as good as the ladies' physique would permit them to be. They lacked that vigour in the *forte* passages that a male orchestra possesses. As for the wind instruments, particularly the brass wind, it was lamentably poor in quality. To sit and hear the efforts of the lady cornets and trombones to "attack" high notes (which were essential to give the desired effect to the music being played) was simply terrible. Musicians, at least, will appreciate the position of a cornettist who fails to "attack" a sustained note at the right time, and tries to work it in surreptitiously, so to speak. Towards the end of the performance there were evident signs of fatigue. The constant bowing and blowing told its tale. There was no "vim" about the playing, particularly in the climaxes and anti-climaxes necessary to a proper performance. To work up a piece of music to fit in with the action of a piece, or play, or picture until the culminating point is simultaneously reached with a grand clash and climax, has always been possible with an orchestra of sturdy players. To see a conductor thrashing his stick in a vain endeavour to get the desired effect, and hear a gradual and grand crescendo fade away like a damp squib at the psychological moment was distressing to all concerned.

Although this article was published three months before the final walk-out of the musicians in Stoll's music-halls, it is hard to believe that the timing was coincidental.

Figure 2-1 contextualizes this article, and an ensuing rebuttal that I discuss below (both marked in bold), within the timeline of the dispute.

Figure 2-1 Chronology of A.M.U. strike and press coverage

(compiled from articles in the *Musicians' Report and Journal* and the *Era*; italics denote Acts of Parliament relating to employment and conscription)

<i>July 2, 1915</i>	<i>The Munitions of War Act is passed, mandating that women be employed in munitions factories to dilute the workforce</i>
December 1915	The General Secretary of the A.M.U. approaches Stoll, and other music hall owners, for a pay increase
<i>March 2, 1916</i>	<i>The Military Service Act comes into effect, mandating conscription for certain men</i>
April 1916	Stoll remains the only music hall owner to have ignored the A.M.U.'s demands (according to the A.M.U.)
<i>May 1916</i>	<i>Conscription is extended to married men</i>
June 1916	"Ladies First" article is published in the <i>Journal</i>
July 1916	The A.M.U. asks for a meeting with Stoll, in response to the suggestion of arbitration by the Entertainment Protection Association
August 1916	Letter from "A Lady Instrumentalist" is published in the <i>Journal</i> (see below)
September 1916	Stoll finally responds to the A.M.U., refusing the pay increase
September 30, 1916	A.M.U. musicians walk out of Stoll's venues
October 6, 1916	The A.M.U. bans its members from performing in Stoll's venues
October 18, 1916	An article in the <i>Era</i> notes that Stoll had employed female musicians as a direct result of the strike
November 1916	The monthly issue of the <i>Journal</i> gives the first full summary of the strike, including a note regarding Stoll's employment of female musicians

This chronology demonstrates that the dispute with Stoll was already well underway when the “Ladies First” article was published. The article was printed around the same time as the A.M.U. requested a personal meeting with Stoll in an attempt to avoid external arbitration by the Entertainment Protection Association (see footnote 200; given that the *Journal* was published monthly rather than weekly, it is difficult to know when exactly the issue would have been circulated in relation to the timing of this meeting request). Later accounts in the *Journal* claimed that Union officials had been “threatened for years with the introduction of lady orchestras if we insisted on this, that, or the other demand.”²²⁸ It seems likely that, six months into the stand-off with Stoll, the A.M.U. recognized that Stoll’s threats of employing female orchestras were now a real possibility, given the length of the dispute, the extension of conscription, and the national employment of women in previously male-dominated industries, consequently leading to the pre-emptive blow against female musicians in the form of the “Ladies First” article. The article ended: “Lady instrumentalists in certain orchestras will, we believe, be able to hold their own, but they will have to realise that there are limitations, natural ones, to their ability to displace men.”

The A.M.U.’s decision to frame these initial attacks against female musicians entirely in terms of their physical ability was not unique. As women began working in munitions factories, a common complaint from their employers was that they were less strong than the male workers.²²⁹ A 1918 report from the Health of Munition Workers

²²⁸ The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, January 1917, 1.

²²⁹ Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, 86.

Committee, set up by the government to advise of the “personal health and physical efficiency” of munitions workers, warned that women’s physiology should be taken into account to protect their welfare. The report stated that women’s muscular systems were less developed than men’s, and that women were more liable to certain ailments including anaemia, muscular pain and weakness, and nervous exhaustion.²³⁰ Although the report’s tone was one of concern for women’s health, its underlying motive was to protect the country’s need for fertile mothers, who would be able to reproduce and run their households unimpeded. The report recommended welfare supervision, rest breaks, seats, and recreational facilities; the implementation of machinery to assist women in completing physically-demanding tasks was already well in place. One of the most prevalent images of female war workers, according to Deborah Thom, was that of “a frail girl wrestling alone with a machine, working heroically and against her nature.”²³¹ Machinery could provide extra physical strength for women employed in factories; but for female musicians, the machinery of their instruments could not be adapted to facilitate their sound production or stamina.

A rebuttal of the A.M.U.’s claims appeared two months later, in the August *Journal*, written by “A Lady Instrumentalist” and A.M.U. member.²³² This author argued that the question of physical stamina and long workdays applied to both male and female musicians: “unfortunately, hard and unreasonable work applies to both sexes equally, and the example quoted of a rehearsal, matinee, and two performances daily without relief, is an impossible task which the musicians themselves should not tolerate, it being

²³⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 140.

²³¹ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, 89.

²³² *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, August 1916, 1.

incompatible with human strength and the proper rendering of music as an art.”²³³ The author of the original article published a response to the Lady Instrumentalist’s letter alongside it. Maintaining their position that women musicians were physically less capable than male ones, the author now related this to pay structures. The author perfectly described the principle of dilution without using that term, writing that in order to obtain the same volume of one male violinist, two female violinists were required; the salary of the single male violinist would be split between the two female ones, with each woman therefore receiving half the pay of the man. By taking on engagements that they were “physically unable to fulfil,” the author claimed, they would play into the hands of the managers who could point out that they were not worth the same level of salary as the men, therefore ruining their own capacities to argue for equal pay with men. A brief note appeared in the *Journal* the following month from one of the Branch Organizers, apparently cementing this position by reporting an interview with a manager of a chain of picture houses:

He stated that he is quite in agreement with Unionism, but suggested that if ladies were admitted as members a special rate should be fixed as a minimum for them. He said that he has to put three ladies in the place of two men to get the same results. He cannot get men, and ladies of the average ability of men are very rare. His point is that he must accept what labour is available and pay at what it is worth.²³⁴

This rebuttal took the initial points about women’s physical abilities from the realm of musicianship and artistry into the economic sphere of dilution. No longer concerned with

²³³ Rather, the Lady Instrumentalist suggested, the combination of the proliferation of picture houses and the scarcity of “properly trained musicians” had resulted in a deluge of “incompetent amateur musicians of both sexes” undertaking engagements at lower terms and with longer hours of work, thus discrediting the profession as a whole. For this author, amateur musicians were harming the reputations of both male and female musicians.

²³⁴ *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, September 1916, 5.

the “distressing” nature of hearing a less-than-adequate performance, the author instead turned their attention to the implications for salary structures and decreased wages that would await male musicians returning from the war to reclaim their orchestral positions.²³⁵

Other twists and turns would follow in this argument over women’s physical abilities to work in music hall pits. By December 1916, the attacks were not so much on the women’s volume and quality of sound as on their abilities to keep up with the constant turnover of music. Amusement came in the pages of the *Journal* from a letter that had been sent to artists who were touring the Stoll music-hall circuit, particularly those performing at the London venues with female orchestras. The letter reminded artists to have the parts for their accompaniments ready for rehearsal on the Monday morning, “otherwise your performance will suffer considerably.”²³⁶ Here the women’s abilities to fulfil their jobs as musicians related not to their capacity to produce enough volume, but to learn music quickly enough to perform at a good standard. The implication from the A.M.U. was that skilled musicians would not give a sub-standard

²³⁵ It is unclear whether or not Stoll was paying his female musicians the same rate as he had previously paid to the A.M.U. members, or whether he was even paying them the minimum wage guaranteed by the A.M.U. Stoll claimed that he was paying them fairly; Joseph Williams, quoted in the *Era*, said that he did not (The *Era*, October 25, 1916, 14). However, calculations elsewhere in the A.M.U. *Journal* seems to indicate that the female musicians received the same rate of pay as the previously-employed Union members. The *Journal* reported that at the Wood Green music hall, Stoll was employing 21 female musicians in the place of 14 male ones, costing him 50% more: this therefore implies that he was paying them the same wages as the men had received. (The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, February 1917, 2.) Without Stoll’s business archives, which unfortunately seem to have mostly been disposed of, this question is impossible to answer. The only monograph that describes Stoll’s business endeavors in any detail is Felix Barker’s 1957 work, Barker, *The House That Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre*. Barker’s preface notes that the archives, press cuttings, and photographs relating to the Coliseum’s early years were all destroyed. The question of pay for the female musicians has implications for whether or not their work would have fallen under the state-sanctioned practice of dilution, or whether they were directly substituting for the male musicians.

²³⁶ The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, December 1916, 1.

performance, no matter how late they received their parts, and that to ask for music while threatening poor performances was laughably unprofessional.

These refinements of the arguments against women's physical abilities were occasioned by the first reviews of the female orchestras in the general press. Most of the reviews found no fault at all with the quality of the female performers, instead praising their playing and quoting sources that put forward Stoll's viewpoint rather than the Union's. The *Era* wrote that the success of the women's performances at the Coliseum "was never in doubt."²³⁷ The next day, the *Times* quoted a member of staff at Stoll's Coliseum: "they were not so bold as the men, but that can easily be explained by nervousness. As soon as they have gained confidence they will be quite equal to the men."²³⁸ The same piece in the *Times* stated that the women were "warmly cheered" at the Coliseum, London Opera House, and the Hackney Empire. The *Daily Express* quoted a member of Stoll's staff who claimed that the women were highly qualified: they had had over 2,000 applicants, "mostly highly qualified, and many of them holding musical degrees."²³⁹ As for the claims that the women would not have the stamina to play full performances, the *Era* described how the work at the Coliseum was actually lighter than in other halls, with plenty of breaks between musical numbers. The reviewer was so firmly on the side of the women musicians that they even found a positive angle on the lack of brass: "if the brass was not so strong as usual, that was regarded as somewhat of a

²³⁷ The *Era*, October 15, 1916, 15.

²³⁸ The *Times*, Tuesday October 17, 1916, 11.

²³⁹ The *Daily Express*, Monday October 16, 1916, 5.

relief, the general complaint against English orchestras being that the brass is generally too loud.”²⁴⁰

The A.M.U., of course, had an explanation for this warm reception. Mr. Jesson wrote that the audience hadn’t yet given the orchestras “the bird,” because they were under the impression that the management had started employing women musicians out of patriotic motives.²⁴¹ The Union was eager to dispel these illusions, and began to post bills in the areas around the halls to this effect.²⁴² These bills and circulars formed the second mode of attack against the female musicians, and were designed to target one of the cornerstones of British labor market rhetoric at this time: patriotism and duty to one’s country.

Profits versus Patriotism

Stoll claimed that his motives for employing female musicians stemmed not from his desire to keep his halls open and avoid meeting the wage demands of the A.M.U., but from patriotic sentiments: “I have opened up a new and suitable branch of work for women, and opened it permanently, although the movement was not of my own seeking.”²⁴³ Stoll’s patriotic motives were further aligned with the war effort by one of his representatives in a conversation with the *Observer*: “As many of the men are eligible

²⁴⁰ The *Era*, October 18, 1916, 15.

²⁴¹ The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, December 1916, 6.

²⁴² The A.M.U. posted bills in the areas around the halls, and were particularly pleased with the efficacy of their billing at the Wood Green music hall in January 1917, when the venue—with a capacity of 3,000—had less than 400 audience members in attendance (The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, January 1917, 6). But despite these apparent drops in numbers, other music hall managers followed Stoll’s lead in replacing male musicians with female ones: in March 1917, the Royal Hippodrome in Dover did the same in response to calls for a wage increase (The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, March 1917, 8).

²⁴³ The *Times*, Monday October 16, 1916, 5.

for the Army and will be joining up shortly, Mr. Stoll has made arrangements for ladies' orchestras to take their places."²⁴⁴

The timing of the strike was fortuitous in allowing Stoll to make these claims. Conscription had begun in March 1916 with the Military Service Act. By May 1916, the Bill applied to both married and single men between the ages of 18 and 41. Exemptions on the grounds of being a skilled laborer, or working in a protected trade, were becoming increasingly rare.²⁴⁵ The language of doing one's duty for one's country had become commonplace, and not only for the men eligible for conscription. The new conscription act sent thousands of men into the Army, creating a shortage of manpower for their jobs on the Home Front. Gail Braybon describes a "rush" of women into the engineering and explosives industries beginning in autumn 1915, resulting in a shortage of labor in 1916 in the traditionally female-dominated textile and clothing industries.²⁴⁶ The government's propaganda campaign depicted women's factory work as war service, with slogans like "Do your bit: replace a man for the front."²⁴⁷ Stoll, in opening his orchestra pits to women performers, could therefore claim that he was assisting in the conscription effort,

²⁴⁴ The *Observer*, October 15, 1916, 11. The Lady Instrumentalist quoted earlier, writing in August 1916, had also posed the question of patriotic duty, arguing that female musicians were performing the important service of keeping places in orchestras open for men to return to after the war. Looking ahead to the end of the war, she foresaw either the closure of entire orchestras, or the replacement of British musicians with foreign ones, "which, once it takes root, will be very difficult to dislocate." (*The Musicians' Report and Journal*, August 1916, 1.)

²⁴⁵ The unions had hitherto controlled the "exemption cards" given to skilled workers exempting them from service. In March 1917 the government attempted to take control of the scheme, unsuccessfully. The government's decision to introduce conscription had resulted in other consequences for the labor market: Asquith's government had repeatedly promised that total governmental control over domestic labor would not be necessary, but with the introduction of conscription, complete control of labor seemed necessary to many so that the domestic work force "could be efficiently 'thinned out'" (Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: Cass, 2000), 169).

²⁴⁶ Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, 46. Munitions factories paid the most lucrative wages for women, most of whom transferred in from other trades rather than entering the workforce for the first time.

²⁴⁷ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, 35.

providing employment opportunities for women and allowing men to leave for the Front without depriving his audiences of one of their only avenues for entertainment.

The A.M.U. did not buy Stoll's excuses of patriotism. It published a circular claiming that Stoll was "gulling" people into believing that his employment of female musicians stemmed from patriotic motives. The circular went into very specific detail about the 103 male musicians out on strike in London in order to prove that they were unable to enlist in the Army, so that their replacement could not possibly stem from patriotic motives:

1 is not eligible (Dutchman),
1 (a lady) volunteered to go out to help the Serbians,
4 have been certified medically unfit,
1 invalided out of Army,
9 are waiting to be called up,
1 over military age, served in the Russian Army,
1 over military age, served in the Roumanian [sic] Army,
55 are over military age, 32 of them served in the British Army,
27 are in the Army stationed in London ready to be drafted away when required,
1 over age, has three sons in France,
1 was wounded in France, discharged from Army,
1 over age, served in the Army, has had a son killed in France and another is a prisoner in Germany.
These are the men whose places Mr. Stoll has filled with blackleg lady musicians.²⁴⁸

In reply, fourteen female members of the orchestra at the New Middlesex published an open letter, "object[ing] very strongly to being called 'blacklegs.'"²⁴⁹ They dealt with this laundry list of accusations on a line-by-line basis:

²⁴⁸ Quoted in the *Era*, October 25, 1916, 14.

²⁴⁹ The *Era*, October 25, 1916, 14. The letter is the only source that contains names of specific female musicians involved in this dispute. Attempts to find out more about the musicians have proved mainly fruitless, with the exception of some of their activities after the War, which I describe at the end of this chapter. I have been able to identify a couple of them as professional musicians advertising their services well in advance of the War. Doris Toft was a "double drummer," performing both jazz and "straight" music. Her adverts for work appear in the *Era* from 1901. Frances Toft, presumably her sister, was a trombonist, who appears in the *Star* reviewed as a soloist with Madame Levanté's Ladies Orchestra. Her

...it is more patriotic to engage an English woman than a Dutch man. The lady was not a member of their Union when she volunteered for Serbia. The nine who are waiting to be called up would have shown more patriotism by enlisting earlier. The man who served in the Russian Army is apparently not an Englishman; neither does it state when he served, during this war or the Crimean War. The man who served in the Roumanian Army could hardly have had anything to do with this war, and is probably not an Englishman. The 27 waiting to be drafted away are receiving Army pay and allowances.²⁵⁰

The open letter escalated the argument to a question of what actions were deemed more patriotic. The first line in particular, as to whether it was more patriotic to employ an English woman or a foreign man, spoke to a question that was preoccupying employers around the country. One contemporary writer, G.D.H. Cole, described that the male wage-earner was “apt to regard women much as the Australian regards Chinamen, or as the American regards East European immigrants, as interlopers, whose different standard of life renders them not only dangerous, but also unfair, competitors in the labour market.”²⁵¹ The equation of female British workers with male foreign workers was symptomatic of some of the concerns surrounding the question of equal pay. The safeguarding of higher pay rates for men carried with it an implication that it might be better to employ foreign male workers rather than British women, in order to prevent women from campaigning for equal pay; and as Belgian refugees were required to undertake paid labor as a condition of their immigration, this was certainly an option for

adverts for work also appear in the *Era*. Violet Branson, a cellist, was listed as a member of Mrs. Hunt’s Ladies Orchestra in 1900.

²⁵⁰ The *Era*, October 25, 1916, 14. The other element in this back-and-forth related to the drummer at the Coliseum, a man for whom Stoll had obtained an exemption from the Army. The A.M.U. circular accused him of being a “slacker,” saying that he refused to go on strike because he was afraid he would be called up. They noted that the women in the orchestra would be “useless” without him, and that the public should not patronize any of Stoll’s venues. The women of the New Middlesex pointed out in their letter that the drummer received a larger salary than any of the A.M.U. members, and that the A.M.U. had no objection to his exemption while their members were playing alongside him: the unspoken, but evident, conclusion was that the A.M.U.’s stance was entirely hypocritical.

²⁵¹ Quoted in Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, 71.

some employers.²⁵² However, wartime patriotism and xenophobia meant that for others, giving jobs to British workers, whether they be male or female, was the highest priority.

Although the question of foreign workers troubled employers across industries, it was particularly pertinent to the music industry. European musicians had been commonplace in orchestras prior to the War, as there were no restrictions on their employment in Britain. They had been a particular problem for the London branch of the A.M.U., as the majority of foreign musicians in the U.K. were based in London.²⁵³ The Union's position on foreigners continued to be a topic of contention during the war. In November 1914, the London Branch passed a resolution that

all German, Austrian, and Hungarian members of the London Branch be suspended during the War... that the Committee and Officials be instructed to take immediate action to displace all German, Austrian, and Hungarian musicians wherever possible, and to endeavour to substitute A.M.U., Belgian, or French Refugee Trade Musicians... That in the event of our being unable to supply members for any vacancies occurring at houses where only A.M.U. members are employed, it be an instruction to the Committee and Officials to obtain a member from the provinces, if possible, and failing that to engage a Belgian or French Refugee Musician, providing they are members of their respective Unions in their own countries.²⁵⁴

October 1915 saw a resolution from the Hull Branch, protesting against “the pages of our *Journal* being used to publish belated apologetic letters from Germans, whoever they may be, and are of the opinion that no alien enemies, whether naturalized or not, be

²⁵² J. M. Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 197. By the beginning of 1915, Belgians had become the largest foreign labor force in the country, particularly in the arms industry. Concerns over competition in the metalworking industry from the refugees manifested in strikes in the autumn of 1914, with attempts to discredit the Belgian factories from which they workers came.

²⁵³ Williamson and Cloonan, *Players' Work Time*, 45. In 1901, the A.M.U. raised a petition to King Edward VII to try to prevent the “wholesale importation of foreign bands,” calling for a by-law that allowed Union membership to foreign musicians only if they had resided in the country for two years.

²⁵⁴ A.M.U. monthly report, November 1914, 1.

allowed to be members of our Union.”²⁵⁵ A year later, the issue saw a longer article, titled “Britain for the British,” calling for a rule that no musician of German or Austrian nationality should be allowed to join the A.M.U. until at least ten years after peace had been declared.²⁵⁶ By March 1917, the A.M.U. and the N.O.A. had reached a joint agreement that musicians of “enemy alien birth” should be barred from membership of both Societies, “at and from the conclusion of peace.” Musicians of “friendly or neutral alien birth” were allowed to become members, providing they became naturalized as British citizens.²⁵⁷

By asserting that their employment was more patriotic than that of the foreign men listed in the A.M.U.’s open letter, the female musicians of the New Middlesex Orchestra exploited the Union’s particular vulnerability to charges of unpatriotic conduct. The *Era*, which was the only news outlet that openly and repeatedly supported the female musicians against the Union, claimed that the A.M.U. considered musicians to be a different case to workers in factories, offices, and shops, and that the Union would rather have foreign male musicians employed than English women: “What is good enough and patriotic enough for every other trades union is not good enough for the A.M.U. and the N.O.A. They have never recognised the right of women to earn their living in orchestras. They have always regarded the admixture of the sexes as an insuperable problem.”²⁵⁸ Joseph Williams responded to these claims the following week, putting forward the

²⁵⁵ A.M.U. monthly report, October 1915, 1.

²⁵⁶ *The Musicians’ Report and Journal*, October 1916, 11.

²⁵⁷ A.M.U. Monthly Report, January 1917, 1.

²⁵⁸ “Women Orchestras,” *The Era*, October 18, 1916, 15.

statistics of the Union's female membership—over 500 women in the A.M.U., and 100 in the N.O.A.—as evidence to the contrary.²⁵⁹

The conflation of female musicians and foreign workers on the part of the A.M.U. was perpetuated in the *Journal* in December 1916. Pride in the continued cooperation of the A.M.U. and the N.O.A. abounded, as did delight in the perceived failure of Stoll's plan to use women musicians to fill the vacancies:

We are informed that during the first week of the ladies' engagement an effort was made through a gentleman rejoicing in the good old British name of Markowitz to find 104 male musicians to replace the ladies who had replaced the men who went on strike.²⁶⁰

This extract from the *Journal* is of particular note because of its sarcastic treatment of the “good old British name of Markowitz.” As the author drew attention to the possibly-Germanic, Jewish name, they tied together foreigners, female musicians, and anyone who was anything other than white, British, and Christian. That Stoll was employing women was problematic, but that he was using a foreign Jewish agent to recruit musicians made the matter even worse in the eyes of the Union.

Professional conduct and morality

The A.M.U.'s protests over Stoll's employment of female musicians on the grounds of ability and patriotism did not help them to bring the conflict to a resolution. At the beginning of 1917 Stoll continued to employ female musicians, audiences continued attending music halls, and the displaced male Union members continued to search for work elsewhere. One final attack came from the Union, and it was in a direction

²⁵⁹ The *Era*, October 25, 1916, 14.

²⁶⁰ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, December 1916, 1.

calculated to wound Stoll where it would most hurt him: the morality and conduct of his musicians and audiences.

The female musicians' conduct was first criticized in the pages of the A.M.U. *Journal* in January 1917, with a piece by Mr. Jesson stating that the musicians were going in and out of the orchestras as they pleased, reading newspapers, and in one case "industriously knitting a pair of socks, in full view of the audience," when she should have been ready to take up her cue.²⁶¹ This accusation did not relate to their characters—no-one could criticize a woman for knitting socks for the war effort, particularly as Lord Kitchener and the Red Cross had called on women to do so²⁶²—but to their abilities to maintain appropriate standards of discipline and concentration.²⁶³ Jesson's opinion was that Stoll, and his conductors, were too scared to discipline the female musicians, in case they joined the men in the strike.

Around the same time, Stoll's license for the New Middlesex venue was up for renewal, and the A.M.U. used this to launch their next attack on Stoll. Joseph Williams appeared before the Theatres and Music Halls Committee of the London County Council to oppose the license renewal on the grounds of immorality, claiming there was practically no control or supervision given to the acts appearing on stage. This was related particularly to comedians appearing in the halls, who cared "not one scrap for the feelings of the mixed audience."²⁶⁴ Elsewhere, the *Times* reported that the A.M.U. and the

²⁶¹ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, January 1917, 6.

²⁶² See "Knitting for Victory" in John Hudson, *Christmas 1914: The First World War at Home and Abroad*, 2014.

²⁶³ The description to the women going in and out whenever they pleased may have been a veiled reference to the need of menstruating women to use the bathroom more frequently: another means by which Jesson could implicate the very fact of the musicians' femininity in their apparently sub-par performance.

²⁶⁴ The *Musicians' Report and Journal*, January 1917, 5.

N.O.A. were also objecting to the nature of the revues that featured “scantily dressed females going through a series of evolutions that are vulgar and immodest, and jokes that have indecent double meanings.”²⁶⁵ The article related these claims of indecency and immodesty to the fact that a large percentage of this particular theatre’s audiences were soldiers. It is unclear whether the *Times* was insinuating that the charges of indecency were all the more shocking because British troops were being subjected to inappropriate entertainment, or whether the troops were encouraging these acts.²⁶⁶

In the license renewal hearing, Williams attempted to co-opt the presence of the female musicians in the orchestras to his advantage, using them to argue against the indecent acts appearing on stage:

The association viewed with deep alarm the recent importation into music-hall orchestras of women musicians, because they had to listen to these vulgarities. Some of the musicians were very young—one was 14 1/2 years of age, another was 17, and there were others under 20. It was said that Mr. Stoll had opened up a new profession to women. On the contrary, it was, in his opinion, an inducement to girls to enter upon what had been called the oldest profession in the world. He did not propose to call any evidence.²⁶⁷

This was not, on the surface, an attack against the women in the orchestras, but rather an attempt to further frustrate Stoll’s music-hall empire. However, Williams’ pseudo-concern for the women was also a vehicle to impugn their morals: his comments implied that the women in the orchestras were on their way to becoming prostitutes (“the oldest

²⁶⁵ The *Times*, Wednesday November 1 1916, 3.

²⁶⁶ The article seems inaccurate in suggesting that this house was particularly well-populated by soldiers: music hall audiences all over the country, and particularly in London, were fast becoming populated with British, Allied, and colonial troops on leave, as well as injured soldiers who were recuperating in London’s hospitals. Soldiers were becoming such a key audience segment that articles appeared in theatrical newspapers considering the proper “entertainment of Tommy” (Andrew Maunder, ed., *British Theatre and the Great War, 1914 - 1919: New Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 182.).

²⁶⁷ The *Times*, Friday November 3, 1916, 6. “Revues and Morality.”

profession in the world”).²⁶⁸ These women of the New Middlesex Orchestra were publically identifiable: they had been the ones to sign the open letter against the A.M.U. two months earlier. For them, Williams’s generalized slanders were acutely personal. Moreover, it is clear from the transcript printed in the *Times* that those present at the hearing knew that Williams was using the female musicians as an excuse. When questioned by the Chairman as to why the A.M.U. had not objected to the revues prior to the War, Williams said that it was because there had been no lady musicians in the orchestra. The *Times* transcript of the exchange notes that this comment was greeted with laughter, demonstrating the audience’s knowledge that Williams was simply using this claim as a pretext to attack Stoll. The transcript creates an image of a room full of men laughing at Williams’s attempt to co-opt arguments around women’s morality in support of his personal vendetta.

These charges would have damaged the reputation of any music-hall owner; but when they were levelled against Stoll, they would have been particularly injurious. As described earlier, Stoll emphasized high standards of morality for all of his music halls and their employees. The A.M.U. was keen to emphasize that this moralist stance was not, in fact, taken purely out of spite against Stoll, saying that they had been drawing public notice to the immorality of music halls since 1912. Again, some of the newspapers

²⁶⁸ The association of music halls with prostitution, before the turn to respectability described earlier, was well-known: reports from the London County Council’s Committees on Theatrical Licences and Regulations in 1866 and 1892 noted that senior policemen were aware that prostitutes used certain halls for business, “but felt that, provided the halls were not rampantly disorderly and badly managed, this was not a serious problem” (Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914*, 89). In 1894, purity campaigner Mrs. Ormiston Chant persuaded the London County Council to build a screen around the promenade bar of the London Empire, in order to hide the prostitutes from the “respectable” element of the audience; it did not take long for the screen to be demolished by a group of young men that included Winston Churchill (*Ibid.*, 88). The theatre’s promenade was finally removed in 1916, along with that of the Alhambra shortly after Stoll’s purchase of it.

saw through the Union's protestations. The *Era's* report of the proceedings delivered a bitingly sarcastic report on Williams's behavior, noting that despite Williams remaining silent on the topic of the New Middlesex's revues prior to the War, he had now found an excuse to "bang the drum in the big band of the purity brigade":

For, lo, tender and delicate women now sit in the orchestra in the seats of the case-hardened though tuneful males. These ladies may see all there is to be seen in the male sex. They probably know almost as much as Mr. Williams about their own sex. But Heaven forbid that they should see what's in the Middlesex! Mr. Williams—I imagine tearfully—informed the committee that some of these lady musicians varied in ages from 14 1/2 to 20 years... After this I think if Mr. Williams would take advantage of one of London's own particular dark nights to finish up his career by getting under a motor omnibus, the world would not be much the poorer.²⁶⁹

The *Era* pulled no punches in calling Williams out on the fact that he was bringing the entire music hall industry into disrepute simply in order to strike a blow at Stoll. "It will be obvious to all that Mr. Williams is not interested in looking after the morals of lady musicians. What he is doing is to stab in the back a management from whose service a number of men resigned."²⁷⁰

But Williams was also capitalizing on the concerns over the morality of women that were permeating the nation. Deborah Thom's investigation of women's labor during the First World War, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, is concerned with the contemporary scrutiny of working women's characters as well as their physical abilities, and the creation of a "moral economy" that intertwined women's independence through employment with their sexuality. Thom describes the debates during the war about where women should be "allowed to share all the experiences of men": where they could work,

²⁶⁹ The *Era*, November 8, 1916, 13.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

where they could safely go, and how they could participate in public life. More generally, beyond the characters of women working in new industries, social purity campaigners were generally concerned during the war with women's sexuality: "sexual promiscuity and perversity became, in the minds of many, almost as great a danger to Britain as the German Army."²⁷¹

Stoll, maintaining his usual taciturnity, was not quoted in any newspaper reports as responding directly to these attacks against the morality of his halls. Whether he responded indirectly is a matter of opinion. In January 1917, the *Era* reported that the women in the orchestra at the Hackney Empire "blossomed out in uniform."²⁷² The uniforms were described as "Russian tunics," and had been designed by Mrs. Arthur Croxton, the wife of the manager of Stoll's Coliseum.²⁷³ The uniform met with the approval of the *Era*'s correspondent: "Mr. Stoll and the management generally are to be complimented on the success of this departure from tradition." There are several possible reasons for Stoll to introduce a uniform for his female musicians at this point. It could have been designed to instill a greater sense of discipline and cohesion into the musicians, to help them feel that they were professionals and behave accordingly. In this sense, it could have been a subtle maneuver to avoid further instances of the musicians knitting during performances. It could also have been a further attempt on Stoll's part to

²⁷¹ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, 81. See also my discussion of the phenomenon of "khaki fever" in Chapter One.

²⁷² The *Era*, January 7, 1917, 22.

²⁷³ L. J Collins, *Theatre at War, 1914-18* (Houndmills, Great Britain; New York: Macmillan Press ; St. Martin's Press, 1998), 82. Mrs. Croxton was clearly concerned with the recreation and welfare of women, as evidenced by her work with the W.A.A.C. (in which she had been an officer) immediately after the War, when she spearheaded a recreation scheme that provided "pleasure and excitement of the healthiest kind": in conjunction with Stoll, Walter de Frece, and other theatre managers, professional entertainments were supplied to the camps of the Womens' Corps. See "Recreation for the Womens' Services," *The Month's Work: A Magazine Issued by the Ministry of Labour*, November 1918, 76.

align his decision to employ women alongside the broader trend of women's wartime organizations. Across the country, women were beginning to adopt military-style uniforms, considering uniforms modelled on male military uniforms to be symbolic of patriotism and duty.²⁷⁴ Stoll's female orchestras, in adopting a uniform, visibly became part of a militarized culture; and of course, the new spectacle of a uniformed orchestra of women would have attracted further publicity and enhanced ticket sales.

The adoption of uniforms could also have been a tactic to further subvert the A.M.U., who had previously tried to adopt a uniform. The suggestion of a uniform for Union members was first put forward in April 1915, and the corresponding article in the *Journal* argued that "A uniformed band, even of inferior players, stands a better chance of securing engagements than would a band of first-class performers without a uniform."²⁷⁵ The suggested uniform was dark blue with white facings, and consisted of a cap, tunic, and trousers: clearly, no provision had been made for female Union members, who would have been unlikely to wear trousers.²⁷⁶ It is unclear from the *Journal* whether this uniform was adopted by the A.M.U. members. Whether or not Union members were now wearing their uniform, the adoption of an entirely different uniform by Stoll

²⁷⁴ Alyson Mercer, "The Changing Face of Exhibiting Women's Wartime Work at the Imperial War Museum," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 2 (April 2013): 4.

²⁷⁵ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, April 1915, 1. The article noted that a uniform would particularly benefit performers at seaside places, exhibitions, and demonstrations. Competition with military bands had been problematic for some time, even prior to the outbreak of the war, and this article suggests that a uniform would be another way to compete with the visual spectacle offered by these bands. The sentiment against Army musicians entertaining civilian audiences became even more pronounced during the early part of the War, as it was felt that Army bands were neglecting their "legitimate" duties in favor of making extra money by performing in civilian venues. While they were performing in seaside resorts, regiments were seen "on the march with no band to lead them, having perforce to whistle and sing to liven things up a bit" (*The Musicians' Report and Journal*, July 1915, 8). One of the Union organizers, J.S. Ratcliffe, felt so strongly on this point that he joined the Army as a Drum-Major in order to "show them an example."

²⁷⁶ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, November 1915, 1. The up-front price for the uniform was 38 shillings and sixpence, or £2 if paid for by deposit of £1 with order and the balance within three months.

certainly signalled the professionalization of these non-Union female musicians, placing them visually at odds with the Union men.

The aftermath

It is unclear from the *Journal* exactly how the conflict with Stoll ended. Descriptions of the dispute disappear from its pages, replaced by accounts of clashes with Army bands and continued tussles with music-hall managers over wages. February 1917 saw a brief notice saying that there had been little movement on the Stoll dispute, and that it may be referred to arbitration. “There is no difference in the playing of the ladies’ orchestras. They are still as bad as ever.” The minutes of the General and Branch Committee Meetings suggest that by February 1917, the specific dispute with Stoll had more or less been dropped. The minutes for that month show that the General Secretary provided a lengthy summary of the dispute; with no further mentions in the committee meeting minutes for the rest of the War, it seems reasonable to conclude that this was a closing summary. The following month, musicians employed at the Royal Hippodrome in Dover resigned over the failure of the management to increase their salaries. The rumor was that the management had hired a ladies’ orchestra, but this time the A.M.U. was uncharacteristically resigned: “we must take it as part of the ‘misfortunes of war.’”²⁷⁷ Similarly, in November 1917, Madame Walters (whose name had first occurred at the very beginning of the dispute with Stoll) was discovered to be recruiting both female

²⁷⁷ The *Musicians’ Report and Journal*, March 1917, 8. This remark reads particularly callously, as it equates the employment of a female orchestras with the millions of soldiers who died or were injured fighting for their countries.

musicians and Army musicians to take the places of Union members at the Marlborough Theatre in Holloway, London.²⁷⁸

The A.M.U. had been fighting a losing battle. Women had become an indisputable part of the workforce across the country. The timing of the strike had to have been a factor: as conscription was introduced and women's labor became normalized, the Union simply could not keep fighting the inevitable.²⁷⁹ The newly expanded munitions industry, combined with the government's interventions on minimum wages, also meant that the Union was under threat from male members leaving the profession to seek better paid work elsewhere. In November 1916, in the midst of the A.M.U.'s fight with Stoll, Williams wrote in the *Journal*: "My aim is to preserve the Union as something that is going to endure after the war. The making of munitions will terminate soon, and then the men who can earn £3 or more making munitions may be glad to go back to music."²⁸⁰ It is evident from this that many musicians, dissatisfied with the reductions in their salary, had found more profitable employment in the munitions factories that had sprung up around the country. The Union would need to consolidate its strength in order to work out how to adapt to the rapidly-changing entertainment industry after the War, in what Cloonan and Williamson have described as a "complex and fraught period in the Union's history."²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ *The Musicians' Report and Journal*, November 1917, 9.

²⁷⁹ Williams's lengthy article on conscription in March 1917 reveals that he was in favor of conscription, and was openly encouraging musicians to enlist: he equated those attempting to avoid conscription with blacklegs and strike-breakers (*The Musicians' Report and Journal*, March 1917, 1-2).

²⁸⁰ A.M.U. Monthly Report, November 1916, 2.

²⁸¹ Williamson and Cloonan, *Players' Work Time*, 60.

As for the continued employment of women in Stoll's orchestras after the war, once again the question of dilution and substitution is in contention. It is difficult to know whether they were immediately evicted from the orchestra pits once the War had ended. This is not simply because there are few records; rather, the music hall industry was already in decline, replaced by cinemas as cheap entertainment suitable for the whole family.²⁸² However, it is possible to trace the careers of a couple of the female musicians who had signed the open letter. Alma Foster's name appears regularly in the *Lancashire Evening Post*, with reviews of her ladies' orchestra's engagements in the Lancashire area.²⁸³ She received a contract from the Council to provide a ladies' orchestra for twelve weeks in the summer of 1920 at Lytham: the Council meeting included a note that the last season's band concerts had been a "marked success from the financial point of view, and he expected that all records would be eclipsed next season."²⁸⁴ Evelyn Hardy achieved success with her Ladies' Band in the 1930s, playing dance music "with a fine lilt" and winning second place in a band contest run by the *Era*.²⁸⁵ From this, it seems that the female music hall musicians were once again confined to playing in all-female ensembles and at seaside venues. At least the ensembles had become less of a novelty, and more of a typical component of the entertainment options.

Williamson and Cloonan's history of the Musicians' Union points out the continued underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities in the Union's

²⁸² Emma Hanna's chapter "British Cinema, Regulation and the War Effort" (in Maunder, *British Theatre and the Great War, 1914 - 1919*, 195–212) traces cinema's thriving audiences, as well as the ways in which the entertainment form was affected by the War, becoming the "dominant form of recreation in Britain" by the end of the War.

²⁸³ The *Lancashire Evening Post*, Saturday August 28, 1920, 5; Monday December 3, 1920, 5; Monday August 22, 1921, 4.

²⁸⁴ The *Lancashire Evening Post*, Monday December 3, 1920, 5.

²⁸⁵ The *Era*, Wednesday May 30, 1928, 15.

membership, as well as across the music profession generally.²⁸⁶ There are few references in the Union's archive to women before the 1970s, and nearly all of these relate to women lowering industry wages.²⁸⁷ It seems all the more remarkable then, that for the second half of the First World War, female musicians were able to not only go up against the A.M.U.'s highly-organized strike action, but win relatively well-paid employment and complimentary reviews of their abilities in the process, performing at some of the most prestigious and popular variety halls in the nation's capital. The arguments against them were the same as arguments levelled against female munitions workers, textiles workers, and women working in other previously male-dominated fields. One key difference was that the female musicians who managed to get employment through Stoll's halls were *de facto* excluded from joining the Union (if they had joined, they would have immediately had to resign their jobs), in contrast to the women who legally entered other industries and who were able, although not necessarily encouraged, to join their respective unions. However, this was the only way for the female musicians to break into a part of an industry that would not have admitted them through the "proper" channels.

Stoll's claims to employ women on a patriotic basis are suspicious, as are Williams's fake concerns over the morality of the women in the music halls. Both parties used women's rights to fair employment as ammunition for their ongoing vendetta; as Thom writes, "All women became a stage army, to be wheeled on and off as the decision

²⁸⁶ Williamson and Cloonan, *Players' Work Time*, 237.

²⁸⁷ Based on interviews with Union members, Williamson and Cloonan suggest reasons for this relating to music industries that remain "pretty misogynistic," as well as cultural aspects of the Union including a hard drinking culture.

demanded.”²⁸⁸ At least the women “on the front line” of Stoll’s orchestras were able to go on the historical record, claiming their place in the struggle for equality via their open letter, and by their continued performance in the face of strong opposition from A.M.U. members. What cannot be shown from the numerous written articles and newspaper reports are the undocumented difficulties that may have been faced by the female musicians. Perhaps they had to cross picket lines, suffering verbal abuse from Union members in the process. Perhaps they had to capitulate to Stoll’s demands of long hours and self-subsidized uniforms in order to keep their jobs, forcing them to spend time away from their families and jeopardize the smooth running of their households; after all, these women would not have been of the economic stratum that had domestic servants. Perhaps the constant attacks on their playing abilities left them demoralized and uncertain of their capabilities.

What is clear is that for the first time, the music hall industry had become entrenched in debates about the musical labor of women, in terms of its economic, artistic, and moral value. The context of the war, with the combination of militant New Unionism and national conscription, provided the impetus for musical labor to be subject to the same arguments regarding dilution as the newly-legislated munitions industry. Although the attitude of the A.M.U. was by no means irrevocably swayed in favor of female orchestral musicians, the 1916 dispute positioned musical performance within the realm of skilled manual labor, and allowed for the possibility that women could participate in a new sector of the industry.

²⁸⁸ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, 147.

Chapter 3

“Our quiet room was a complete failure”:

music and agency in the United Suffragists’ Women’s Club

When the state is in danger, when the very liberties in your possession are imperiled, is above all the time to think of duty. . . . It is our duty as women to do what we can to help our country in this war, because if the unthinkable thing happened, and Germany were to win, the women’s movement, as we know it in Europe, would be put back fifty years at least; there is no doubt about it.²⁸⁹

Emmeline Pankhurst, founder of the Women’s Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.)—the militant suffrage organization that used dramatic public acts of violence and disruption to draw attention to its cause—called a halt to the organization’s campaign as soon as the First World War began.²⁹⁰ Millicent Fawcett, leader of the non-militant National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, similarly advised her branch leaders to turn their attention to plans for relief work, in order to maintain the organization “in some sort of working order” until the War was over and the campaign for women’s suffrage could restart.²⁹¹ For the duration of the War, many suffragists (a general term for members of the suffrage movement) and suffragettes (a term for more militant activists,

²⁸⁹ Quotation from Emmeline Pankhurst’s speech at the Sun Hall, Liverpool, in April 1915. Quoted in Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, ed., *Speeches and Trials of the Militant Suffragettes: The Women’s Social and Political Union, 1903-1918* (Madison: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 359, 361.

²⁹⁰ The W.S.P.U. had been responsible for acts of window smashing and arson to draw attention to their cause; once the offenders were imprisoned, they went on hunger-strikes and were force-fed, drawing further attention to their treatment. The “Cat and Mouse Act” meant that prisoners on hunger strike would be released to recover, only to be re-imprisoned once they were healthy enough to withstand further detention. Emmeline Pankhurst, the organization’s figurehead along with her daughter Christabel, was a controversial and mighty figure in the history of women’s suffrage.

²⁹¹ Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 130–31. The campaign never restarted in quite the same way, because the British Government granted women the vote in 1918, with the Representation of the People Act. However, the Act was extremely limited in its scope, only allowing women to vote if they were over the age of 30, and either a member of the Local Government Register or married to a member, a property owner, or a university graduate. Thus, voting was still restricted to women with private wealth, from the middle- and upper-classes.

particularly members of the W.S.P.U.) channeled their energies away from the cause and into the national war effort; in Lisa Tickner's words, "militant rhetoric and the image of the 'just cause' remained, but the object of attack shifted to that of German hostility."²⁹²

Even the musical hallmarks of the suffrage movement were taken over by the war effort. Prior to the War, one of the official suffrage anthems was the "Women's Marseillaise." Florence Macaulay's words were coupled with the tune of the French national anthem (see Figure 3-1: *The Women's Marseillaise*) to become a resounding sonic feature of public marches and demonstrations, one that was particularly associated with the militant actions of the W.S.P.U.²⁹³ Newspaper reports described Emmeline Pankhurst's followers singing in court as she was sentenced to imprisonment in April 1913:

The demonstrators sang the Suffragette song to the tune of "The Marseillaise." The anger and excitement continued for five minutes, the police being quite unable to interfere. The Judge described the scene as an indecent and indecorous exhibition, but the women broke out afresh, singing wildly and enthusiastically.²⁹⁴

Once Britain joined its ally France in the War, the tune of the Marseillaise became repurposed as a symbol of British patriotism, of Allied strength, and of unity against the common enemy of the Germans. It was played at concerts, in restaurants, and in music

²⁹² Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 230. June Purvis, Emmeline Pankhurst's biographer, describes Pankhurst's support for the war as "patriotic feminism," in that she still challenged traditional assumptions about women's roles, but "in a context that was no longer subversive" (June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography*, Women's and Gender History (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 269).

²⁹³ The lyrics are quoted in Kitty Marion's unpublished autobiography, held at the LSE Women's Library, item number 7KMA Box Number FL639.

²⁹⁴ Article reprinted in the *Lincolnshire Echo*, Thursday April 3, 1913, 3.

Figure 3-1: The Women's Marseillaise

In the absence of original sheet music, this arrangement is my own suggestion of how Florence Macaulay's words would have been set to the Marseillaise.

Words: Florence Macaulay (1862-1945)
Tune: Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle (1760-1836)
Arrangement: Vanessa Williams



A - rise! ye daugh-ters of a land that vaunts its li-ber - ty! May rest-less
ru - lers un - der - stand that wo - men must be free, that
wo - men will be free. Hark! hark! the trum - pet's
call - ing! Who'd be a la - ggard in the fight? With
vi - ct'ry e - ven now in sight And stu - bborn foe-men back-ward
fall - ing. To free - dom's cause till death we swear our fe - a -
lty. March on! March on! Face to the
dawn, the dawn of li - ber - ty.

halls—sometimes five times in a single evening—alongside the British and Russian anthems, and was sung by English school children.²⁹⁵ Almost overnight, the *contrafacta* words sung by the suffrage movement were drowned out by the public performances of the original anthem in the service of an entirely different call to arms.²⁹⁶

This musical illustration shows, in microcosm, the cooption of the women's suffrage movement in the service of the war effort, and the replacement of its women-centered militant rhetoric by a national rallying cry. Missing from this picture is an account of the continued existence of the "Women's Marseillaise" during the War, detached from the context of the public marches and protests that had almost entirely ceased to exist. We can only imagine that the "Women's Marseillaise" continued to be sung, transformed into a new, more clandestine, sonic form of protest. Perhaps it was hummed by former suffragettes as they went about their daily lives, or sung together in intimate gatherings in their homes; we can even imagine the possibility that supporters of the suffrage cause sang "their" lyrics during public performances of the French national anthem. These possibilities for private performances of the "Women's Marseillaise" again reflect broader developments in the suffrage movement. Although the largest and most prominent organizations ceased their campaigning for the duration of the War,

²⁹⁵ *The Era*, September 23, 1914, 9; Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain*, 147. Michel Vovelle gives an account of the changing reception of the Marseillaise in France, as the song's overexposure led to French national sympathy turning against it. See Michel Vovelle, "La Marseillaise: War or Peace," in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 3 (New York; Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1998).

²⁹⁶ Very occasionally during the War, the "Women's Marseillaise" resurfaced in descriptions of suffrage activity. An article in *Votes for Women* in July 1915 described a twilight march organized by Sylvia Pankhurst. It hinted at nostalgia for the tune's "original" meaning: "The Marseillaise took on its former meaning, the one that women have given to it many times in the last eight years, as the band sent the inspiring rebellious old tune echoing through the dusty corners of Fleet Street..." (*Votes for Women*, July 30, 1915, 363.)

many smaller organizations continued their work in more private, smaller-scale settings, that nonetheless kept the spirit of the suffrage movement alive.

These societies turned their attention to working-class women, assisting them with the hardships of wartime life while informing them about the suffrage agenda. Some of them had formed as a result of disputes with the major personalities of the national organizations. Emmeline Pankhurst's daughter, Sylvia, had long been at odds with her mother's and sister's militant campaign; she was expelled from the W.S.P.U. in 1914, choosing instead to work with women in the East End of London to effect immediate changes in their working conditions.²⁹⁷ Similarly, Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, previously staunch W.S.P.U. supporters who had been imprisoned for their support of the organization, had also been ousted by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1912 because of their opposition to the violent tactics employed by its members. The Pethick-Lawrences became members of a new organization, the United Suffragists, which had formed in response to divisions both within the W.S.P.U. and more broadly across the suffrage movement. This organization's work forms the basis of this chapter.

Krista Cowman describes the United Suffragists as “an important, almost unique site of suffrage activity during the First World War.”²⁹⁸ Thanks to their single-issue stance on the topic of women's votes, the United Suffragists were able to maintain their focus on this agenda during the War. Other organizations, including the W.S.P.U., had by

²⁹⁷ Sylvia Pankhurst remained a staunch pacifist, and wrote articles demonstrating how the War was making women's lives worse, rather than better. See Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain during the First World War* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2005), 40.

²⁹⁸ Krista Cowman, “‘A Party between Revolution and Peaceful Persuasion’: A Fresh Look at the United Suffragists,” in *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 77.

1914 taken on such broad agendas concerning women's rights that they were almost duty-bound to give up their campaigns and support the war effort in order to prove that women's labor was vital to the continued functioning of the country. The United Suffragists not only continued their campaign through their publications and regular meetings, but also ran a club for working-class women in Southwark, London, for almost the entire duration of the War. This club provided working-class women with a social network and a space for entertainment, relaxation, and mutual support. It was a comfortable space to which women could bring their children and friends; it was also a forum for public meetings, concerts, and classes, occupying a liminal position on the threshold between public and private space, between large-scale meeting place and small-scale home from home.

In this chapter, I take the Club as a case study to examine how the United Suffragists, and the members of its Women's Club, used musical activities as an expression of the suffrage cause during the War. I will suggest that the Club's musical activities played major roles in furthering the social and political possibilities that the Club offered, variously embodying the suffrage movement's calls for change. Although there are relatively few sources that shed light on the Club's activities, those that remain repeatedly emphasize the various musical activities that took place. I begin by discussing the program of weekly formal concerts, setting them in their context of education and aspirations for social mobility. I then consider the Club's documented activities of folk song and dance, and the overlap between members of the United Suffragists and the pre-War folk music revival, examining the correlation between folk dance and their socialist agenda. Finally, I consider the descriptions that focus on the Club's gramophone,

examining how the machine was transformed from an object of entertainment into a necessary sonic overlay that provided Club members with the freedom to voice opinions that were at odds with the “official” patriotic spirit of wartime Britain.

The United Suffragists’ Women’s Club: an aspirational community

Founded in February 1914, the United Suffragists aimed to unite suffragettes and suffragists who felt alienated from the myriad disparate suffrage organizations. Many of its first members had been major figures in the W.S.P.U., both as organizers and financial sponsors. Its founders included the Pethick-Lawrences; Evelyn Sharp; Lena Ashwell (the subject of Chapter Four of this dissertation); war correspondent H.W. Nevinson; author Laurence Housman; and Dr. Louisa Garrett Anderson, who worked with Flora Murray to establish hospitals in France during the War. The United Suffragists intended to focus solely on the single issue of votes for women, and welcomed members from both militant and constitutional suffrage groups, as well as members of both sexes, as opposed to the women-only W.S.P.U. In the words of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence:

Now it is absolutely essential to the welfare of the whole movement that as the militant section is driven underground there should arise a strong intermediate party, occupying a position between the revolutionary section and the party of peaceful persuasion—an intermediate party determined of front, strong of action, politically militant and ready if need be to challenge oppression—yet with a stable organisation that remains above ground and intact for constitutional agitation.²⁹⁹

The United Suffragists’ work was initially concentrated in the London area, although it soon began work in the provinces. Its development into a national organization was helped by Emmeline and Fred Pethick-Lawrence’s decision to give their publication,

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 79.

Votes for Women, to the society.³⁰⁰ *Votes for Women* chronicled the establishment of the United Suffragists' Women's Club and its ongoing development, calling the national readership's attention to it despite its geographic limitations to one specific area of London. The Club was positioned as both the main outlet for the organization's war work and an opportunity for the continued education of working class women on the suffrage cause.

The Club opened its doors for the first time on November 27, 1914 in a house at 92 Borough Road, in Southwark: an impoverished area of London whose chief characteristics were described in 1902 as "evil living and low conditions of life... vice, poverty and crowding."³⁰¹ Membership was open to every woman over school age: this meant the Club members came from every age range, from teenage workers to mothers and grandmothers.³⁰² The Club was designed to be a cheerful, welcoming place ("Ours is the prettiest club house in London, with its bright chintzes and wallpapers and flowers"³⁰³), where the local working-class community could gather to socialize, enjoy

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 81. *Votes for Women* had previously been the W.S.P.U.'s mouthpiece. It was initially published on a weekly basis, moving to a monthly one partway through the War, and was an outlet for news about the activities of the United Suffragists and also about the latest instalments in the campaign for women's suffrage. It proclaimed the organization's decision to "keep the suffrage flag flying" during the War while also prioritizing relief work; an article from August 1914 from the founders of the organization stated that "the war makes it even more necessary than usual that the woman's point of view should be emphasized" (*Votes for Women*, August 21, 1914, 705).

³⁰¹³⁰¹ S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30. In the nineteenth century, Southwark had been most known for its "low life, criminality, and heathenism." Southwark remained impoverished and overcrowded until the devastation of the Second World War forced changes in housing and infrastructure.

³⁰² The official school leaving age until 1918 was twelve years old, and "juvenile workers" were a source of both legal and illegal labor in the agricultural, mining, and munitions industries. Although the legal age of employment was fourteen, and many children stayed in school until this age, low household incomes meant that many children under the age of fourteen sought employment. See Irene Osgood Andrews and Margaret Hobbs, *Economic Effects of the World War Upon Women and Children in Great Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921), chap. XIII.

³⁰³ Reprinted in the *Lincolnshire Echo*, November 25 1916, 2.

refreshments at highly subsidized rates, and participate in a variety of recreational activities. Mothers could bring their children, and all members could bring friends to visit, although no visitor could come more than twice without becoming a member. The Club therefore enabled its members to entertain guests in a manner that they may well have been unable to do at home, owing to wartime food rationing and low incomes.³⁰⁴ By July 1915, the Club had nearly one hundred paying members: the subscription was one penny per month, with an entrance fee of a further penny.

Many of the members were soldiers' wives, sweated workers, and wives with invalid husbands: women who were the poorest of the poor, and whose behavior often came under suspicion from the state and the communities around them.³⁰⁵ The United Suffragists' decision to provide a community specifically for women in these marginalized positions was important, and politically-motivated. Not only did the organization treat these women as fellow citizens, rather than as drains on society, it also blurred socio-economic class barriers by welcoming working-class women into the tradition of middle-class social clubs. Social clubs for middle-class women had risen to new heights of popularity in the 1890s, with many clubs in London welcoming women who were visiting the city from their rural homes for shopping and entertainment. These

³⁰⁴ *Votes for Women*, July 2, 1915.

³⁰⁵ Soldiers' wives were often at a particular financial disadvantage during the War: despite nominally receiving separation allowances, the paperwork often proved to be a bureaucratic barrier, and the Government's decision to award allowances to the wives of all volunteers meant there were no systems in place to actually administer the payments. The War Office used the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (founded in 1885 and of prominence during the Boer War) to help administer the allowances, but the Association's volunteers judged which wives and widows were "worthy" of receiving their allowances, evaluating their behavior and domestic standards. Soldiers' wives were also deemed to be at moral risk without their husbands to guide their spending; Janis Lomas describes how this led to police surveillance and the imposition of curfews (Janis Lomas, "'Delicate Duties': Issues of Class and Respectability in Government Policy towards the Wives and Widows of British Soldiers in the Era of the Great War," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 1 (March 2000): 123–47).

clubs provided safe places for women to take refreshments, and even to stay for the night. They became social spaces, where gossip was “an appreciated feature,” and gradually constellated around specific interests. Gordon and Doughan’s overview of women’s clubs describes the Green Park Club, which held musical and dramatic entertainments, and the Lyceum Club, which was only open to women who had “either published any original work in literature, journalism, science, art or music, or had university degrees.”³⁰⁶ The subscription fees for these clubs, as well as the entrance requirements, put them well out of the reach of working-class women: the subscription for the Lyceum Club, for example, was four guineas, with a two guinea entrance fee.

The Church provided alternative social spaces for women, with lower economic barriers to membership: for example, St Saviour’s Cathedral Church in Southwark ran a mission hall, whose activities included bible classes and a children’s scripture union.³⁰⁷ However, church social gatherings were generally only open to regular church attenders, creating an entry barrier for non-Christian women, and required adherence to moral and ethical codes of conduct, including a whole-hearted support of the War. The Church of England had begun a “National Mission of Repentance and Hope” in October 1916, as a response to the “spiritual crisis” of the nation in wartime. The Bishop of London, Bishop Winnington-Ingram, told congregations across the country that their national sins included disunity and strife in industry; the neglect of religious practices; use and abuse of alcohol; and sexually-transmitted diseases.³⁰⁸ The same Bishop told a gathering of

³⁰⁶ Peter Gordon and David Doughan, *Women, Clubs, and Associations in Britain* (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 51, 53.

³⁰⁷ Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939*, 44.

³⁰⁸ Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 76.

2,000 women in October 1914 that they must tell their husbands and male relatives, “Go [to the war], with my love and blessing.”³⁰⁹ The Church of England’s official position on women’s wartime roles was that they should support the war in every way possible, while maintaining spotless moral characters. Women who did not meet these standards were penalized through the Church’s involvement in state welfare programs; the Archbishop of Canterbury gave evidence to a government committee about whether common-law wives and unwed mothers of troops should receive the same separation allowances as those women who had been married in the Church. He suggested that “the utmost care [should be] taken not to break down the distinction between the married and the not married.”³¹⁰ Any woman who disagreed with the War, or who lived in a common-law marriage, or who drank alcohol as “the only refuge from depression and misery,” in the words of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, could not access the Church’s support network.³¹¹

The United Suffragists’ Women’s Club provided an alternative to the morally-prescriptive socializing offered by the Church. Evelyn Sharp highlighted the Club members’ appreciation of this in a wry description:

They seemed to like coming there every evening, whether for amusement or more serious entertainment; and our drinking member, most intelligent of them all, was quite sober when she declared enthusiastically that ours was “just like a West End gentlemen’s club, without any prayers in it.”³¹²

Through Sharp’s dry humor, we find a subtle emphasis on the double standards between clubs for men versus women. Men’s clubs did not have to conform to the teetotal,

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 94.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 105.

³¹¹ Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1938), 81.

³¹² Evelyn Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure: Selected Reminiscences from an Englishwoman’s Life*, Faber Finds (London: Faber, 2009), 162.

religious morals that so many women-only spaces did. Her description of the Club suggests that she saw it as a much-needed alternative space for women to socialize without the institutional constraints of the Church and male double standards.

Despite this, the United Suffragists' Club was still positioned as an alternative to disreputable community venues such as public houses, which were at the epicenters of local social activity for both men and women.³¹³ Respectability politics were still much in evidence, and the Club's mission to provide a social space for women modelled on middle-class social clubs can in itself be seen as another way of enforcing behavioral models on the Club members. However, Peter Grant's work on philanthropy in the First World War suggests that, rather than acting as a means by which "the dominant and commercial classes confirmed their power and status," middle-class volunteer work and philanthropy was more a means of integrating social classes, providing a meeting-point for "top-down" philanthropy and "bottom-up" mutual aid.³¹⁴ By giving the women of Southwark a venue outside of the judgment of the Church and the state, the United Suffragists created a space in which Club members could exercise their own agency, creating a self-governed community.

The Club's formal concerts: education and class aspirations

The United Suffragists' underlying goal to spread the suffrage message was furthered by the weekly discussions on women's suffrage that were listed on the Club's timetable.³¹⁵

³¹³ Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939*, 39.

³¹⁴ Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War*, 7.

³¹⁵ The timetable was described in *Votes for Women*, November 19, 1915. The "Suffrage meeting" took place on Tuesdays; other activities listed include rehearsals for a play, reading aloud to older members, sewing and knitting "taught by an expert," and a "mother's working party, and children's crèche."

However, the educational remit of the Club's organizers was not confined solely to this topic. Instead, their project was to provide information on broader topics for women who may otherwise have been excluded from accessing it, enabling them to broaden their knowledge base and form independent opinions. This was the case at the Club's opening ceremony, during which H.W. Nevinson used a map to tell the women at the club about the progress of the war, "and the soldiers, and the shells, and the life in the trenches, with all the little intimate details that the women were hungering for."³¹⁶ A description in the *Daily Herald* claimed that Nevinson "said just the right things about the war. He could do no more than hint at its combination of horror and silliness, for most of his hearers had menfolk fighting. But the hint was there, and right quickly the women took it."³¹⁷ In telling the "real" story of the War, as opposed to the Government's propaganda, Nevinson earned the trust of the new Club members, and demonstrated that he, and the rest of the Club organizers, were their allies. Nevinson's speech, which ended with "a great peroration about women's right to have a voice in the decisions of peace and war," would have been the first step in persuading the Club members of the importance of the suffrage issue.³¹⁸ It also established the Club as a space exempt from Government propaganda, instead becoming one of discussion and critique, however veiled this needed to be.

The Club's missions of education and self-improvement were reflected in the weekly concert series, which are referred to in many of the articles about the Club in *Votes for Women* and other newspapers. Concerts of classical music were given not only

³¹⁶ *Votes for Women*, November 27, 1914, 69.

³¹⁷ *The Daily Herald*, November 28, 1914, 1.

³¹⁸ *Votes for Women*, November 27, 1914, 69.

by amateur volunteers, but by high-caliber professional musicians. The opening ceremony made it clear that music would be integrated into the Club's life: it included Hilda Saxe playing "glorious things on the piano that amazed and charmed us at once," and Madame Mallia singing "Sleep Baby Sleep."³¹⁹ Saxe was a concert pianist who had accompanied the famous opera singer Enrico Caruso on his tour of the United Kingdom in 1909.³²⁰ She took a five-year hiatus from performing which included most of the period of the War (she gave birth to a daughter in October 1915), returning to the Wigmore Hall in May 1918 to perform a program of Beethoven and Brahms.³²¹ Given Saxe's background, which included training with piano pedagogue Tobias Matthay and studies in Europe, it seems safe to assume that the "glorious things" with which she delighted the Club members were drawn from virtuosic classical piano repertoire.

Madame Mallia appears in newspaper reviews as a soloist in Handel's *Israel in Egypt* in 1898, and performing songs by British composer Montague Phillips in February 1908.³²² Her choice of song, "Sleep Baby Sleep," is important: this was the only piece mentioned by name in the reviews of the day's entertainments. Various settings of texts titled "Sleep Baby Sleep" were published during the second half of the nineteenth century, including by American composer A.H. Pease (1838-1882), and English composer and singer Elizabeth Philp (1827-1885).³²³ Although it is impossible to know

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Saxe appears as a "long-forgotten" pianist in Scott Messing's history of Schubert's *Marche Militaire*, where she is listed as one of the performers of Tausig's virtuosic solo-piano arrangement of that piece. See Scott Messing, *Marching to the Canon: The Life of Schubert's Marche Militaire*, Eastman Studies in Music (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 41.

³²¹ *Musical America*, May 18, 1918, 14.

³²² *The Musical Times*, May 1, 1898, 342; *The Musical News*, February 15, 1908, 153.

³²³ Pease's setting was published by William A. Pond & Company in New York in 1875. The title page of this publication also lists Philp's setting; elsewhere, Philp's setting is mentioned in a review in the *Illustrated London News* on June 1, 1867, in which it is described as a "newly-published" song. The

which setting Mme. Mallia performed at the opening of the Club, it seems plausible that she might have chosen a song by a female British composer to celebrate the opening of a club for women. Either way, her decision to perform a lullaby sung to a sleeping baby, rather than any other art song or aria, demonstrates the Club's focus on women and mothers, some of whom may even have brought their children to the opening event. "Sleep Baby Sleep" brought a scene of private domesticity into a public space, further accentuating the Club's liminal position between home and hall. If it was Philp's setting that was performed, this would have added a further layer of political statement: it is not a traditional lullaby, but rather a grieving mother's plea for her and her child to be laid alongside the child's dead father, so that they might be spared "scorn and want and care."³²⁴ This text acknowledges the hardships faced by single mothers, openly citing death as a preferable alternative to the narrator's way of life. The song would have set another example of the Club as a "safe space" in which women could give voice to their own personal hardships without fear of judgment, one that welcomed women who were otherwise left on the margins of society without institutional support.

Hilda Saxe's commitment to the musical life of the Club extended beyond the opening ceremony, as she continued to organize regular performances on Thursday evenings, presumably using her professional contacts to obtain performers.³²⁵ Despite

concert at which it was performed featured Elizabeth Philp making her "entrance into the musical profession as a composer and singer." Philp's setting of W.C. Bennett's poem "Sleep Baby Sleep" was performed at this concert by a Mdme. Rudersdorff, "with such pathos that it was encored with acclamations."

³²⁴ Philp's publication, *How to Sing an English Ballad. Including Sixty Songs by Eminent Authors* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1869), includes the full text.

³²⁵ Mlle. Léonie, a dancer and reciter, performed in January 1915. The Misses Fox, who organized the Merrymaids Concert Party, often appeared as solo performers. Several references to The Merrymaids Concert Party appear in other articles: this concert party also gave public performances to raise money for

Saxe's success in this area, it clearly proved challenging for her to guarantee weekly entertainment, especially given her pregnancy, so in September 1915 a committee of seven women took over the concert series. In October 1915, a singer called Monsieur Bicquet, hailing from Antwerp, performed: the appearance of a Belgian performer must have been somewhat politically poignant, given Britain's support of Belgium and its refugees at this time.³²⁶ The following month, a singer described as "Mme. Beola (of the Opera)" performed; one member apparently remarked, "It's not often we have such a treat as that."³²⁷ The performance by Madame Beola (of unknown opera house and nationality) was facilitated by a Mr. and Mrs. Aspland, although it is unclear whether they invited Mme. Beola to perform alongside them, or simply financially sponsored the event.³²⁸ Either way, the facilitation of concerts by private individuals clearly enabled high-quality performers to appear; and the popularity of the concerts was such that on at least one occasion—a performance by a Mrs. Schutze—Club members had to sit on the stairs, as there were not enough seats in the room itself.³²⁹ Given the presumable difficulties in finding performers able to travel to Southwark and perform for free during the War, the organizers were also keen for Club members to assist with providing the entertainment: "If any of our [*Votes for Women*] readers would like to come down sometimes to sing or play we shall be very glad of their help."³³⁰

the Club (*Votes for Women*, May 14, 1915, 266). Miss Baldwin, a singer who also worked at the Endell Street Hospital, sang in July 1915.

³²⁶ *Votes for Women*, October 8, 1915, 10.

³²⁷ *Votes for Women*, November 19, 1915, 58.

³²⁸ Another mention of the Asplands describe them as "giving" a concert, perhaps implying that they were the performers, but no further details of instruments of repertoire appears. *Votes for Women*, October 22, 1915, 26.

³²⁹ *Votes for Women*, December 31, 1915, 111.

³³⁰ *Votes for Women*, September 10, 1915, 406.

These formal concerts of classical music sat within the Club's provision of typically middle-class entertainment, also exemplified by entertainments given by the Actresses' Franchise League and by evenings that included dances and recitations.³³¹ Even though the second half of the nineteenth century had seen an increasing democratization of classical music, with music festivals and education projects providing access to classical music for working-class and lower-middle class audiences, an appreciation of classical music still signified certain class identities and aspirations, and openings into the circles of middle-class power.³³² As David Deutsch summarizes: "An appreciation of classical music... could signal intelligence and gentility while a lack of appreciation signaled intellectual laziness and vulgarity regardless of one's inherited background or economic status."³³³ Through these concerts, the women were being offered a new cultural language, that could allow them access into other parts of society. Despite initiatives that brought classical music into the daily routines of the working classes, like the Tonic Sol-Fa movement, described by Charles McGuire, and the Promenade concerts, the perception among many middle-class aficionados was still that increased socio-economic class was correlated with interest in classical music.³³⁴ The

³³¹ *Votes for Women*, December 18, 1914, 90; January 15, 1915, 131.

³³² Charles Edward McGuire, *Music and Victorian Philanthropy: The Tonic Sol-Fa Movement* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Christina Bashford, "Not Just 'G': Towards a History of the Programme Note," in *George Grove, Music and Victorian Culture*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). It is also less likely that these programs would have penetrated into the daily routines of the Southwark community: Williams' analysis of oral interviews with inhabitants of the area at the turn of the century only cites descriptions of occasional music hall visits, and group singing of music hall songs around a piano (Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939*, 42–43).

³³³ David Deutsch, *British Literature and Classical Music: Cultural Contexts 1870-1945* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 131.

³³⁴ In the interwar years, the BBC's radio programming would continue this debate, with distinctions between highbrow, lowbrow, and even middlebrow classical music. Emily Hoyler's PhD dissertation, "Broadcasting Englishness: National Music in Interwar BBC Periodicals" (Northwestern University, 2016), details the "brow spectrum" of its programming.

enjoyment of classical music by audiences who, the middle-class philanthropists felt, would not normally appreciate or participate in such musical entertainments, was still something remarkable; the assumption was that the members' "usual" musical preferences came from music halls and popular songs.³³⁵ Evelyn Sharp recalled:

There was one [evening] on which Ivor James came down, and, after giving them ragtime tunes on the 'cello with average success, broke into a Bach fugue; and he has often told me since that he never played Bach to an audience so thrilled as that one immediately became, and remained until he could play no more.³³⁶

The dedication of organizing these concerts, and the ability of a small club to attract good performers for little or no payment, indicate that these musical evenings must have been a key priority for the Club's founders. They gave impoverished women, who could not afford to attend public concerts of classical music, the chance to experience live music, by providing it for free in a respectable venue that women could safely attend on their own. The concerts may also have been a selling-point for women who might otherwise have bypassed the Club's offerings, attracting more members and increasing the Club's membership. However, the Club could not provide evenings of lowbrow music-hall style music: this would not have fitted within the model of middle-class respectable philanthropy. Instead, the concerts were examples of aspirational aesthetic tastes, educating audiences in the musical "highbrow" and providing another form of entry into a middle-class space for working-class women, fulfilling the Club's intentions of class mobility.

³³⁵ This attitude was prevalent among officers at the Front as well as within philanthropic organizations in England; see Chapter Four, page 205.

³³⁶ Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure*, 163. It is no coincidence that the United Suffragists reflected the same kind of mission as Lena Ashwell's work: Ashwell was also one of the founding members of the organization, and the Actresses' Franchise League, of which Ashwell was a member, also provided evenings of entertainment for the Women's Club.

Although the concerts continued more or less for the duration of the War, they became more difficult to organize, as regular performers were unable to maintain their commitments. It was perhaps increasingly difficult to attract performers because of the difficulties of travelling in and out of Central London late at night, particularly when air raids were becoming more of a threat.³³⁷ The concerts were also under threat from other activities within the Club: an article in *Votes for Women* in October 1917 noted that the regular concert night had to be changed from Thursday to Wednesday, because so many of the younger members of the Club were taking gymnastics or first-aid courses on the Thursday.³³⁸ In a move unsurprising to musicians in the twenty-first century, arts and musical entertainments had to make way for sports and classes that provided participants with more “practical” life-skills. However, an alternative form of musical praxis combined music with more strenuous physical activity: folk music and dance.

Folk music and socialism

By 1915, old English folk dances were being taught to Club members by a Miss Williams.³³⁹ Although this is the only reference to these folk dancing lessons in *Votes for Women*, it is clear that this was not a one-off lesson, but an ongoing series that took place on Wednesday evenings. The organizers were keen that the participants in the dancing classes, as well as in the military drill class also mentioned in the article, should have special drill dresses. The implication was not only that these classes were a high priority

³³⁷ Air raids certainly affected audiences for the concerts: one notice in *Votes for Women* (October 22, 1915, 26) describes a concert for which, “as a result of the raid the audience was not so large as usual.”

³³⁸ *Votes for Women*, October 1917, 302.

³³⁹ *Votes for Women*, June 18, 1915, 306.

for the Club, but that there may have been opportunities for the participants to perform publically, requiring professional performance costumes.

The United Suffragists had several connections to the English folk song and dance revival that had taken place in the years preceding the War. In particular, Mary Neal, who was one of the driving forces behind the folk dance revival, was a member of the United Suffragists, having previously been a member of the W.S.P.U.³⁴⁰ Despite the lack of references to her work with the United Suffragists in her autobiography, Neal spoke at the society's meetings during the War—she made “one of her witty and racy speeches” at a meeting in May 1915—and Elizabeth Crawford also suggests that Neal raised money for the organization with the Espérance Club.³⁴¹ The history of Neal and the Espérance Club is of relevance here. In 1895, Neal, with Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, had set up a club in St. Pancras for working girls, called the Espérance Club.³⁴² The Club had two functions: one was to give steady controlled employment with a high minimum wage through its dress-making firm, Maison Espérance; the other was to provide creative outlets for the girls, including drama and dancing.³⁴³ Neal met with Cecil Sharp—Evelyn Sharp's brother—who had already begun his project of traveling across the country collecting folk songs. She asked him to teach some folk songs to the Espérance members for their Christmas party. Soon afterwards, Neal met with William Kimber of the

³⁴⁰ Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866-1928*, Women's and Gender History (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001), 443–44.

³⁴¹ *Votes for Women*, May 21, 1915; *Ibid.*, 444.

³⁴² This was part of the national Settlement movement, in which middle-class Christian volunteers lived in settlement houses in working-class areas, providing services and neighborly advice and creating “not only contact but community” (Nigel Scotland, *Squires in the Slums: Settlements and Missions in Late-Victorian London*, International Library of Historical Studies 45 (London: Tauris, 2007), 32). See also Robert Hunter, “The Relation Between Social Settlements and Charity Organization,” *Journal of Political Economy* 11, no. 1 (1902): 75–88.

³⁴³ Roy Judge, “Mary Neal and the Espérance Morris,” *Folk Music Journal* 5, no. 5 (1989): 548.

Headington Quarry Dancers who agreed to teach some Morris dances to the club members. This was the beginning of Neal's enormous influence on the folk-dance revival. As the Espérance Club members were trained by Morris dancers from across England, they in turn began to travel around the country to give folk dance lessons, particularly to school teachers who would then teach the dances in their schools. They also danced in public events, including at the Women's Exhibition in Knightsbridge in 1909.³⁴⁴ In 1907, Neal held an "informal conference" to revive interest in English folk music; Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence attended, further cementing the links between the two collaborators.³⁴⁵

Neal became established as an authority on folk dance; but, despite the collaborations during the early part of their relationship, an enormous rift grew between her and Cecil Sharp, who is now generally thought of as the founder of the folk music revival. Their opinions on how the folk dances should be taught and represented were diametrically opposed. Sharp aimed for a controlled, codified framework through which traditions of English dance could be passed on: Georgina Boyes describes how the objectives of Sharp's English Folk Dance Society reflected the "language of control, authority and nationalism" that was characteristic of his approach.³⁴⁶ He campaigned for dances to be taught in schools through formal teaching and with graded exams, in order to establish high standards of performance and consistent performances. On the other

³⁴⁴ Roy Judge's article, "Mary Neal and the Espérance Morris," provides a detailed history of the Club's activities. Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology, and the English Folk Revival*, Music and Society (Manchester ; New York : New York: Manchester University Press, 1993) is also one of the few texts on Neal's approach.

³⁴⁵ Boyes, *The Imagined Village*, 73.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

hand, Neal's approach was grounded in a socialist political philosophy. As she considered that traditional Morris dancers were untrained, learning the dance steps by oral tradition and adding their individual style to them, she also thought that there could be no such thing as an "expert" in Morris dancing, and that there was no need for "discipline, strictness, absolute uniformity... What the little boys and girls of the humbler classes needed was not so much discipline as joy and freedom; and the sense of co-operation felt in the acquirement of these songs and dances was discipline enough."³⁴⁷ Where Sharp was concerned with a clear hierarchy of knowledge and expertise, Neal saw the potential for folk dance to work across social and class barriers, placing everyone on the same level of knowledge, ability, and enjoyment.

Given Sharp's and Neal's diametrically opposed views concerning folk dance, it is no surprise that their political views, particularly on the topic of women's suffrage, were also at odds. Sharp followed the political movement of the Fabian Society of which Sidney and Beatrice Webb (mentioned in Chapter Two) were leaders: a movement that was founded on a vision of gradual progress towards socialism rather than revolutionary changes.³⁴⁸ Cecil Sharp opposed the women's suffrage movement, and so Neal's involvement with the militant W.S.P.U. would have been another nail in the coffin of their working relationship.³⁴⁹ Neal even saw links between the folk dance movement and the suffrage movement: her unpublished autobiography directly correlates the first revived dance performed by "her girls" with the beginning of the militant suffrage

³⁴⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁴⁸ Royden Harrison, *The Life and Times of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: 1858-1905, the Formative Years* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000), 62–67.

³⁴⁹ This also caused friction in Sharp's relationship with his sister Evelyn; they did not become close until well after the War.

movement.³⁵⁰ The Espérance Club also proved to be a locus for various major figures in the suffrage movement, and Neal's dancers gave public performances to raise money for the W.S.P.U.³⁵¹

It is difficult to gauge Neal's level of involvement with the United Suffragists' Women's Club: her autobiography skims over the war years, only describing her work in pensions administration, and her sadness at having had to close the Espérance Club. However, it is difficult to imagine that someone with such experience in setting up a working women's club, with a close connection to Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, would not have had input into the Club's formation and activities, at least in its early stages.³⁵²

The United Suffragists' connections with the folk movement do not end with Neal: Evelyn Sharp, Cecil Sharp's sister, was one of the founding members of the organization, and editor of *Votes for Women*, for which Neal sometimes acted as "special commissioner." Despite Evelyn's assertions that she did not become involved with the folk music movement until after the War, January 1918 saw a notice in *Votes for Women* stating that Evelyn Sharp had given a lecture on folk songs at the Club, "with songs by Mrs. Gould and piano settings by Mrs. McCall."³⁵³ This brief sentence not only demonstrates that Evelyn Sharp's interest in folk music began much earlier than she

³⁵⁰ Mary Neal, *As a Tale That Is Told: The Autobiography of a Victorian Woman*, 1939, 168. The unpublished typewritten manuscript is held in the English Folk Dance and Song Society Archive.

³⁵¹ Judge, "Mary Neal and the Espérance Morris," 558.

³⁵² Frustratingly, Neal's relationship with the United Suffragists remains absent from her autobiography. Her involvement with the W.S.P.U. is also described in less detail than her other social work: she explained this by saying that her absorption with the folk-dance revival meant that her connection with the "Militant Campaign" was not very active (Mary Neal, autobiography, 119). However, she finished her autobiography in 1939, five years after she became a Justice of the Peace, and I would surmise that, if she had planned to publish it, a certain amount of her previous activism needed to be downplayed in order to maintain the decorum appropriate to a judge.

³⁵³ *Votes for Women*, January 1918, 326.

claims in her autobiography; it also shows that folk music continued to be a feature of the Club's activities, and that it was presented not only in a practical form—through dance lessons—but also in a more theoretical or historical lecture-driven format.³⁵⁴

The divisions within the folk revival led to very partisan feelings among Cecil Sharp and Mary Neal's supporters, and it is difficult to estimate whether Evelyn Sharp's loyalties would have lain with her distant brother or with her fellow suffragette. In Sharp's autobiography, she devoted some space to describing her own conception of the folk-dance movement, which seems to be more aligned with Neal's ideas than Cecil Sharp's. Evelyn wrote,

When I visit a country of whose language I am ignorant, I now find a universal language in its folk dance and music, for there are generally features common to our own in both; and this spiritual link between folk dancers is even more important, I think, in promoting universal understanding than the actual intercourse that is provided by international folk-dance festivals. For the spiritual link breaks down barriers within nations, too, so that people of all classes and all temperaments may be found sinking their differences, or, better still, failing to discover that they have differences, when they link hands and go dancing down the room in a "longways for as many as will."³⁵⁵

If this was the style in which Evelyn Sharp lectured the women at the United Suffragists' Club, it seems likely that folk song was presented, in this setting, as part of the Club's broader political stance on women's equality and social cohesion. The potential for the new dancers to in turn become teachers, as the girls of the Espérance Club did, would have been another part of this, suggesting alternative career prospects for the female workers otherwise confined to sweated workshops; the article quoted earlier, that called for special dresses for the Club's dancers, suggests that this professionalization was not

³⁵⁴ Evelyn writes in her autobiography of participating in the English Folk Dance Society's summer vacation school for the first time in 1923 (Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure*, 293).

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 294.

out of the question. The existence of folk dance within the Club not only provided an outlet for physical activity and exertion for the younger club members, but was part of a political ideology that forms another strand of the suffrage movement's story. This strand occurs elsewhere in the movement's history. Ethel Smyth's *The March of the Women*, which became the official anthem of the W.S.P.U. in 1910, drew on folk songs in its influences.³⁵⁶ Later in Smyth's career, she listed the folk songs that she had drawn on for her opera *The Boatswain's Mate*. Elizabeth Wood describes that critics heard these borrowed tunes as original: Smyth's *March of the Women* in this context reverted to a traditional folk song from which she borrowed for her opera.³⁵⁷

In addition to the folk-dance lessons noted at the beginning of this section, it is possible that folk songs were also part of the Club's programming. In September 1915, three "girls" are listed as forming a committee to start a singing class: although there are no further mentions of this, and the type of singing is not listed, this could well have been connected to the educational program of the folk music movement. Folk songs were

³⁵⁶ Christopher St. John's biography of Smyth claims that the March's main theme came from an "old tune Ethel had heard in the Abruzzi"; Smyth denied charges of plagiarism by citing the story that Rouget de Lisle had similarly taken the melody of the Marseillaise from another folk song. Despite the Italian origins of the basic melody, Smyth described one of her March's melodic turns—the jump up to the highest pitch—as a "peculiarly English" interval. Christopher St. John, *Ethel Smyth: A Biography* (London; New York; Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co, 1959), 151–52.

³⁵⁷ Elizabeth Wood, "Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women's Suffrage," *The Musical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (1995): 630. Another strand of the folk music/suffrage intersection comes via a short story by Gertrude Colmore, "The Magical Musician," which describes a Cabinet Minister giving a public speech and being interrupted by a woman asking for his opinion on the question of suffrage. As he fumbles for words, an itinerant violinist begins playing. In Colmore's story, the violinist's music tells the whole history of the division between the sexes, from the Garden of Eden. As his music conjures up women marching hand in hand through the ages, Colmore writes, "The measure of the music changed. It was a march that was played, and the air of it might be known to those who had Irish blood in them." (Quoted in Carolyn Christensen Nelson, ed., *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2004), 310–12.) Although this is an Irish, rather than English, march, the implication is still that it is a traditional tune, a folk song that listeners felt in their "blood" as somehow part of a natural cultural inheritance: much in the same way that Neal thought that English folk song was the natural English legacy, even for people not born into the tradition.

being taught in schools, thanks in large part to Sharp's educational campaigns; he considered that the simplicity of the songs, as well as the notion that they were "natural, pure and simple," meant that they were ideally suited to form the foundation of a musical education.³⁵⁸ Outside of the school context, books of folk songs were readily available for people to learn at home, including Mary Neal's *Espérance Morris Book* (published in 1910 and dedicated to the Pethick-Lawrences), which provided words and music for traditional tunes as well as details of how to play singing games. Folk songs would therefore have been an ideal entry point for singing lessons within the Club.

However, there is little to no information about how the women in the Club reacted to this part of their recreational timetable. One particularly tantalizing source, a recorded interview from 1975 with a Miss Edith Pepper who was both an active member of the W.S.P.U. and one of Mary Neal's Morris dancers, is damaged and unlistenable.³⁵⁹ Most histories of the folk music revival erase Mary Neal's dancers from the history of the folk revival; Georgina Boyes describes how the names of Sharp's all-male Morris dance demonstration team were repeatedly listed in publicity for his program, whereas Neal's dancers and teachers, numbering over one hundred, remained almost entirely anonymous.³⁶⁰ Even when they are named, further problems stem from judgments of class and social status. One of Neal's *Espérance* Club girls who became a folk dance teacher, Rosina Mallet, was described by Marjorie Sidgwick in the *E.F.D.S. News* in 1930: "The first Oxford teacher was an East London club girl, looking about fourteen,

³⁵⁸ Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin & Co., Ltd; Novello & Co., Ltd, 1907), 134.

³⁵⁹ Held at the LSE Women's Library, catalog number 8SUF/B/045.

³⁶⁰ Boyes, *The Imagined Village*, 85.

almost a slum girl, probably a gypsy, a brown-eyed goblin with feet trained by London barrel organs, taking a class of forty middle-aged schoolmistresses with expert calm.”³⁶¹ Sidgwick was keen to highlight the “broadmindedness” of the Oxford schoolmistresses; her biting description of Mallet emphasizes the urban street “slum” environments from which this “probable gypsy” had arisen, setting it at odds with the rural idylls from which these folk dances had supposedly sprung. Even if the girls and women at the United Suffragists Women’s Club did reach a standard of performance which would have allowed them to participate in Neal’s teaching mission, judgments based on their social backgrounds would have proved another hurdle for them to overcome.³⁶² Although the juxtaposition of pastoral rural music in an urban space became another way in which the Women’s Club created a liminal space of encounter and possibility, it is impossible to know whether, for the Club members, this utopian vision of folk dance as a levelling factor became a reality.

Gramophone music

The provision of folk dance and music in the middle of the metropolis reflected Evelyn Sharp’s vision of these arts as symbols of an “eternal and unchanging” past in a “modern machine-driven world.”³⁶³ Yet despite the Club’s emphasis on live musical performance,

³⁶¹ Quoted in Helen Kennedy North et al., “A Jubilee Symposium,” *Folk Music Journal* 2, no. 2 (1971): 79–101.

³⁶² The girls of the Espérance Club faced difficulties when visiting stately homes in the country to teach folk dances, reporting uncertainties on how to behave in these new social circles: Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World*, 136.

³⁶³ Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure*, 294.

what comes across most vividly from written descriptions is the vital importance of the machine-driven music of the gramophone to the Club's activities.

Although I have described the Club thus far in terms of education and socialist politics, its stated goals emphasized the creation of a community for mutual support:

But I suppose what is really happening at the Club is that we are all helping one another to get over stiles at this most difficult and tragic time in our history; and whether we are trying to keep ideas alive at our Suffrage meeting on Tuesday evening, or listening to the cheery entertainments provided on Thursday evening by Miss Hilda Saxe, or bringing to our resourceful Secretary, Miss Cochrane, all sorts of knotty points to be settled, from the teeth of Mrs. A.'s baby to the delayed separation allowance of Mrs. Z., whether we are sharing in the activities of the Club or merely using it, as a man does, as a place in which to sit and have a meal, I suppose it is true in a way to say that the Club means good fellowship to us all.³⁶⁴

In many ways, this community-building was facilitated by the Club's gramophone. When the Club organizers encountered problems in finding performers for the Thursday night concerts, the evening's entertainments still took place, in the guise of gramophone concerts.³⁶⁵ It seems likely that the gramophone concerts would have proceeded with the formality of live concerts; the gramophone is described as a direct replacement for the concert. This was not a unique phenomenon: gramophone concerts were a familiar concept thanks not the industry's sales campaigns that had publicized the new technology at the beginning of the century. In January 1907, the *Musical Herald* reported a "mammoth gramophone concert" taking place at the Albert Hall, "at which some striking 'reproductions' of famous vocalists were given."³⁶⁶ The appearance of a gramophone concert in this venue would have done much to legitimize the new technology as equal to

³⁶⁴ *Votes for Women*, July 2, 1915, 327.

³⁶⁵ *Votes for Women*, December 3, 1915, 74; January 21, 1916.

³⁶⁶ *Musical Herald*, January 1, 1907, 12.

live performances by the world's greatest performers; it also would have inspired "normal" concert etiquette in its audience. Nicholas Cook describes an advert for the Columbia record company in February 1915 that showed a couple listening to their gramophone dressed in a dinner jacket and a formal evening gown.³⁶⁷ He also quotes from an advertisement from April 1914, that suggests that listeners applauded the recorded performances by famous singers that they heard in the comfort of their own homes.

The evening concert series was not the only instance in which recorded music apparently replaced live music in the Women's Club. Just one month after the Club had opened, an article in *Votes for Women* stated: "Our splendid gramophone has been a tremendous success; for a few evenings it quite put the piano in the shade, but the balance of power is, I am happy to say, once more restored, otherwise the "Tipperary" record would no doubt have been worn out by this time."³⁶⁸ Part of the sidelining of the piano—the typical Victorian parlor instrument—in favor of the gramophone may of course have been due to its novelty. Although Peter Martland suggests that by the outbreak of the First World War 40 percent of British households owned a gramophone, with particularly high demographics among the households of skilled and semi-skilled workers, many of the women attending the Club were from more impoverished households that may well not have been able to afford such a luxury. S.C. Williams's interviews with Southwark inhabitants mention pianos in their homes, but no gramophones.³⁶⁹ Even if they did own

³⁶⁷ Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 341.

³⁶⁸ *Votes for Women*, December 18, 1914, 90.

³⁶⁹ Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939*, 43.

one, the financial hardships of wartime, particularly for soldiers' wives dependent on meager living allowances, would have made purchasing new records more difficult. The Club's provision of access to this technology can be seen as another formulation of the "levelling" achieved by the folk dancing and singing. The previous quotation, however, notes that eventually the "balance of power" was restored: the writer thought that the "natural order" of things would be for live music to take precedence over its mechanized reproduction. Disputes over the value of recorded music in relation to live musical performance had accompanied the technology almost from its inception, particularly with respect to women's domestic lives. William Howland Kenney traces how women became defined as the primary audience for recorded music, and in doing so were relieved of the "burden" of practicing instruments; but that in response, concerns flourished over the effortlessness of producing music in the home.³⁷⁰

"Tipperary," the record identified as most popular among the Club members in the previous quotation, was a patriotic music-hall song that came to be the most emblematic song of the First World War. Although it had been composed in 1912, a surge in its popularity came from an article in the *Daily Mail* in August 1914 that reported troops singing it as they volunteered for the Army. The article described it as the "first original marching song of the war"; by the end of 1914, 10,000 copies of the sheet music were sold daily.³⁷¹ John Mullen situates "Tipperary" within the tradition of "cheer-up" songs that encouraged listeners to maintain hope and continue with their daily lives

³⁷⁰ William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 53, 89.

³⁷¹ Baker, *British Music Hall*, 157. Barker, *The House That Stoll Built: The Story of the Coliseum Theatre*, 116.

despite the hardships of the War.³⁷² In the context of the Women's Club, it seems likely that the song would have been listened to repeatedly not simply because of its cheery nature, but because of its close identification with the troops.³⁷³ While listening to the record—most likely the version recorded by tenor John McCormack in 1914—the women of the Club were able to substitute the voices emanating from the gramophone with those of their loved ones who had enlisted. In McCormack's rendition, he is accompanied by a military band and joined by a chorus of male voices. Although the chorus sings close harmonies, the voices do not necessarily sound highly-trained; it is difficult to distinguish the lower voices, but one voice in particular on an upper part sounds strained, either in an attempt to reach the notes or to project into the recording horn. It is not a stretch to imagine a chorus of “real” soldiers, rather than singers acting the part, backing McCormack.³⁷⁴ Thus “Tipperary,” via the gramophone, allowed the soundtrack of the War, and the voices of the absent men participating in it, to penetrate the walls of the women-only space of the Club.

Although Peter Martland describes that, during the War, demand for patriotic records was replaced by purchases of ballads and sentimental songs, it is small wonder that these are not mentioned in the descriptions of the Club's gramophone preferences. By 1924, Rudolph Lothar was already examining the linkage between recorded music and memory: “the machine demands that we give bodies to the sounds emanating from it.

³⁷² Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, 159.

³⁷³ The popularity of the song among troops was such that that numerous sets of *contrafacta* lyrics were created, notably “That's the wrong way to tickle Mary.”

³⁷⁴ McCormack's own trained tenor voice was part of the tendency by record companies to use opera singers to record folk and popular songs in order to “lend their cultural prestige” to lowbrow music. See Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life*, 50.

... we see trumpets flashing in the sun when we listen to military marches.”³⁷⁵ The patriotic marches and Army songs enabled women to picture their absent relatives fighting abroad, and more importantly, remaining alive and well enough to keep singing, for as long as the gramophone kept playing.

Other descriptions of the Club’s gramophone give less attention to the music coming from it, and more to what was taking place under cover of the music.

You would think that conversation might flourish more easily without the gramophone; but it doesn’t really. In a competition with ‘Tipperary’ the thrilling account of how “my Joey” developed measles just as he was off for a country holiday wins easily; and it is surprising how soon you grow accustomed to conversing under cover of a brass band “record.”³⁷⁶

But our quiet room was a complete failure. What our members really like to do is to congregate in the ground floor room adjoining the restaurant, set the gramophone going, and under cover of its cheery optimism discuss everything under the sun, from the war to the Lord Mayor’s Show, and from Mrs. Hampshire’s new hat to Mrs. Lloyd’s new baby.³⁷⁷

In 2017, it seems no great mystery that background music facilitated free and easy conversation; any time we go to a coffee shop, restaurant, or other social space, music plays in the background. Even in spaces not specifically designated for socializing, such as supermarkets and doctor’s offices, recorded music often plays as an aural panacea. However, in 1915, the phenomenon of the new technology of the gramophone acting not as a focal point but as a sonic background was worthy of comment. Talking underneath the gramophone was something that took practice, that people had to “become accustomed to.” What is more, despite modern conceptions of “background” music, in

³⁷⁵ Quoted in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Writing Science (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999), 45.

³⁷⁶ *Votes for Women*, July 2, 1915, 327.

³⁷⁷ *Votes for Women*, November 19, 1915, 61.

these descriptions the gramophone noise is foregrounded, acting as a cover behind which the club members could have frank conversations about their lives and emotions, at a volume that causes speakers to “compete” with it to be heard. The descriptions imply that it acted as a kind of curtain, or auditory barrier, behind which the real “work” of the Club, in terms of building fellowship and camaraderie, took place.

The November 1915 article in *Votes for Women* (see previous page) makes particular note of the gramophone’s “cheery optimism.” The mentions of “Tipperary” and brass band records imply that the records played on the gramophone during these social gatherings were not necessarily the classical ones that might have featured during the evening gramophone concerts. Jonathan Rose traces the link between brass bands and the working classes, stemming from the roots of workplace bands in places of industrial employment, particularly in the collieries.³⁷⁸ Records from military bands had always been one of the main outputs of record companies, as the instruments were captured by the early technology far better than strings or singers; but whereas prior to the War their records focused on classical repertoire, records released during the War shifted towards patriotic and military marches. For example, the Band of the Coldstream Guards released recordings of Schubert’s *Marche militaire* and selections from Audran’s comic opera *La Poupée* in November 1912 on the H.M.V. label; June 1913 saw the same band perform “Reminiscences of Verdi,” and arrangements from *Swan Lake*.³⁷⁹ By March 1915, the band was releasing records of marches titled “The Four Flags” and “Wake Up England!” June 1915 saw the Metropolitan Military Band recording a composition by an unnamed

³⁷⁸ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 2nd ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 197.

³⁷⁹ *His Master’s Voice* new records catalog, November 1912. Accessed online via the British Library.

sailor, dedicated to Admiral Jellicoe and the British Fleet. Pathé's offerings from 1917 included the Band of H.M. King's Colonials, the Band of H.M. Grenadier Guards, and the Band of H.M. Scots Guards performing marches including the "Savoy Lancers," "Till the Boys Come Home," and "Humoresque on Tipperary," still mingled with classical and ragtime repertoire.³⁸⁰ Zonophone's complete catalog, as issued in 1917, has pages of listings for the Black Diamonds Band; the first pages are all classical repertoire, and then there is a marked shift towards military marches presumably coinciding with the outbreak of war, including regimental marches and records titled "Fighting for Liberty," "Private Tommy Atkins," and "Jack and Tommy's Tunes."³⁸¹

The patriotic records released by "real life" Army bands created an acoustic space that was aligned with the official public stance on the war effort, full of martial vigor: even the advertisements featured images of soldiers in full military regalia. Within this atmosphere, less positive opinions on the War could be voiced, while the gramophone provided a mechanized patriotic overlay that would remove any aura of dissent or discontent from the room. If, in Mark Katz's formulation, "the phonograph is a mirror, not simply of music, but of society," in the United Suffragists' Women's Club the phonograph mirrored the pro-War spirit of the nation, and thereby removed this task from the female members.³⁸² For the time that they were in the Club, at least, the women were relieved of the need to publically perform their patriotism, and could instead discuss the

³⁸⁰ Pathé record catalogue, 1917. Accessed online via the British Library.

³⁸¹ Jack and Tommy were slang for the generic British sailor and soldier, respectively. Zonophone had been acquired by the Gramophone Company in 1903 as their label for popular music, music hall songs, and brass bands, as opposed to their classical records issued via their main label (Peter Martland, *Recording History: The British Record Industry, 1888-1931* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 164.

³⁸² Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 71.

difficulties and hardships of the War, while the gramophone parroted its mechanized, repetitive patriotism over the top. The gramophone's cheerful obliviousness to events in the lives of its listeners was demonstrated in another anecdote from Evelyn Sharp: after a United Suffragists' fundraising event was interrupted by an air raid, which the organizers and participants had to wait out with only the help of "large cups of very strong tea," someone put a record on, "the first record she picked up." Sharp wrote, "it seemed part of the madness of that evening that... it wheezed out the popular song of the moment, 'When you come to the end of a perfect day.'"³⁸³ Although this is a slower ballad, very sentimental in tone, it still holds an optimistic message ("And we find at the end of a perfect day / the soul of a friend we've made"). The song was another incredibly popular one among troops during the War; and Sharp's amusement at its presence in such an incongruous situation, even under bomb fire, demonstrates the power of the gramophone to invade the sonic space of the Club with cheerfulness and optimism that was otherwise unable to be generated.

If we accept the idea of the gramophone as a patriotic foil to less pro-War conversations, we still have to ask whose ears the gramophone was foiling. Were the working-class women of the Club wary of the middle-class philanthropists running it, concerned that they might overhear their domestic and industrial problems and judge them accordingly? Did the gramophone become a tool of the working-class members, used literally to occlude their words from institutional governance? Gramophone companies had capitalized on, and even deepened, divisions between the working- and middle-classes through their marketing strategies and choices of records. Complaints in

³⁸³ Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure*, 164.

elite gramophone newsletters took issue with music-hall songs taking up record companies' time and money, diverting them from producing recordings of classical music. The initial adoption of the gramophone by the skilled and semi-skilled industrial working classes meant that, in order to diversify their market, record companies targeted middle-class customers in their advertising, persuading them that gramophones were essential to a comfortable life of leisure.³⁸⁴ However, the technology struggled to shake off its association with the lower classes, and records continued to be sold in tobacconists and general stores as well as in high-end piano retailers and music shops. Taking into account these class frictions, our reading of the Women's Club gramophone may reveal the gramophone as a form of subtle dissent by the working-class members against the middle-class philanthropists. If, as Kate Lacey suggests, choosing what record to listen to was a form of control, then the members of the Club were able to exert aural control over the space of the Club, ostensibly theirs but in reality controlled by the United Suffragists.³⁸⁵

Lacey also suggests that, although gramophone listeners controlled what they listened to, the gramophone simultaneously controlled them, transforming the public audience "to a mute collection of individualized customers subjected to the silence of discipline and restraint."³⁸⁶ In the Women's Club, the gramophone allowed the opposite to happen. The members used the gramophone to facilitate conversation, moving away from the "natural order" of the silence and attentiveness given to live music and choosing

³⁸⁴ Martland, *Recording History*, 160.

³⁸⁵ Kate Lacey, ed., *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 78.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

instead to make their sound world one in which individual expression could take place alongside the gramophone's music. As they made the records of soldiers and military bands a near-constant soundtrack to their activities, either of conversation or of work such as knitting and sewing, the women of the Club opposed their musical choices to the regimented timetable of folk music and classical music. The periods of listening to gramophone records were a space of freedom, outside of the almost militarized timetable of activities otherwise designated for the Club's members.

Clearly the gramophone did not provide a total veil for the women's conversations. The articles in *Votes for Women* provide snippets of conversations relating to children, fashion, and of course the War. Perhaps, then, the gramophone as cover was not a cover against other people listening, but simply against silence. The "complete failure" of the Club's quiet room, and the emphasis on constant background music, indicates that an avoidance of silence was vital for many of the women using the Club. One newspaper report quoted Lady Forbes-Robertson's description of a "poor mother, who heard on the same day that her two sons were missing and came round to the club for fear she should go mad."³⁸⁷ Rather than grieving alone, this mother chose the noise and companionship of the Club. Madness lay in the silence of her house and the absence of her songs; the noise and companionship of the Club was her immediate avenue for comfort. Lacey writes, "Silence can connote peace, but also terror, loneliness, death"; similarly, Mary Favret's beautiful analysis of silence and stillness in Romantic wartime literature calls on Hannah Arendt's identification of the "absolute silence of violence."³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ Quoted in the *Lincolnshire Echo*, November 25, 1916, 2.

³⁸⁸ Lacey, *Listening Publics*, 83. Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 102.

In the face of the silence of war for the women at home, removed by distance from the noise of the guns and shells that the troops faced abroad, the constant noise produced by the gramophone created a sonic social space that symbolized companionship and community.

Conclusion

The United Suffragists' Women's Club provided a social space for the impoverished and marginalized working-class women of Southwark, as part of the organization's mission of promoting the suffrage cause at a time when the national campaign had ground to a halt. Musical entertainment was central to the Club's work, taking place in the form of concerts, folk dance lessons, and a readily-available gramophone that the Club members could listen to on demand. These musical activities, mentioned in almost every single article that exists on the Club, were emblematic of the United Suffragists' mission in their relief work. They both looked to the future, by empowering women to aspire to different social conditions—ones in which they would be permitted to participate in middle-class social venues and entertainments, or ones in which their creativity was valued just as much as their industrial employment—as well as providing them with tools and opportunities to improve their lives in the present.

The provisions of music for all reflected the organization's socialist agenda. The concerts allowed the working-class members to hear professional performers who otherwise appeared on concert platforms and opera stages. The dance lessons not only provided a creative outlet and physical exercise, but may even have furthered the participants' earning potential, by equipping them to teach these dances in the future,

following in the footsteps of Neal's Espérance Club members. Finally, the gramophone created a social sonic space, generating both an immediate community, of women bound together by their acoustic environment, and an imagined community, as they listened to the same records as troops fighting on the Continent. The gramophone's "cheery optimism" took on some of the emotional labor of the women's daily lives, temporarily relieving them of their need to maintain an optimistic exterior and allowing them free and frank discussion and a supportive environment to talk about their personal tragedies in the loss of their menfolk. It provided the Club members with the agency to control their sonic surroundings for their personal purposes, and to prioritize their mental and emotional needs for once.

I began this chapter by imagining the continued existence of the "Women's Marseillaise" during the War, transformed from a public blast of militant fervor into a quieter emblem of the movement's continued existence. The United Suffragists' Women's Club is proof that the suffragists, and the women they worked with during the War, were able to find routes for music to enact change and to represent the suffrage cause. The suffrage movement was not subjected to the violence of silence: the voices of its proponents could still be heard, in the gaps between the gramophone records.

Chapter 4

Lena Ashwell's Concerts at the Front:

Performing Gender Beyond the Home Front

In 1917, the newly-formed Imperial War Museum³⁸⁹ (I.W.M.) appointed a Women's Work Sub-Committee to record the work undertaken by women during the First World War.³⁹⁰ They supervised the collection of ephemera relating to British women's labor on the Home Front and in the theatres of war, and in May 1918 began to add artwork commissions to their remit.³⁹¹ Alongside paintings and photographs, the Sub-Committee commissioned canvas and plaster models, recorded in their catalog as 'dioramas,' from female sculptors and model-makers to represent the main categories of women's war work. Eighteen models were produced, depicting scenes including a munitions factory, hospitals, canteens, women police officers, Land Girls, and Forage Corps.³⁹² One of these models is somewhat different in terms of its subject matter: it illustrates a moment of entertainment, a performance of a scene from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*,

³⁸⁹ The Museum, established in 1917, was originally named the National War Museum; it was renamed the Imperial War Museum soon afterwards, and remains operational under that name today. See Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: A Social History* (London; New York: Leicester University Press, 1994) ; also "History of IWM," accessed May 31, 2017, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/corporate/about-IWM>.

³⁹⁰ This was one of several sub-committees, others of which included Admiralty, munitions, War Office, and Red Cross sub-committees (Ibid., 126). Committee members included Ethel Conway, the daughter of the Honorary Director-General of the Museum, Sir Martin Conway; Lady Priscilla Norman, who had worked in France during the first few months of the War running a hospital, and who was Chair of the sub-committee; and Lady Askwith, Lady Mond (wife of the Chairman of the Museum), and Lady Haig (wife of Field Marshal Douglas Haig). The Women's Work Sub-Committee did not receive as much funding, space, or support from the Museum directorship as the other sub-committees, and was dissolved in December 1920.

³⁹¹ For a detailed description of the types of artistic material gathered by the Women's Work Sub-Committee, see Katy Deepwell, "Women War Artists of World War One," in *Women's Contributions to Visual Culture, 1918-1939*, ed. Karen Brown (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 11-36.

³⁹² Ibid., 16-17.

with actors in brightly-colored costumes performing to khaki-clad troops on a proscenium arch stage (see Figure 4-1).³⁹³



Figure 4-1: view of the Lena Ashwell diorama, IWM catalog number MOD 21. Photograph by Vanessa Williams

³⁹³ The model is listed as MOD 21 in the Imperial War Museum's catalog, and is held in their storage facility at IWM Duxford. The scene is one of the "casket" scenes from Act II of the play.



Figure 4-2: close-up of staff officer. Photograph by Vanessa Williams

across Europe to entertain troops for most of the war.³⁹⁵ The figures in the audience depict troops from across the services, both army and navy, with some in convalescent clothes, and possibly some female nurses. A staff sergeant is identified by the scarlet band on his cap (Figure 4-2).³⁹⁶ Other soldiers appear to be “rank and file,” but still with

The full title of the model, made by Ethel Pye, is given in the catalog as “Lena Ashwell Concert Party at Le Havre.”³⁹⁴ It illustrates a specific production of *The Merchant of Venice* that took place in 1918 in a theatre at the large base camp in Le Havre. The production had been organized by actress Penelope Wheeler in conjunction with Lena Ashwell’s Concerts at the Front, a program which, under the auspices of the Y.M.C.A., sent musicians and actors

³⁹⁴ This appears to have been the only model contributed by Pye to the collection. One of Pye’s other surviving works, a bronze sculpture titled *Marne 1914-1919*, is held in the Library of the Society of Friends (<https://quakerstrongrooms.org/2014/11/28/library-resources-for-researching-world-war-i-visual-resources/>, accessed May 31, 2017). Pye’s sister Edith established a maternity hospital for refugees in France during the War, in conjunction with the Quaker organization, the Friends War Victims Relief Committee;

³⁹⁵ Ashwell details Wheeler’s work in France in her autobiography, *Lena Ashwell, Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front* (London: Gyldendal, 1922), 175–79. Ashwell describes the production of *The Merchant of Venice* in particular as a “great effort.” Wheeler herself played the role of Portia (J. G. Paul Delaney, *Charles Ricketts: A Biography* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press, 1990), 304).

³⁹⁶ Cross-references to military uniforms come from Jonathan North and Jeremy Black, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Uniforms of World War I: An Expert Guide to the Uniforms of Britain, France, Russia,*

differentiations within their uniform: one soldier's cap seems to be a Glengarry, denoting a member of one of the Highland regiments (Figure 4-3). A sailor is shown by his square collar (Figure 4-4). Although it is unlikely that a single audience was ever comprised of such a varied collection of troops, this model includes them in order to demonstrate the vast cross-section of audience members who attended performances during the



Figure 4-3: view of soldier in Glengarry cap. Photograph by Vanessa Williams

years of operation of Ashwell's program. The contrast between the dull colors of the uniforms is heightened by the brightness of the colors of the costumes on stage (Figure 4-5): the costumes for the 1918 production were designed by artist Charles Ricketts, who hand-stencilled the fabric himself and also designed the backdrop.³⁹⁷

America, Germany and Austria-Hungary, with Additional Detail on the Armies of Portugal, Belgium, Italy, Serbia, the Ottomans, Japan and More (London: Lorenz Books, 2010).

³⁹⁷ Richard Allen Cave, *Charles Ricketts' Stage Designs* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1987), 60–61; Charles Ricketts, *Self-Portrait Taken from the Letters & Journals of Charles Ricketts, R.A. Collected and Compiled by T. Sturge Moore Edited by Cecil Lewis* (London: Peter Davies, 1939), 302. Ricketts became a stage designer relatively late in his career, and thought of them as a “holiday pursuit” which he undertook mostly for free out of friendship for the dramatists and actresses involved (Cave and Consortium for Drama and Media in Higher Education, *Charles Ricketts' Stage Designs*, 11). Penelope Wheeler had previously worked with Ricketts in London, and was able to secure his help for this production.



Figure 4-4: close-up of naval collar. Photograph by Vanessa Williams

Ricketts was also the Honorary Technical Advisor on Models for the Women's Work Sub-Committee, advising on appropriate commission fees and durability of materials: his personal involvement perhaps sheds some light on why this particular production was chosen to be modeled, rather than one of Ashwell's musical concert parties.³⁹⁸

The model stands out amongst the I.W.M.'s collection of dioramas because of its depiction of

a recreational pursuit, rather than scenes of manual labor and medicinal care that comprise the rest of the collection. The inclusion of this model in the collection demonstrates that the Women's Work Sub-Committee considered the roles of these performers to be more than simply entertainers: instead, the performers, and Ashwell's program as a whole, was immortalized in the permanent collection as a vital part of women's labor during the War. The model is also exceptional because it shows the

³⁹⁸ Minutes of the Women's Work Sub-Committee, May 10, 1917, June 19, 1918, etc: Imperial War Museum EN/1/1/COM/24/2. Ricketts was also acquainted with Ethel Pye through her father, who was on good enough terms with Ricketts to take his daughters to his house for tea (Ricketts, *Self-Portrait Taken from the Letters & Journals of Charles Ricketts, R.A. Collected and Compiled by T. Sturge Moore Edited by Cecil Lewis*, 225).

recipients of the women's work, in this case the audience. The other dioramas focus solely on women's labor: this one highlights the relationship between the workers and the beneficiaries of the work, emphasizing that the presence of both parties was necessary for the work to take place. Munitions could be made without the soldiers who would fire them; bandages could be wound without the limbs to put them on; but this play could not be



Figure 4-5: close-up of costume. Photograph by Vanessa Williams

performed without an audience. Yet the woman for who the model is named—Lena Ashwell—is absent from the artwork, present in name only. Her personal labor—traveling across Great Britain to raise money and recruit performers, as well as her multiple trips to France to check on the concert parties and occasionally perform—is invisible.³⁹⁹ The impetus for the model, in terms of exactly whose work is being shown,

³⁹⁹ Ashwell's name would have carried with it a well-known history at the time of the model's creation. As well as her work for the Concerts at the Front, she was a famous actress, theatre manager, and campaigner for women's suffrage. The only full biography of Ashwell is Margaret Leask *Lena Ashwell: Actress, Patriot, Pioneer* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2012). After a successful career as an actress, Ashwell took on the role of manager of the Kingsway Theatre in 1908, receiving a great deal of press attention as a female theatre manager. She was an active philanthropist and charity campaigner, particularly for women's causes, notably fundraising for Dr Simson's Women's Hospital in Soho. In 1911 she established the Three Arts Club, with the aim of providing accommodation to young actresses working in London and, eventually, in other cities: the stated intention was "to help those who are not yet firmly established on the ladder of success... it will also safeguard girls in the theatrical profession unused to

is unclear: is it Ashwell's, or the performers on the stage? The model therefore holds in tension the relationships between labor and recreation, between performers and audience, between civilians and troops, between institutions and individuals, and between the Home Front and the Theatres of War.

This chapter focuses on the work of Ashwell's concert parties and the tensions exemplified by this model in order to discuss ways in which women's labor beyond the Home Front during the First World War was governed by institutions (in this case the War Office and the Y.M.C.A.), and transformed by individuals within the male-dominated military zone. I begin by describing the structure and operations of the concert party program, before examining ways in which the work of the concert parties was framed in order to mediate the multi-faceted power dynamic between Ashwell, the Y.M.C.A., the War Office, and the performers themselves. I discuss the ways in which the program was described in medical terms, drawing on tactics used by other women to volunteer at the Front, and the ways in which the narrative of "music as medicine" related not only to music but to the musicians, as embodiments of inspirational nationhood. The performers' roles as para-nurses extended into other forms of domestic, social roles typical of Edwardian British society, and I position these alternative roles in relation to geographical transitions between civilian and military zones in order to suggest ways in which traditional forms of women's labor operated within the radical new context of the Western Front.

London life" (Ibid., 95). In December 1913, Ashwell was one of thirteen women suggested by the *Daily Sketch* for inclusion in the King's Honour's List, an award that was only available to men at that time. She was finally recognized in August 1917 for her work, receiving the new Order of the British Empire. Her theatrical endeavors in London and connections with the highest circles of classical art continued throughout the First World War; in 1916 she produced *The Starlight Express*, with original music by Edward Elgar.

Lena Ashwell's Concerts at the Front

In Ashwell's 1922 book "Modern Troubadours," her account of the Concerts at the Front, she writes that she conceived of a nationally-organized scheme of entertainment for troops as soon as war was declared in August 1914.⁴⁰⁰ That October, she sent a proposal to the War Office that had been sanctioned by "representative Generals and Bishops of the Church" as a guarantee of respectability; but this met with no success. It was not until January 1915 that an invitation for a concert party to visit Le Havre came to Ashwell via the Ladies' Auxiliary Committee of the Y.M.C.A., with the direct involvement of Princess Helena Victoria.⁴⁰¹ The Y.M.C.A.'s credentials as an organization vital to the British army in wartime were already well established, thanks to its activities during the Boer War and in camps with the pre-war Volunteers and Territorial Force.⁴⁰² Its endorsement, combined with that of a member of the monarchy, was able to sway the War Office where Ashwell could not.

In some respects, Ashwell and the Y.M.C.A. did not make the most natural pairing. As a Christian organization, the Y.M.C.A. was initially suspicious of actors and musicians, assuming a broad immorality associated with the world of entertainment that was not in line with the organization's own aims and ethics. Ashwell considered one of the major achievements of the Concerts at the Front to be the "breaking down of barriers

⁴⁰⁰ I draw heavily on this text as an account of the Concerts at the Front program written very soon after the War; many of the anecdotes in it were republished from articles in Y.M.C.A. publications. This article also makes extensive use of Ashwell's scrapbooks of press cuttings, held at the Imperial War Museum, LBY 09/771. These "meticulous" scrapbooks formed a large part of the material for Margaret Leask's biography of Ashwell (see Leask, *Lena Ashwell*, xvii, 160).

⁴⁰¹ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 6. Princess Helena Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein was one of Queen Victoria's grandchildren, dropping her Germanic designation, along with the rest of the royal family, in 1917.

⁴⁰² M. F. Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars*, Christianity and Society in the Modern World (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005), 208.

due to misunderstanding... So many of those working with the Y.M.C.A. who had never been to a play, and thought with the Puritans of old that all recreations were evil... took to plays like ducks to water.”⁴⁰³ Due in part to their initial concerns, the Y.M.C.A. did not express confidence in the plan by funding the first series of concerts: the expenses were paid by an unnamed friend of Ashwell’s. Pianist Theodore Flint travelled ahead to make the arrangements for the concert party, and the rest of the group—a soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, entertainer, and instrumentalist—followed in February 1915. This first party gave 39 concerts in 15 days.⁴⁰⁴

The success of the first concert party paved the way for more to follow almost immediately. By the Armistice (November 11, 1918), there were twenty-five concert parties on rotation in France. Five parties toured around the country every month, while the permanent parties remained in one place for four to six months, based variously at Abbeville, Boulogne, Le Havre, Rouen, Trouville, Dieppe, Marseilles, Etaples, and Cherbourg.⁴⁰⁵ Nine firing-line parties, composed of men only, were sent out between January 1916 and February 1917.⁴⁰⁶ There was also one party in Egypt, and three in

⁴⁰³ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 7.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰⁵ Civilians were forced to remain behind the lines of communication in France, although an article by Lena Ashwell in *The Nineteenth Century* stated that “we have been very near [to the Front]” (n.d.; copy held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook,” Imperial War Museum). No-one in France, neither troops nor civilians, were allowed to give their exact location in any correspondence, which led to numerous articles and letters referring simply to ‘Somewhere in France.’ On some occasions, concerts given by the touring parties were broadcast to troops on active duty further up the line via telephone wires. Ashwell was keen to emphasize that even when parties did not travel up to the firing lines, they were still in dangerous zones of military activity, particularly in 1917 when air strikes took place along the coast of France: she considered the touring parties performing at Calais in 1917 to be included amongst the “firing-line experiences” (Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 170). The permanent parties were formed at the end of 1915, for the purpose of doing work which was impossible for the touring parties. This included forming orchestras and choirs that the troops themselves could join (*Ibid.*, 36).

⁴⁰⁶ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 150. Ashwell met with Prime Minister Lloyd George in October 1916 to argue that, after the previous success of the three male-only firing line parties, and the impossibility of male-only parties given the demands of conscription, mixed parties should be allowed to travel to the front lines (*Ibid.*, 59). Her argument included using only parties

Malta.⁴⁰⁷ The concerts took place in Y.M.C.A. huts, hospital wards, and makeshift outdoor venues (see Figure 4-6), as well as in existing concert halls in the larger cities. Each member of a party typically performed four pieces consecutively, twice during each show, with each party performing two and sometimes three concerts per day.⁴⁰⁸ Their repertoire was a mix of classical works with light popular songs, folksongs, and ragtime songs. Performers were drawn from Ashwell's professional contacts, as well as from members of her Three Arts Club that she had established in 1911 to provide



Figure 4-6: photograph of an open-air performance, showing one of Ashwell's concert parties on a makeshift stage. Photograph (c) Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, The University of Birmingham

who had already worked in France, and had given proof of their reliability. Her plea met with no success; it was not until over a year later that mixed parties could travel beyond the lines of communication.

⁴⁰⁷ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 77. Two of the Maltese parties were aided by another voluntary organization, the Red Cross, as Malta was used only as a hospital base and therefore the Y.M.C.A. had a lesser remit. Concert parties in Malta and Egypt were subject to different restrictions regarding where they could travel. The Egyptian concert party, stranded there from September 1916 until the end of the war due to the ban on traveling by sea, moved through Egypt and Palestine, giving concerts “in Jerusalem and Jaffa, and still nearer the actual firing-line” (*Yorkshire Post*, 25 July 1918; copy held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook”). They also received permission to travel to Salonica, but the permission was revoked due to the potential of submarine attacks (Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 92).

⁴⁰⁸ “Mr Charles Thomas Abroad,” *Western Daily Press*, July 28, 1916, 3.

accommodation for touring artists.⁴⁰⁹ She also auditioned performers as she traveled across Great Britain publicizing the scheme.⁴¹⁰

In addition to the musical concert parties, from November 1916 the actress Penelope Wheeler worked with Lena Ashwell to put together repertory companies to perform plays. The first company was based at the Central Y.M.C.A. at Le Havre, and performed Greek tragedies, Coventry Mystery plays, plays by Shakespeare, as well as more contemporary works: a different play was performed every week.⁴¹¹ As the work grew, seven soldier companies were established. Wheeler had a number of actresses but only two male actors in her company, and it was therefore left to soldiers to play the supporting men's roles. One of the self-described crowning achievements of Wheeler's and Ashwell's work in this area was a production of *The Mikado* at Rouen in which there were only three professional actors, the remaining company, chorus, and orchestra consisting of men from the Base and representatives from the Red Cross, Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, Women's Royal Naval Service, and the Y.M.C.A.⁴¹²

Ashwell's musicians were not the only parties of civilian musicians traveling out of Britain to entertain troops. After Scottish music hall star Harry Lauder's son was killed in action in December 1916, Lauder led a party to France with the dual purpose of

⁴⁰⁹ Ashwell's involvement with the Three Arts Club came to an end at some point after she began the Concerts at the Front. The exact reasons for this remain unclear: Ashwell simply wrote in her autobiography, "In the storm and stress of those days, disagreements and misunderstandings grew up, which in days of peace might have been avoided. After a few months it seemed better to organise the work independently." (Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 110.) Some press cuttings from early on in the Concerts at the Front scheme conflate Ashwell and the Three Arts Club, writing, for example, that the "seventh concert party sent out by the Three Arts Club Employment Bureau has left for France" (*Daily Telegraph*, June 23, 1915; held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook").

⁴¹⁰ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 122.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 175–76.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 185.

entertaining troops and visiting his son's grave in order to "understand something of what his son had experienced."⁴¹³ Lauder gave concerts that included speeches from James Hogge, an Edinburgh Member of Parliament, and George Adam, a Presbyterian curate, who informed troops about their pension rights and discussed the progress of the war. The party therefore provided information as much as entertainment; but their tour lasted only a few months before the British government asked Lauder to travel to the United States and Canada to publicly represent the British cause.⁴¹⁴ Another group of music hall stars traveled to Boulogne to entertain troops over the first Christmas of the war, before Ashwell was given permission to organize her concerts. The arrangements for their trip were documented in the *Era*, with the party led by actor Seymour Hicks and featuring his famous wife Ellaline Terriss alongside other singers and actors. Rumors of Marie Lloyd's involvement spread, although they were untrue. Whether or not this party was officially sanctioned by the War Office remains unclear: they certainly gave some concerts, but the *Era* reported that the concert scheduled for Christmas Eve in Boulogne did not take place due to "military reasons."⁴¹⁵ No press reports appeared of other concert parties traveling abroad, with the exception of Ashwell's, although many performers performed in army camps within Great Britain. The Army itself soon replicated music hall-style entertainments with divisional concert parties formed from its own members: men who were proficient as female impersonators were in such high demand that divisional staff

⁴¹³ Andrew Horrall, *Popular Culture in London C. 1890-1918: The Transformation of Entertainment* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 215.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴¹⁵ "Variety Gossip," *The Era*, December 30, 1914. The party returned somewhat the worse for wear, with Seymour Hicks being detained in Le Havre due to 'a chill,' and with other party members suffering from influenza, all ill-health being attributed to the poor weather and the strenuous conditions of their week-long tour ("Theatrical Gossip," *The Era*, January 6, 1915)



Figure 4-7: cartoon in *John Bull*. Held in Lena Ashwell's scrapbook at I.W.M.

became involved in finding them.⁴¹⁶

However, Ashwell's project remained the only long-term, large-scale civilian project for live entertainment for the troops over the course of the entire conflict, and the Amalgamated Musicians' Union described Ashwell and the Y.M.C.A. as having a "practical monopoly" of providing the entertainment for troops.⁴¹⁷

Ashwell's name became synonymous with the Concerts at the Front, as demonstrated

both by the A.M.U.'s comments and by the description of the Imperial War Museum model in the committee's notes as the "Ashwell model," despite the model depicting a play that was produced chiefly under the auspices of Penelope Wheeler. The total identification of Ashwell with the scheme in the eyes of the British public was demonstrated by a cartoon printed in the magazine *John Bull*, which showed Ashwell singing to troops (Figure 4-7). Ashwell never sang in the concert parties, although she gave some recitations; but the caption to this cartoon, as well as the publicity poster in the background, indicated that she stood in place all of her performers, taking center stage as

⁴¹⁶ Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), 602; Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918*, 95-99.

⁴¹⁷ W.H. Lowkes, "Organiser's Notes," *Musicians' Report and Journal*, Amalgamated Musicians' Union, December 1915, 9. This was not seen as a favorable situation by Lowkes, who argued that any young man whose values were not in line with those of the Y.M.C.A. would not attend these concerts and as a result would be driven into "the very channels everyone ought to be anxious to keep him out of."

musician as well as organizer. However, the joint nature of the project with the Y.M.C.A. meant that ownership and governance of the scheme was sometimes in dispute. Some of the permutations of the parties' billing can be seen in Figure 4-8. Ashwell insisted that all of the parties should go out under her name, leading to a disagreement with a Mr. McCowan, who stated the organization's opinion that the parties should be billed as Y.M.C.A. parties.⁴¹⁸ Ashwell's defense of her position encompassed two points: firstly, that the parties should not be subsumed into the larger organization, but should remain distinct in order to emphasize their worth as an artistic endeavor; and secondly, that her name indicated the professional status of the musicians, differentiating their work from the ad-hoc voluntary entertainments by soldiers and Y.M.C.A. staff that often took place in the Y.M.C.A. huts. She indicated that she viewed the attempt to remove her name, and all that it represented, from the scheme as symptomatic of the "indifference and contempt" that she saw directed towards musical and dramatic endeavors more broadly.⁴¹⁹ It is also possible that Ashwell felt that losing public ownership of the series would be the first step to a total loss of control to the Y.M.C.A. Her standards for the scheme were high: she had strong ideas about performers and repertoires, and although she was careful to emphasize that her program worked within the Y.M.C.A.'s agenda, she was able to implement her own artistic agenda as long as she remained in charge.

Ashwell's concern to keep her name attached to the scheme reflects a difficulty that many other women's voluntary organizations encountered in maintaining control

⁴¹⁸ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 132–33. It is unclear exactly what McCowan's position within the organization was, but he met Ashwell on all of her early visits to France and drove her to the various bases: it seems likely therefore that he was part of the governing body of the Y.M.C.A.'s work within France.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Y.M.C.A. TENT

Y.M.C.A. Etaples

SPECIAL VISIT.

of

Princess Victoria's


CONCERT PARTY

TUESDAY 18th May 7 p. m.
N° 1 Y.M.C.A. HUT

WEDNESDAY 19th May 7 p. m.
N° 2 Y.M.C.A. HUT

Apply for admission tickets at the huts

*Special Note: All men who will have their own families
R.A.M.C. - - - - - in hospital
to R.S.A.S. - - - - - from this regiment only.*



With the British Expeditionary Force

Y.M.C.A.

GRAND CONCERTS

22-27 March 1915

Miss LENA ASHWELL'S, Second Concert Party

Monday	No 1. — Stationary Hospital	3 p. m.
	Y. M. C. A. — Hut Bruyeres Camp	6-30 p. m.
Tuesday	No 9. — General Hospital	3 p. m.
	Y. M. C. A. — Hut Cavalry Camp	5-30 p. m.
Wednesday	Folies-Bergere Theatre	7-0 p. m.
Thursday	No 11. — Stationary Hospital	3-30 p. m.
	Y. M. C. A. — Territorial Camp	5-30 p. m.
Friday	No 12. — General Hospital	7-0 p. m.
	Y. M. C. A. — Hut 28 th Division	5-30 p. m.
Saturday	No 8. — General Hospital	3-0 p. m.
	M. T. — Depot Bapaume	7-0 p. m.

ARTISTES

Soprano . . . Miss Alice de la BELLANDIERE.
 Contralto. . . Miss Paola RIVERS.
 Violinist . . . Miss Gwendolyn TEAGLE.
 Tenor . . . Mr. Ivor NOVELLO.
 Bass-Baritone . . . Sergeant G. Rowland MORFITT, R. A. M. C.
 Entertainer . . . Mr. W. ROBINSON.
 Accompanist. . . Mr. Theodore FLINT.

Admission Free. Troops Only.

THE Y.M.C.A. PRESENT

A LENA ASHWELL CONCERT PARTY

at the _____

on _____

at _____

The Following Artists will Contribute to the Programme

Miss Anita Powell _____ Soprano	Miss Paula Desborough _____ Soubrette
" Alice A. E. Coppin _____ Contralto	" Grace Ivlie _____ Accompanis
" Dorothy F. Horne _____ Violinist	Mr. Hubert Hayden _____ Entertaine

Admission Officers 4 Mks., N. G. O. & O. R. 2 & 1 Mks

Y. M. C. A.

Miss LENA ASHWELL'S

5th CONCERT PARTY

GRAND-THÉÂTRE - HAVRE

June 26th 1915

PROGRAMME

Figure 4-8: publicity materials for Ashwell's concert parties. Held in Ashwell's scrapbook at I.W.M.

over their own work. In 1916 the War Office, finally realizing the value of the work of the independent organization of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, tried to assert its authority over them and subsume the program within the War Office; even with the establishment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Women's Royal Naval Service, and Women's Royal Air Force, the female commanders-in-chief found that they were figureheads, with the decision-making authority remaining largely with the men of the War Office.⁴²⁰ Ashwell, however, remained largely successful in running the concert party scheme according to her artistic vision, an important aspect of which was that women should be an integral part of the roster of performers: an imperative that was aligned with her involvement with the suffrage movement and the organization of women's labor during the War more generally.⁴²¹

The presence of women in the parties, although not seeming at all unusual by today's standards, was at the time a highly remarkable phenomenon. Many of the troops' comments to Ashwell, after seeing a concert party perform, related to the unusual position they found themselves in with regard to having female performers visit their camps. One captain wrote to her to say that his men thanked the concert party that visited them by singing "He's a Jolly Good Fellow," because they hadn't suitable words or songs with which to thank a lady.⁴²² Another group of soldiers in France pointed out the

⁴²⁰ Shipton, *Female Tommies*, 2014, 238.

⁴²¹ See Leask, *Lena Ashwell*, 108, 134. Ashwell also enabled women's employment in hitherto male-dominated professions, such as scene shifters and stage hands, within her own Kingsway Theatre during the War, and worked in support of the Women's Emergency Corps and the Three Arts Club Employment Committee. Her position was aligned with her strong support of the suffrage movement and her long-standing belief in equal employment for women (see *Ibid.*, 102–3), and was yet another reflection of the national debates over women's position in the wartime workforce that form the subject of Chapter Two of this dissertation.

⁴²² Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 31.

incongruity of women in their camp by pretending that the women were soldiers, escorting them back to their transport after a concert with comments like, “Mind the wire, Miss! Shell-hole at the next corner!”⁴²³ As the next section of this chapter will demonstrate, Ashwell received permission for women to participate in the Concerts at the Front, thereby pushing the boundaries of the types of labor opportunities available to women during the war. She achieved this, however, by framing her program within the expectations of the War Office as they related to traditional types of women’s labor, making use of the only officially-sanctioned route for women to work beyond the Home Front: that of nursing.

Medicinal music, medicalized musicians

Elisabeth Shipton writes that at the end of the nineteenth century, “it was generally felt... that women did not belong in conflict and that they would not be able to cope mentally or physically with the harsh reality and violence of war.”⁴²⁴ Nursing was the only officially-sanctioned option for women who wanted to participate in the war effort away from the Home Front, legitimized as a profession since Florence Nightingale’s work during the Crimean War.⁴²⁵ Shipton notes that “it was a logical extension of the traditional role of a caring mother, the doting daughter and the loving sister.”⁴²⁶ The War Office oversaw

⁴²³ Ibid., 178.

⁴²⁴ Shipton, *Female Tommies*, 2014, 10.

⁴²⁵ Hallett, *Containing Trauma*, 7. The British Army’s first permanent military nursing service was Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service, brought out of reforms made after the Boer War (Margaret Vining and Barton C. Hacker, “From Camp Follower to Lady in Uniform: Women, Social Class and Military Institutions before 1920,” *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 3 (2001): 360). Since 1887, professional nurses had been campaigning for political recognition and a state register (Fell and Hallett, *First World War Nursing*, 92).

⁴²⁶ Shipton, *Female Tommies*, 2014, 16.

some organizations that supplied nursing services, such as the British Red Cross and the Voluntary Aid Detachment Scheme (V.A.D.s), but with thousands of V.A.D. volunteers in the first months of the War, the Office was keen to limit the numbers of nurses traveling out to France.⁴²⁷ Women who offered their services in medical capacities other than nursing at the beginning of the war were flatly refused by the War Office, who actively tried to ban women from military zones towards the end of 1914.⁴²⁸ In response to this, middle- and upper-class women set up organizations to send women to the Front both as nurses, for example with the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry and the St. John Ambulance Association, and in other capacities, such as the Women's Emergency Corps and several different ambulance units. These organizations worked with Britain's allies, particularly Belgium and Serbia, and were able to operate much closer to the front lines than the official hospital nurses, with some going all the way up to the trenches.⁴²⁹

With the presence of women within zones of military action remaining a

⁴²⁷ Fell and Hallett, *First World War Nursing*, 1. At the beginning of the war, about 80,000 women were members of the V.A.D.; by the end of the war, the number was around 120,000. (Ibid., 92.) V.A.D.s were trained only in very basic nursing tasks, used more for manual labor such as cleaning the wards and feeding injured troops. They were mainly middle-class women who could afford to purchase the uniforms and who did not have to earn their own income. They were often at odds with the professional nurses, partly because of their lack of skill and partly because of the great deal of public attention given to them over the professional, lower-class, nurses. Memoirs of V.A.D.s have become cornerstones of First World War women's writing: for example, Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2005) ; Enid Bagnold, *A Diary without Dates* (Memphis: RareBooksClub, 2012) ; Irene Rathbone, *We That Were Young: A Novel* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1989). Christine Hallett discusses V.A.D.s' memoirs and writings in her chapter on "Emotional Nursing" in Fell and Hallett, *First World War Nursing*, 87–102.

⁴²⁸ Elisabeth Shipton, *Female Tommies: The Frontline Women of the First World War*, 2014, 35, 69. Famously, Dr Elsie Inglis went to the War Office in September 1914 and offered to equip and staff a hospital in France to the War Office. She was told, "my good lady, go home and sit still." (Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, (New York; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 51.) Inglis continued with her project with the support of the French government, founding the Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service and eventually sending women's hospital units to France, Corsica, Malta, Romania, Salonika, and Serbia. Many of the other volunteer schemes were set up by middle- and upper-class women, who had the resources and the leisure-time to dedicate to them, as well as experience in supporting philanthropic projects in peacetime.

⁴²⁹ Shipton, *Female Tommies*, 2014, 69, 85.

contentious topic, the act of sending female civilians to a war zone purely to provide entertainment was always going to face opposition from the War Office, and perhaps also from the general public whom Ashwell was asking to donate money to fund the concert parties. In order to justify her scheme, a large part of Ashwell's rhetoric focused on the medical benefits of her parties, framing her requests for funding in terms of the healing and therapeutic properties of the performances rather than solely on their entertainment purposes, and situating her project within the wider context of the aforementioned volunteer nursing organizations. Some of Ashwell's earliest public writings on the subject of concert parties cite testimonies from medical professionals. For example, in the Y.M.C.A. publication *The Y.M.* (later re-named *The Red Triangle*), in October 1915, she quoted a clinical paper called *The Hospital*:

Money for this purpose [that of the concert parties] is just as usefully expended as if it were spent on splints and bandages, for diversion and amusement are valuable aids to recovery from bodily ills, whether they be fevers or bullet wounds. It would probably be true to say that these concert parties have actually saved lives. Unquestionably they have brightened those of thousands of our soldiers just when they most needed diversion.⁴³⁰

Extant letters from Army doctors to Ashwell also extol the work of the concert parties, with one describing them as a “boon... especially to our convalescents to whom getting well is often a slow and tedious performance.”⁴³¹ The Army soon officially

⁴³⁰ Lena Ashwell, “Concerts for the Army,” *The Y.M.*, October 15, 1915, 944. Other examples include an article published in the *Star* on March 20, 1915, under the headline “‘Concert Better Than a Month’s Nursing,’ Says Doctor”: this article advertised tickets for a forthcoming fundraising concert (“Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook”). Another article, by Ashwell, in the *Evening News*, opens by setting the scene in a base hospital when news arrives that a concert party is visiting the next week. It continues, “The doctors tell us that we do more than physic in putting heart into war-worn convalescents” (Ibid.).

⁴³¹ The quoted letter is item Ladd/6383, from F. Steele to Lena Ashwell, undated, held at the Cadbury Research Archive at the University of Birmingham. Other extant letters within the Cadbury Research Archive include ones from Colonel Caton-Jones, Assistant Director of Medical Services, item LAdd/6379, and Private Garner of the Royal Army Medical Corps, item LAdd/6382.

recognized the value of music to the improved convalescence of soldiers, as well as to morale in general, and by the end of 1916 most divisions had their own official concert parties.⁴³² Back in England, convalescent hospitals established in many of England's stately homes soon followed suit and featured regular musical performances by both soldiers and female philanthropists, as Michelle Meinhart has traced; and music halls across the country gave thousands of free or subsidized tickets to recuperating soldiers.⁴³³ Jane Angell has described the contributions of the music press to public belief in the material benefits of music to wounded soldiers, quoting sources from late 1915 and 1916: i.e. after Ashwell's program had become established.⁴³⁴

In the case of the Concerts at the Front, many concerts took place within the hospital ward, accompanied on a portable piano taken from venue to venue by the parties. The audiences included not only wounded soldiers but also the doctors, nurses, and orderlies who attended them, who also sent their descriptions of the concerts to Ashwell. Ashwell quoted a nurse who wrote to her from a hospital at Wimereux:

they came and gave a concert in the orderly room, as the men in hospital were too bad for us to have a concert in the hospital itself; but afterwards those kind people came into each ward and sang softly, without any accompaniment, to the men who were well enough to listen, and the little Canadian story-teller went round

⁴³² Jeffrey S Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War*, 2011, 83–86; Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918*, 96.

⁴³³ Michelle Meinhart, “‘It’s a Long Way to Tipperary . . .’ and Tennessee: Unlikely Musical Exchanges in the English Country House during World War I” (Eighty-second Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Vancouver, 2016). Multiple articles appear in *The Era*, London’s theatrical newspaper, describing the attendance of wounded soldiers in music halls, and some even credit the musical performances with the restoration of hearing and speech to soldiers suffering from shell-shock (see for example *The Era*, August 9, 1916, 12). The discipline of music therapy was in its nascent stages, and would begin to be codified soon after the War: the first course in Musicotherapy was taught at Columbia University in 1919 by Margaret Anderton, a British pianist who had worked with wounded Canadian soldiers during the War. See Helen M. Tyler, “The Music Therapy Profession in Modern Britain,” in *Music as Medicine*, ed. Peregrine Horden (Aldershot ; Brookfield, USA: Ashgate, 2000), 379.

⁴³⁴ Jane Angell, “Art Music in British Public Discourse during the First World War” (Royal Holloway, 2014), 162–64.

and told his stories to each man in turn as they were having their dressings done, the result being, that instead of a mass of suffering humanity having their wounds dressed, the men were happy through the time that is usually so awful. It really was too nice, and so kind of those concert people to do it, as it must have been a very trying job for them: the sights and smells are gruesome.⁴³⁵



Figure 4-9: photograph labeled "Convalescents at a Concert." © Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, The University of Birmingham. This photograph was originally printed in *Strand Magazine*.

Ashwell noted the distressing nature of performing on the wards: "it seemed impertinent to intrude, and yet the first strains of music seemed to break up the spell of pain."⁴³⁶ Here, she ascribes the healing effects to the sounds of the music itself; elsewhere, she becomes even more specific about the physical properties of the music on the human mind, with the medico-scientific terminology of the day: "we bring a positive electric current, a mysterious magnetism, to change all these whirling mental electrons and make them vibrate to memories of happiness, love, and joy."⁴³⁷ In contrast, the nurse

⁴³⁵ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 11.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁷ With Captains Courageous 'Somewhere in France,'" *The Nineteenth Century*, August 1915; copy in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook."

at Wimereux seemed more focused on the individual attention that the concert party members took the time to give to the soldiers. This personal attention, given to individual soldiers by people not obliged to do so through medical necessity, must have been very welcome. The discipline of music therapy was in its nascent stages, with the first course in Musicotherapy taught at Columbia University in 1919 by Margaret Anderton, a British pianist who had worked with wounded Canadian soldiers during the War.⁴³⁸ Ashwell's concert parties were precursors to what would later be described as the 'recreational' model of music therapy, providing therapeutic entertainment and distraction, with a personal relationship between performers and patients that did not become codified as an integral part of music therapy until the 1960s.⁴³⁹

Another account, from a permanent concert party member, credited the healing properties of the concert parties not just to the music, nor to the personal attention provided to injured soldiers by the performers, but also to the simple presence of women in the parties. They wrote, "we know that the sight of our girls, our music, and our humour are as the very salt of life to these poor pain-wrecked boys."⁴⁴⁰ This description positions the visual aspects of the concert party's performance to be of equal importance

⁴³⁸ Helen M. Tyler, "The Music Therapy Profession in Modern Britain," in *Music as Medicine*, ed. Peregrine Horden (Aldershot ; Brookfield, USA: Ashgate, 2000), 379. An article about Anderton's work with Canadian soldiers appeared in the *New York Sun*, reprinted in *Standard Player Monthly* in October 1919, in which she described herself as at the "threshold of the possibilities in her field," administering medicine either as an "opiate or stimulant." ("Music Cures Wars Ill's," *Standard Player Monthly*, October 1919, Vol. 4 No. 10 edition, 13.) Ted Gioia notes that, although music therapy as a codified discipline gained greater momentum during the Second World War, the American Medical Association first mentioned it in 1914, "almost in tandem with the gun-shots that set off... the 'Great War.'" Ted Gioia, *Healing Songs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 133.

⁴³⁹ Tyler, "The Music Therapy Profession in Modern Britain," 379. With medical vocabulary for the effects of music lacking at this point in time, references appear to "a positive electric current, a mysterious magnetism, to change all these whirling mental electrons and make them vibrate to memories of happiness, love, and joy" ("With Captains Courageous 'Somewhere in France,'" *The Nineteenth Century*, August 1915; copy in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook").

⁴⁴⁰ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 63.

to the aural ones. Specifically, the sight of the female performers, not the male ones, is credited with giving strength to the wounded soldiers. In the same paragraph, the correspondent wrote, “As they listened to the sweet strains of that grand old song [*Annie Laurie*], they saw the Old Country in all the glory of its spring-time, they saw their wives, their little ones.” Here, the aural experience of the concert leads to a visual image: an evocation of “home” that equates the “Old Country” with the soldiers’ wives and children.⁴⁴¹

The push from the aural to the visual affects of the experience is reflected further in the lyrics of the Scottish folksong *Annie Laurie*. This song is a gentle, lilting, major-key ballad that describes the singer’s sweetheart in terms of her physical attributes: “Her brow is like the snow-drift, / Her neck is like the swan, / Her face it is the fairest / That e’er the sun shone on.”⁴⁴² The performance of the folksong conjured up an image of an idealized woman, representing absent wives and girlfriends, for whom the female singer was temporarily a real-life, embodied (rather than imagined) stand-in. Elson notes in his collection of folksongs that *Annie Laurie* had become a favorite of British soldiers in the Crimean War: “Though each recalled a different name, they all sang Annie Laurie.” The one song unified the soldiers in the act of remembering a myriad of individual women.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ As described in Chapter Three, the early twentieth-century had seen associations drawn between folksongs and “spiritual” links to an idealized pastoral landscape, and a thread of oral tradition passed down for countless generations. See page 147 onwards.

⁴⁴² Louis C. Elson, ed., *Folk Songs of Many Nations* (Cincinnati, Chicago, New York, Leipsic, London: The John Church Company, 1905), 92–93.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 92.

The medical benefits of the concert, in this description at least, were escapist ones, with reminders of a life back home (and possibly also of a prior, successful military campaign in Crimea) called into existence both aurally and visually through the female figures in the concert. The highly domesticized practices of female music-making within Edwardian society further cemented the associations of female musicians with home and family.⁴⁴⁴ The choice of image for Ashwell's "Window Tax," a small print that



Figure 4-10: Lena Ashwell's *Window Tax*. Held in Ashwell's scrapbook, *I.W.M.*

shopkeepers could buy towards the end of the War to demonstrate their support of the scheme, depicts this very literally: as the female performers play and sing, a thought bubble appears above the audience's heads, showing an image of a large rural house and a faceless woman in front of it (Figure 4-10). The women of the songs and the women performing them were "their" girls: a communal, national, property, as much a part of a

British identity as was the choice of repertoire and style of music.

⁴⁴⁴ Gillett, *Musical Women in England 1870-1914*, 3-5.

The female bodies of the British nation

The importance of the visual appearance of the female members of the concert parties did not go unacknowledged by Ashwell, although she had to be careful to remain in line with the moral codes of the Y.M.C.A. It is even acknowledged in the I.W.M. model, with the inclusion of the audience members that makes explicit their rapt attention on the performers: an inclusion that was not strictly necessary in terms of simply depicting the stage production, but became fundamental precisely because of this relationship between the performers and the audience. Historically the Y.M.C.A. had been an institution for men, and although by the time of the First World War women ran its huts and provided tea and food for soldiers, Ashwell described the organization as still being in thrall to early Victorian ideas of the segregation of the sexes:

The organisation [the Y.M.C.A.] spread and spread, but it had always been an institution for men, and though the women who were working for it were roughly a thousand to ten men, the Y.W.C.A. was supposed to meet the needs of the women. Both these organisations were under the spell of the early Victorian ideal of fitness of things. They were bound down with the idea of keeping the sexes gracefully apart lest in any way they should influence each other on the downward path which leads to ruin. The idea of companionship, friendship, equality of status and interest was undreamt of. When properly educated you entered a world where a member of the other sex was not referred to except as a strange and dangerous being who apparently made rare visits from a distant planet to spread havoc and destruction. There was every effort at first to follow this strange prejudice which strove to separate the two halves of the human race.⁴⁴⁵

Ashwell's awareness of the importance of the visual elements of the concerts, and the appearances of the female performers in particular, had to be balanced with the

⁴⁴⁵ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 210–11. Interestingly Ashwell noted a similar attitude, although arising from a different set of concerns, coming from the theatrical community. "I do not suppose any section of the community was more convinced that the woman's place was the home, and though actors have to allow the greater part of a play to be represented by women, they do not like women to represent the profession. How many years, for instance, have passed before a woman was allowed to have any power in the Actors' Benevolent Fund?" (Ibid., 38.)

knowledge that the Y.M.C.A. would never explicitly condone this as a part of their morally-faultless entertainment program. In terms of the performers chosen to participate in the scheme, Ashwell auditioned every one, and made decisions not only based on their musical ability—sometimes choosing artists for the atmosphere they were able to create over their musical “efficiency”—but also on their “suitability for the work, which required a certain amount of stability of character.”⁴⁴⁶ She related the story of a soprano who auditioned for her, who seemed to have a “rather wandering eye,” but whom Ashwell ultimately decided to send to France on the basis that “it might be safe to count on her abnormal size [stoutness] as a make-weight to the levity of mind.”⁴⁴⁷ This reasoning was proved faulty when Ashwell was asked to withdraw the artist, as she was displaying inappropriate behavior by sitting on officers’ knees in public restaurants. Despite the light-hearted way in which Ashwell relates this story, and the language that would be called ‘body-shaming’ in modern parlance, I include this anecdote as a depiction both of Ashwell’s and the Y.M.C.A.’s concern over the moral character of artists, and of the undercurrent of sexuality that runs through the story. Ashwell knew before sending the artist that romantic or sexual intrigue may result: in fact the outcome of the story does not seem to have come as a surprise to her, but indicates that perhaps previous artists had engaged in flirtations with troops. She relied on the woman’s size as a countermeasure, hoping that the gaze of the men would pass over anyone who was not of an ideal body type, thereby indicating that she was aware of the male gaze in the first place. Finally, as the story is related, the fault is placed entirely on the artist for her

⁴⁴⁶ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 122.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

behavior. No mention is made of the circumstances which led to the knee-sitting, and whether the officers invited it. The morality of the officers is left unremarked, and Ashwell's prompt response to the situation also removes any accusations of impropriety from her and her program.⁴⁴⁸

Ashwell's position on the subject becomes even more complicated when we read more about her process of selecting artists; for, although she chose them for their characters as well as musicianship, she seems also to have not necessarily wanted to dampen all possible romantic feelings.

I remember once in France a Y.M.C.A. leader complained to me about a certain party. He considered them too attractive, and he explained that every man in the audience must have wanted to kiss a certain young artist, who always gave me the impression of a wild rose in spring. He then drew up a party which met with his idea, that no member of it should have awakened such a reprehensible desire, and his party, I must frankly confess, selected out of the different parties he had seen, would have been rather a chilly affair. I always have felt that the audience should love the artists, and the appeal to beauty and goodness should be so great that the longing to kiss one of them need not necessarily be an ignoble thing at all—indeed, to kiss something may represent the highest form of worship. One can kiss a cross as the symbol of the greatest wonder and miracle of Love.⁴⁴⁹

Here, again, Ashwell acknowledges the existence of the male gaze, and of heterosexual desire. She situates the possibility of the desire to kiss a female artist within

⁴⁴⁸ Clearly, though, despite Ashwell's best efforts to ensure good moral compasses of her artists, liberties were able to be taken. She notes, at the end of the previously-quoted anecdote, "Of course it was impossible to prevent a certain amount of romance, and many of the artists became engaged in France and have married since." This is the only reference I have found to romantic attachments between concert party members and troops: two members of the Egyptian concert party married each other, but other than that this romantic element is absent.

Romantic involvements were also forbidden between other women on active service, such as nurses and V.A.D.s, and the troops; but many nurses' accounts, at least after the War, were more forthcoming about occasions on which these rules were broken, or at least bent. The need for trained, efficient staff outweighed the impropriety of casual flirtations: "as long as she [the V.A.D.] remained on the right side of military discipline and propriety" (Lyn Macdonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land* (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 157). Women who had been married prior to the outbreak of the war were banned from working in the country in which their husbands were based so that the same rules regarding relationships applied to everyone.

⁴⁴⁹ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 122.

a frame of Christian love that would be much more in line with the ideals of the Y.M.C.A., even if in practice the end result was still an undesirable one.⁴⁵⁰ Ashwell simultaneously needed to publicly demonstrate the alignment of her choice of artists with the Y.M.C.A.'s moral code, but also fulfil her desire to create programs and performances that would satisfy all the needs of the troops in France: both for good entertainment, and also for a female presence that was aesthetically pleasing and not entirely free of sexual allure.⁴⁵¹

It was not simply the physical qualities of the female performers that were a factor in their reception amongst the troops, but also their clothing. The first all-women parties

⁴⁵⁰ The description of the artist as “young” is important: it seems that many of Ashwell’s female performers were young women, especially compared to the male performers who had to be exempt from army service on the grounds either of age or health after conscription was introduced in 1916. Gwendolyn Teagle was still a “legal infant,” and names of some other performers appear in regional newspapers as just beginning to cement their reputations as public performers in the years immediately preceding the War (for example, reviews of soprano Mary Mackie in the *Aberdeen Journal*, March 30, 1914; September 23, 1915; and November 4, 1915); the *Musical Standard*, in a brief notice in the early part of 1916, refers to “Little Miss Phyllis Nash, the clever violinist” (n.d.; “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook”). An occasional reference appears to the artists’ own conceptions of their relative youth: one member of the concert party based in Egypt wrote to Ashwell from the Fayoum Desert, “My hair keeps up beautifully, and is acquiring quite a noble contour. I look most grown-up and womanly.” (Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 95.)

The performers’ relative youth may also have had economic considerations. These artists were not paid, with the exception of a few who were given money to cover their out-of-pocket expenses at home while they were abroad (Ibid., 36., and type-written pages inserted in Lena Ashwell, *Concerts at the Front* (Y.M.C.A., 1916). Young unmarried women, with no families to support, possibly still living at home with parents, would have had no such expenses. Other, more experienced, artists refused to join the scheme because of the lack of monetary compensation.

⁴⁵¹ Another check on Ashwell’s ability to hire the artists of her choice was the condition that all artists had to be approved by Princess Helena Victoria, “who became personally responsible for them and their conduct” (Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 6–7). However, it is not clear exactly how this approval process worked: Princess Helena Victoria attended many of the concerts that Ashwell organized in London to fundraise for her scheme, so it is possible that she saw performers at these events who were then sent on to perform abroad. There may also have been private auditions that went unrecorded; but it is also entirely possible that Princess Helena Victoria was simply a convenient figurehead to further legitimize the artists.



Figure 4-11: C.R.W. Nevinson, *Paths of Glory*. © I.W.M.

to travel in 1917 turned out to be “the most successful,” according to Ashwell, because of the “intense joy... to see a pair of slippers.”⁴⁵² In this same sentence, Ashwell comments on the greatest pleasure given by the brightest colors and the “prettiest

frocks” adopted by women who initially dressed very practically. Ashwell puts this down to a “love for colour” on the part of the men. The color palette of the trenches was unremittingly grey and khaki, as demonstrated by some of the most famous paintings of the First World War: for example, C.R.W. Nevinson’s *Paths of Glory* (1917)

(Figure 4-11), Paul Nash’s *We Are Making a New World* (1918) (Figure 4-12), and John Singer Sargent’s *Gassed* (1919) (Figure 4-13), all use myriad shades of brown, gray, and khaki, with the only relief coming from occasional patches of blue sky.



Figure 4-12: Paul Nash, *We Are Making a New World*. © I.W.M.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 36.



Figure 4-13: John Singer Sargent, *Gassed*. © I.W.M.

Comparing these with the bright colors of Pye’s model, with the startling yellows, greens, and blues of the actors’ costumes in stark contrast to the grays, browns and blues of the audience members, it is easy to imagine how Ashwell came to the conclusion that brightly colored clothing was an integral part of the performance experience for many men.

It was not simply the colors of the civilians’ outfits that were out of the ordinary: it was the individuality allowed by the lack of a uniform. All other women at the front on official business were uniformed, either as nurses, V.A.D.s, ambulance drivers, or W.A.A.C.s. The uniforms of the nurses in particular were relics from the Victorian era, with skirts to the ground, plain aprons, capes to “conceal curvaceous bosoms,”⁴⁵³ and cumbersome head-dresses (see Figure 4-14).⁴⁵⁴ George Robb likens their uniforms to

⁴⁵³ Macdonald, *The Roses of No Man’s Land*, 39.

⁴⁵⁴ See accounts in *Ibid.*, 78, 113, 283. Margaret Ellis, a Special Military Probationer, recalled that she was reprimanded by her Matron for wearing a gray scarf with a thin red stripe: she “longed for a bit of color,” but it was not part of the regulation uniform (190). Nell Brink, a nurse at a Base Hospital in Angers, disliked the regulation uniforms so much that she asked her mother to send her hand-made aprons with “a cute little small bib and a pretty skirt line” (283).



Figure 4-14: A sister of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service and a matron of the Territorial Force Nursing Service. © I.W.M. Q30390

religious habits.⁴⁵⁵ For women in other organizations, uniforms were based on the equivalent men's service uniforms, and were considered to be unfeminine and unflattering.⁴⁵⁶ Despite the Y.M.C.A. having a uniform that the concert parties were asked to adopt, this was not strictly enforced.⁴⁵⁷ The nurses and other military workers, dressed in their uniforms, represented a certain kind of patriotic performance of duty, but their uniforms separated them from the Home Front, and homogenized them into

a generic "nurse" or "ambulance driver." The concert party performers, on the other hand, were marked as coming from outside the military zone through their civilian

⁴⁵⁵ Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, 66.

⁴⁵⁶ Alyson Mercer, "The Changing Face of Exhibiting Women's Wartime Work at the Imperial War Museum," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 2 (April 2013): 4. See also Vining and Hacker, "From Camp Follower to Lady in Uniform: Women, Social Class and Military Institutions before 1920." Vining and Hacker focus mainly on American uniforms, though mention British women's military-style uniforms; they see the First World War as changing the traditional designations of male uniforms of hierarchical authority and female uniforms of service, with quasi-military uniforms for women that suppressed gender distinction, albeit with skirts remaining standard.

⁴⁵⁷ See the previously-cited comments from Ashwell on non-uniformed performers. Another source for this comes from Siegfried Sassoon's book *Sherston's Progress* (the third in his trilogy *The Memoirs of George Sherston*, which is semi-autobiographical and heavily based on Sassoon's own experiences during the First World War), in which he describes seeing a concert party with three women in "short silk skirts" (Siegfried Sassoon, 'Sherston's Progress,' *The Memoirs of George Sherston* (Garden City, N.Y.: Country Life Press, 1937), 156). Sassoon's later poem "Concert Party (Egyptian Base Camp)" re-tells his experience of seeing this concert party, this time describing the "warbling ladies in white" (Siegfried Sassoon, *War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon*. (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2004), 98).

clothes, and the variations in their clothing allowed them to embody more realistically the civilian women whom the soldiers were fighting to protect.

Even when clothing was not at the forefront of the audience's concerns, basic feminine accessories still became tantalizing objects. The *Daily Malta Chronicle*, in reviewing a concert at Spinola, wrote of cellist Adelina Leon, "One was of course carried away by her music but not so carried away as not to observe her dexterous fingering of the catgut combined with the occasional salvation of a hairpin at the very moment of falling out."⁴⁵⁸ Leon's ability on the cello is subsumed by the admiration of the writer for her ability to juggle instrument and gender-specific accessories; this, rather than her music-making, becomes the vehicle of her virtuosity. Her performance of her gender through her accessories is of more note than her musical performance. Other elements of typical feminine appearance were used by the female performers to provide further contrast between themselves and other workers at the front. Ada Ward, in a letter to her sister published in the *Bradford Weekly Telegraph*, noted that she had met some "grand women... splendid nurses... and workers in the Y.M.C.A. huts, titled ladies and wealthy ladies with coarse rough hands and broken finger nails, but all happy 'doing their bit.'"⁴⁵⁹ Ward's description does not mention the specific jobs she saw these women performing, letting their lack of hand and nail care (previously unthinkable for wealthy ladies) stand in for presumed hours of manual, rather than artistic, labor.

The male members of the concert parties attracted less attention for their civilian clothes, although Ashwell noted that troops would stroke the sleeves of good-quality

⁴⁵⁸ Held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook."

⁴⁵⁹ 'Concerts at the Front: Experiences of a Bradford Lady.' *Bradford Weekly Telegraph*, 6 August 1915. Held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook."

coats worn by the men in the firing-line parties.⁴⁶⁰ However, a press photograph of one of the firing-line parties uses a different type of costume to emphasize the heroism of the performers (Figure 4-15). This photograph shows all five members of the concert party wearing gas masks: their faces, normally the focus of any publicity photograph, are entirely obscured. Their features are obliterated, placing them into the position of generic heroes rather than individual performers. The gas masks draw attention to the peril that they faced while performing, affirming their masculinity, while their civilian clothing provides a stark reminder that these were not trained soldiers, but rather volunteers bravely putting themselves in physical danger. They are not to be admired for their looks, but for their heroism: contrast this image with Figure 4-16, in which the members of the



Figure 4-15: photograph from "Actors Who Wear Gas Masks, *Daily Mirror*, July 13, 1916. Held in Lena Ashwell's Scrapbook, I.W.M.

⁴⁶⁰ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 150.



Figure 4-16: photograph of the concert party in Egypt. Published in *The Sphinx*, February 24, 1917. Held in Lena Ashwell's scrapbook, I.W.M.

Egyptian concert party pose in front of an idyllic backdrop in smart, light-colored clothing. Although the members of the male-only concert party could be admired for their willingness to perform in the face of apparent danger (although in actuality, there is no record of any of them experiencing a real gas attack), they are not depicted as objects of sexualized or romantic desire. In fact, although Ashwell mentions that the male performers attracted

soldiers' attention because of their clothes, the military regime in which homosexuality was an offence punishable by court-martial meant that any sort of open admiration of the male civilians by the male troops would have been out of the question.⁴⁶¹ The military zone was officially heterosexual, and therefore the gaze of the troops would have been directed solely (officially, at least) towards the female civilians rather than the male ones.

This, of course, assumes that the admiring gazes directed towards the women were

⁴⁶¹ Holmes, *Tommy*, 598. During the War, 8 officers and 153 soldiers were court-martialled for 'indecent': a number that Holmes suggests is surprisingly low.

sexually driven in nature. However, the desire to see women from home seems to have been chiefly an inspirational and nostalgic one: at least, in the publically-disseminated discourse about the concert parties, no implications ever appear regarding the possibility of the male gazes on the female performers being sexually driven. The troops' sexual activity took place in brothels behind the lines,⁴⁶² the glamorous female impersonators of the Army's own concert parties also acted as an outlet for expressing sexual desire, allowing men to enjoy a sexualized spectacle of femininity without the impropriety of actually addressing these feelings towards a "real" woman.⁴⁶³ Despite the expectations that, if an Ashwell concert party was advertised, it would feature female performers, the desire on the troops' part to see them does not appear to have been sexually driven so much as motivated by a desire to see women from 'home.' The association of the female performers with the British nation, real-life versions of the personification of the nation in the female figure of Britannia, is further emphasized in some accounts by emphasis on the performers' race, and the whiteness of their skin.⁴⁶⁴ A telling few sentences in one newspaper article read:

⁴⁶² Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, 79–80. Robb notes that by 1918, 32 out of every 1000 soldiers in the Army were receiving treatment for venereal disease, and that as well as French brothels, men were able to visit brothels operated by the British Army in Le Havre and Cayeux-Sur-Mer.

⁴⁶³ Female impersonators in the divisional concert parties often made very convincing women, and their attention to detail was such that they were permitted to make special trips to London or Paris to procure accessories, even down to lingerie (Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918*, 106). One audience member wrote, "judging from the way [the men] sat and goggled at the drag on stage it was obvious that they were indulging in delightful fantasies that brought to them substantial memories of the girls they had left behind them" (quoted in *Ibid.*, 105).

⁴⁶⁴ The figure of Britannia as the ideal female, chaste and warlike, emanating from depictions of Queen Elizabeth I and becoming increasingly institutionalized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is described by Kirsten Stirling in *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 16–18.

Cannot our young friends realise what it means to a soldier who has been up the line to see a woman again? And most of all an *Englishwoman*! It is to be feared that the Englishwoman often puts to the credit of her songs and her singing of them a warmth of welcome that is really inspired by her femininity and her nationality.⁴⁶⁵

Other quotations from the concert party based in Egypt described how good it was for the troops to see *white* women in particular. One performer noted that only one white woman had previously been allowed to visit the zone around the Suez Canal, where her party stayed for six weeks, describing how proud they were to be allowed there.⁴⁶⁶ More comments on the race of the women came in the artist's diary a few days later, as she wrote that "Sometimes there are as many as four or five thousand men who have forgotten the sound of anything less compromising than a cannon, and who have forgotten what a white woman looks like."⁴⁶⁷

Of course, the emphasis on the whiteness of the women, and the ensuing association with the white women back "home," is part of the narrative of colonialism that has, for decades, obscured the contributions of colonial troops to Britain's involvement in the First World War.⁴⁶⁸ Despite many hospitals in France and Britain treating soldiers from India, Africa, and the West Indies, contact between white nurses and soldiers of color was limited by the Army Council.⁴⁶⁹ Although some nurses' memoirs recount stories of working with colonized troops, the absence of any mention of

⁴⁶⁵ Cutting from "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook." The cutting does not include the publication title.

⁴⁶⁶ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 97.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁶⁸ See for example Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*; Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, chap. 4.

⁴⁶⁹ Alison S. Fell, "Nursing the Other: The Representation of Colonial Troops in French and British First World War Nursing Memoirs," in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 164.

troops of color in the memoirs printed by Ashwell's performers seems telling: a single reference to a French officer, who joined in "in all the wrong places," appears, emphasizing the specifically British knowledge-base that the performers were used to.⁴⁷⁰ Elsewhere, brief mentions of performances at Canadian and Australian hospitals are the only indications that the concert parties ever interacted with non-British troops, and that these were white Dominion troops rather than troops of color from the colonies.⁴⁷¹ Ashwell's emphasis, and that of many of her performers, were on white middle-class British culture, with white women performing folksongs in order to inspire the men of Britain to fight for their country and homeland. It is unclear whether the concert parties performed to colonial troops, and if so whether they still expected these troops to consider Britain to be their homeland. In the tradition of upper- and middle-class women's imperialist organizations that had been formed since the 1870s, all of which were Anglocentric and bound up with racial pride and fear of indigenous peoples of the colonies, this construction of nationhood reinforced prejudices against British colonies and their cultures.⁴⁷² The problem of Ashwell's Concerts at the Front representing a homogenized home nation was not only felt (we can surmise) by colonial troops, but was also recognized by some members of the constituent nations of Great Britain. One incident in particular stands out: as Ashwell travelled across Great Britain publicizing her scheme and recruiting local artists, she visited Scotland and presented her plans to form an all-Scottish concert party, which she proposed to advertise as "Scottish Concerts at the

⁴⁷⁰ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 19.

⁴⁷¹ "An Irish Colleen Entertains the Tommies," unknown publication, November 1915 held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook"; "Miss Bessie Unwin behind the Firing Line," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, unknown date.

⁴⁷² Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power*, Women, Power, and Politics (London; New York: Leicester University Press, 2000), 6.

Front.” Scottish newspapers detailed local outrage at this plan, mainly stemming from local government and members of the public in Edinburgh, and the correspondence on the subject was collated in *The Thistle*. The main thrust of the criticism related to the idea that Scottish songs and singers were being taken over by a non-Scottish organizer, reading this as an attack on Scotland’s national honor:

What have these people got to do with Scottish Songs and Scottish Singers, and their services at the Front; and who are the Princess Victoria of Schleswig-Holstein, and her henchwoman, Miss Ashwell, who seem to imagine that they have Scotland and her Songs and Singers under their sole control?⁴⁷³

In describing “the composition of the attacking committee,” *The Thistle* clearly differentiates between the Y.M.C.A. and Ashwell, making a personal attack on Ashwell’s character by way of her nationality:

It acts from London, under the name of “The Ladies Auxiliary Committee of the Y.M.C.A.”; but this is not the proper working title; for the “Y.M.C.A.” do not seem to have acted in the dispute at all, and apparently prefer to have nothing to do with it. Apparently this “Ladies’ Auxiliary Committee” has resolved itself into a committee of three—a Patroness, a dictatrix, and a treasurer. The first, a German Princess; the second, a theatrical damsel of a very aggressive type and an official recorder of the ordinary character. So far as we can see of the respective characters of this aggressive trio, Miss Lena Ashwell is the chief performer, the “leading lady” in fact, who comes on the stage alone, and pirouettes as the English heroine who has at last subdued Scotland, and placed it under her heel. “The Ladies’ Auxiliary Committee” seems to be in reality an “Anglo-German Committee” of two, whose aim is to insult and humiliate Scotland!⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷³ *The Thistle*, December 1916, 217.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 217–18. The quotations from correspondence printed in newspapers continued at great length. A pre-existing scheme to provide concerts of Scottish music at the Front, organized by a committee in Edinburgh, had agreed to work in conjunction with Ashwell’s scheme, although the exact terms of the co-operation were also disputed. In particular, the idea that Princess Victoria would have the power of veto over any artists that the Edinburgh Committee sent was problematic, as well as whether any money sent by the Scottish Committee would go to concerts abroad or to the Y.M.C.A. more generally. Correspondents also wrote on issues including the idea that national songs could now only be performed at the Front if Ashwell gave her permission; that Ashwell was operating without the permission of the War Office, as “such a monstrous musical monopoly” would never have been granted by any responsible authority; and that it was an indignity for Scottish performers and committee members to have to travel to London to be approved by Ashwell.

These attacks identify both songs and the performers singing them as representing Scottish identity and culture, placing Ashwell's claim to organize (and therefore 'own') the songs and singers as tantamount to ownership of Scotland itself by the nation of England. Ashwell is allegorized as physically subduing Scottish culture by means of her bodily autonomy (placing it "under her heel"), providing another variation on the identification of the female body with nationhood.

On the other hand, some troops made very specific regional connections between members of the concert parties and local areas of Great Britain. As Ashwell recruited performers from all over the country, performers with strong regional accents and typical regional names were hailed by troops from the same area. Bessie Unwin, from Sheffield, wrote of meeting a Sheffield "boy" who was so glad to see her that she ended up writing to his family to cement their connection; and also of a Y.M.C.A. padre who had been based at a local church, and who asked Unwin to send his remembrances to his old congregation.⁴⁷⁵ Elsie Illingworth's name brought the boys "flocking around, eagerly asking how Bradford, Leeds, Huddersfield, Halifax, Dewsbury, etc., etc., were all looking."⁴⁷⁶ Amy Joyner recalled that, as each artist was announced not only by name but by the town from which they came, she was often greeted with shouts of "Good owd Yorkshire," "Bravo, Barnsley," and "Come up, Barnsley."⁴⁷⁷ In this re-telling, Joyner becomes synonymous with a physical location, her name and personal identity replaced with that of the part of the country that she represented to the troops.

⁴⁷⁵ "Singin' to Heroes," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, n.d., held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook."

⁴⁷⁶ *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, October 23, 1915, held in Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ "Five Weeks with the Boys in France." N.p., n.d., held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook."

So, as the female performers of Ashwell's concert parties moved across France, Egypt, and Malta, they were able to embody both a homogenized nationhood and a specific sense of place for many troops. Anxieties over how the British nation was represented through repertoire, rather than through performers, became another issue. A few lone voices acknowledged a unique problem that female performers brought to the concert parties, namely that the audience was so focused on their appearance that the performers could sing anything at all, to any standard, and would still receive a warm reception ("An English girl would be cheered if she merely stood on the stage and did nothing but look pretty!"⁴⁷⁸). In contrast, Ashwell made strong claims over the importance of repertoire to the performances, using them to further legitimize her program within the educational remit of the Y.M.C.A. Anxieties over race and class surfaced here, too, around discussions of one of the most popular types of music of the period: ragtime.

Repertoire, race, and ragtime

Throughout the existence of the Concerts at the Front program, the vast part of Ashwell's writing asserts that concert parties performed only programs of classical music, light popular songs, and traditional folk songs: what Ashwell termed "good" music.⁴⁷⁹ She gives examples of specific classical works including arias from *Tosca* and *Il Trovatore*; "Una Voce Poco Fa" (sic) by Rossini; and a part-song by Frederick Bridge.⁴⁸⁰ The *bel*

⁴⁷⁸ Cutting from Ibid. The cutting does not include the publication title.

⁴⁷⁹ See for example "Concerts for the Troops," *Dublin Daily Express*, June 18 1915; held in Ibid.; Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 137.

⁴⁸⁰ See Ashwell, "Concerts for the Army," *The Y.M.*, October 15 1915, pp. 943-4; a specimen concert program quoted in Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 91; concert program from the 5th Concert Party's performance at Le Havre on June 26 1915, article in the *Evening Standard*,

canto style song “Il Bacio” is listed in several newspaper clippings as a piece often requested by troops.⁴⁸¹ A sacred concert given on Malta on Good Friday 1917 included works by Gounod, Mendelssohn, and arias from Handel’s *Elijah*.⁴⁸² Instrumentalists were called upon by audience members to play works including Mascagni’s ‘Intermezzo’ from *Cavalleria Rusticana*; the last movement of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto; Dvorák’s *Humoresque*; Schubert’s *Moment musicale*; and solos by Wieniawski, Kreisler, and Rubinstein.⁴⁸³ Gordon Williams, a performer on the zither banjo, played not only popular songs but also classical works adapted for the instrument, including Rossini’s Overture to *William Tell*, Mascagni’s ‘Intermezzo,’ and Souza’s *Stars and Stripes* March.⁴⁸⁴ The propensity towards artistic rather than popular repertoire is also reflected in the model by Ethel Pye: this permanent visual record of the concert party scheme depicts not one of the contemporary plays that the companies performed, but a work by Shakespeare. Ashwell claimed that solo performances of repertoire by Handel, Dvorak, or Bach, were as popular as a humorous story, and related anecdotes of troops specifically requesting

September 6 1915, and ‘A Taste for the Classics: The Soldiers’ Favourite Songs’ in *Birmingham Gazette*, September 1915, all held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook”.

⁴⁸¹ No mention is made of whether it was performed in the original Italian by Arditì, as popularized by Adelina Patti, or in the English version by Henry Farnie titled “The Dream of Home.” As the title is given in Italian, it may be safe to assume that it was performed in Italian, but the English version may have popularized the song and certainly given another layer of meaning to the piece, as the English lyrics speak of a “hallowed and happy spot that knoweth nought of sadness.” Henry Farnie had written words for a number of burlesques and operettas in London and New York in the second half of the nineteenth century (see Kurt Gänzl, *Lydia Thompson, Queen of Burlesque*, *Forgotten Stars of Musical Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 101–2): the popularity of ‘Il Bacio’ at the front may well have been a remnant of the popularity of his work.

⁴⁸² Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 91.

⁴⁸³ See ‘The Firing-Line Concert Party,’ *The Musical Herald*, August 1916; ‘Concerts at the Front: Lady Violinist’s Experiences,’ *The Queen*, July 17, 1915; both held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook”; Helen Mott, “‘Good’ music and the soldier,” *The Y.M.*, May 1918, 367-8; Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 24, 91.

⁴⁸⁴ The text of a talk given by Williams about his experiences in one of the concert parties, along with the longer handwritten diary from which he took extracts for his talk, are held in the Imperial War Museum, catalog number Documents 15459.

classical pieces above popular songs.⁴⁸⁵ For example, an article in the *Evening Standard*:

“Land of Hope and Glory” was a trump card everywhere, and often when Miss Phyllis Lett appeared the soldiers would shout for it. Similarly, they would clamour for the Marching Song of Oliver from Miss Carrie Tubb, and sometimes for ‘Il Bacio,’ which one would hardly have expected.⁴⁸⁶

Elsewhere, an audience of “wharfside navvies from the Thames and the Tyne” were “spellbound” by Schubert’s *Moment musicale*.⁴⁸⁷ An article from 1916 said that it was “a surprise... to find the regiment of dock labourers at Havre... much preferred the violinist who played classical music; while an East End audience was found to be deeply appreciative of Bach.”⁴⁸⁸

The apparent surprise at soldiers requesting classical works reflects on the class prejudices inherent within the army.⁴⁸⁹ In the Regular Army, prior to the outbreak of the First World War, officers were “gentlemen,” educated at public schools and universities. They had to be independently wealthy in order to purchase the necessary equipment and engage in expenses of elite sports such as polo and hunting, as well as entertaining other officers: “an officer was evaluated by his peers based on his ability to maintain the sporting and gentlemanly lifestyle.”⁴⁹⁰ Enjoyment of classical music, as opposed to popular working-class forms of entertainment such as music hall and variety acts, was part of the gentleman’s way of life. In 1914, as the casualty rates among officers were proportionally much higher than among the rank-and-file troops, replacements were

⁴⁸⁵ Ashwell, ‘Concerts for the Army,’ in *The Y.M.*, October 15, 1915, 943-4.

⁴⁸⁶ *Evening Standard*, September 6, 1915, held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

⁴⁸⁷ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 19.

⁴⁸⁸ No publication information provided; held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

⁴⁸⁹ See page 144 for a fuller discussion of the class-based assumptions around classical music.

⁴⁹⁰ Laura Root, “‘Temporary Gentlemen’ on the Western Front: Class Consciousness and the British Army Officer, 1914-1918,” *All Volumes*, no. Paper 72 (2006): 2.

commissioned from middle-class young men and white-collar workers.⁴⁹¹ It was not until 1916 that the system was reformed to allow commissions from within the Army's ranks, allowing working-class men to become officers for the first time.⁴⁹² For the first half of the War at least, these educated officers were the ones writing to Ashwell to request a visit from one of her parties, and Ashwell's reports emphasize their concerns that the "good" music performed by the parties should educate the men, and provide a relief to the officers from the lowbrow popular music enjoyed by their working-class subordinates. In one letter, an officer wrote:

The whole tone of your entertainment, the class of music, and the entire absence of vulgarity are a liberal education to the men. After forty years' service, I feel convinced that that is what is sadly wanted for our men—and sometimes for others! Everything should be done to elevate them and alter their tastes.⁴⁹³

A diary from a member of the concert party in Malta notes that, at their farewell concert, one speech-maker gave them the epitaph: "You have made them like good music. When first you came these boys were all for songs with choruses, but they know better now."⁴⁹⁴

Ashwell, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1919 in an article titled 'The Artistic Growth of the Soldier,' claimed that,

As the war went on the standard among the men went up steadily. Light chorus songs... gradually yielded in popularity to better music till, at last, the works of the great composers were preferred to all others, and listened to with breathless attention, and who shall say with what spiritual refreshment?⁴⁹⁵

This educational project of performing classical music to audiences of men who were not

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁹² Holmes, *Tommy*, 356.

⁴⁹³ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 138.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁹⁵ Lena Ashwell, 'The Artistic Growth of the Soldier,' *Daily Telegraph*, March 2 1919, held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook." Here, again, the link to spiritual well-being frames the entertainment provided by the parties within the Christian remit of the Y.M.C.A.

expected to enjoy it was in line both with the aims of the Y.M.C.A. and with Ashwell's advocacy for an accessible theatre prior to the war.⁴⁹⁶ Some artists reinforced this goal by choosing to perform more in the style of lecture-recitals, such as the cellist Helen Mott, who would intersperse her musical items with "admirably lucid and attractive explanations of the musical developments they represent."⁴⁹⁷ It is likely that Ashwell's advocacy for "good" art had made her an even more favorable candidate when the Y.M.C.A. committee were looking for a concert organizer. An article in *The Y.M.* in January 1916, reporting on a meeting held by the Lord Mayor in support of the Concerts at the Front scheme, noted that Lady Rodney said that the Y.M.C.A. were "persuaded that they should get the right spirit" and the "right quality" of music when they secured Ashwell's help.⁴⁹⁸ It is also likely that Ashwell once again selected her anecdotes for her publicity campaign for the series in order both to align the concerts with institutional goals, further legitimizing her program, as well as to perpetuate her own "highbrow" agenda.

However, Ashwell's emphasis on the troops' enjoyment of classical music was at odds with some accounts from other members of the concert parties. Julius Harrison, a member of one of the firing-line parties, wrote that, "occasionally, the 'Tommies'... enjoyed really good music, but on the whole the chorus-songs were the best

⁴⁹⁶ Leask, *Lena Ashwell*, 101. For example, Ashwell told a meeting of Bristol Playgoers' Club that one of theatre's main purposes was to widen the consciousness and awareness of its audience "to gain them insight into the lives of others," and another was "the awakening of feeling" (ibid). Her comments smack of middle-class elitism, particularly with respect to the new popular medium of cinema, on which topic she apparently stated that "the mass could never be the real judge of values": a comment at odds with her wartime claims that ordinary soldiers could enjoy, and actively request, "good" music.

⁴⁹⁷ B.A. Yapp, 'The Editor Goes to France,' *The Y.M.*, February 1918, 224.

⁴⁹⁸ 'A Twentieth Century Joan of Arc. Adeline, Duchess of Bedford, Miss Ellen Terry, and Father Bernard Vaughan on the Way to Win in the War.' *The Y.M.*, January 28, 1916, 67-8.

‘winners...’⁴⁹⁹ An extended article by Elsie Illingworth in the *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner* mentions as her favorite item a song with a “swinging chorus” titled ‘Somewhere in France’: she describes it as “one of the finest numbers written of its kind.”⁵⁰⁰ She does not give further details about what “kind” of song this was, but the conjunction of a swinging chorus with such a topical title implies that the song was relatively newly-composed, certainly not falling within the sentimental ballads that were more typical of the concert parties’ “good” contemporary repertoire. Later in Illingworth’s article she mentions that the baritone in the party performed a song with a “rattling good chorus” titled “Balloo, Boulogne, and Blighty,” the words of which had been written by a private in the 3rd Worcesters and the music by Mr. Herbert Fryer during the concert party’s tour. “Balloo” was slang for Bailleul and “Blighty” was common slang for England: it is questionable whether a song incorporating such slang would have met Ashwell’s criteria for “good” music. As Ashwell distinguished in one article between “good” music and the “lighter” kind, setting them up in opposition to each other, it certainly seems that some of the concert parties veered towards the “lighter” end of the spectrum.⁵⁰¹ Other sources in the music press went further in their criticism of Ashwell’s programming style; one article in *The Era* cited an interview with a British soldier who found some concert parties’ programming “straight-laced” with a “patronising atmosphere.” The author derived the lack of desire on the part of the soldiers to sing along to rousing choruses not from their rarified tastes in music, but from their

⁴⁹⁹ Julius Harrison, ‘Somewhere in France: The Adventures of a Concert Party,’ *The Musical Times*, July 1 1915, held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

⁵⁰⁰ Elsie Illingworth, ‘With a Concert Party “Somewhere in France,”’ *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, October 23 1915, held in Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Lena Ashwell, ‘Singing them to Berlin: What the Royal Matinee means to Our Men,’ *The Echo and Evening Chronicle*, March 24 1915, held in Ibid.

exhaustion and the uncomfortable seating in the performance space.⁵⁰²

Even definitions of classical music were contentious, particularly those coming from members of the officer classes rather than from Ashwell. After Ashwell had heard a party perform at Abbeville, including songs by Mozart and several other items of classical music, she dined with the officers, and a colonel asked to be allowed to suggest new items, urging “the advisability of a higher standard.”⁵⁰³ He mentioned songs including “The Perfect Day,” “The Old-Fashioned Town,” “Donegal,” and “Roses in Picardy”: all sentimental popular songs or folksongs.⁵⁰⁴ Another leader wrote to Ashwell and asked her to send musicians to perform a high standard of classical music, and mentioned the Fisk Trio by name. Ashwell’s final sentence of this anecdote reads, “They were the noted coloured singers of negro melodies.”⁵⁰⁵ The renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers had been performing tours across the world in various incarnations since 1875, performing spirituals and part-songs. Abbott and Saroff’s detailed description of the Singers’ tours and press coverage thereof finds that the troupe that had made the world tour between 1884 and 1890 “was the finest company of spiritual singers ever

⁵⁰² John N. Raphael of the *Referee*, “Notes from a Paris Sky Parlour,” in *The Era*, August 23, 1915, 11. This is the only exemplar of a negative view of Ashwell’s programs that Leask and Angell cite.

⁵⁰³ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 136.

⁵⁰⁴ “The Perfect Day” (also known as “A Perfect Day”) had been composed by American Carrie Jacobs-Bond in 1910; in the following decade, more than five million copies of the song were sold and about fifty phonograph and piano roll recordings were made. The popularity of the song was in part due to its optimistic lyrics, appearing at the “right psychological moment” (Edward T. James, ed., *Notable American Women, 1607 - 1950:: A Biographical Dictionary. Vol. 2: G - O* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 195). ‘Roses in Picardy’ was a song popular amongst the troops later in the War, becoming a standard song for men who had fought in Picardy on the Somme. Roshwald and Stites describe the melody as having a “sweet sadness,” offering “connection or consolation to millions of divided families in Britain” (Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, eds., *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare 6 (Cambridge, UK : New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 334). The commonality between these songs seems to be that they were sentimental in nature, designed for solo performance: ‘Roses in Picardy’ in particular has a more complex chord structure and wider ranging melody than many chorus songs of the time.

⁵⁰⁵ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 136.

assembled.”⁵⁰⁶ Despite their renown, the way that Ashwell abruptly ends her story seems to imply that the fact that they were African-American performers of African-American music was enough of an explanation as to why she did not pursue this request further.

This leads to the question of the reverse side of “good” music, and back to relationships of race and class to the musical style of Ashwell’s parties. In particular, in Ashwell’s writings we find anxieties over two genres of music: music hall songs, and ragtime. Music hall songs (the “cheap popular element”⁵⁰⁷) were objected to by both Ashwell and the Y.M.C.A., on the basis of the potential for vulgarity in the lyrics, and the associations of music-halls with immorality, drinking, and prostitution that were absolutely at odds with the aims of the Y.M.C.A.⁵⁰⁸ A large proportion of the army was constituted of working-class men for whom the music halls may well have constituted a typical peacetime evening’s entertainment; as well as singing music hall songs amongst themselves, often changing the words to make them more topical to their regiment, entertainment in this style was provided by the army’s own divisional concert parties. Ashwell related that two women, or “girls” as she termed them, who ran a Y.M.C.A. hut near Dunkirk, had spoken to her “with regret” of the coarseness of the entertainment that had been recently provided by one of these divisional concert parties.⁵⁰⁹

It remains unclear whether Ashwell’s concert parties stuck to this embargo on music hall songs, or whether they altered their repertoire once they were performing

⁵⁰⁶ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895*, American Made Music Series (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 13.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ladies Field*, June 10 1915, held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

⁵⁰⁸ Ashwell would not permit any sort of performer who brought in influences from the music halls, with comic turns “frowned on” and absolutely no dance steps allowed—in the auditions, at least. (Additional notes inserted in Ashwell, *Concerts at the Front.*, held in the IWM.)

⁵⁰⁹ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 143.

away from the immediate oversight of Ashwell. In a recorded interview held at the Imperial War Museum, First World War veteran Basil Farrer spoke of attending a performance by Ashwell's permanent concert party at Le Havre. He describes the show as "Like music hall... music hall and singing."⁵¹⁰ One explanation for Farrer's description of the show as a music hall show could be a conflation of different memories—this interview took place seventy years after the War—but he was also able to state with certainty that the concert did not include much patriotic material, because this was not popular with the soldiers. It is likely that the distinctions between music hall choruses and the sentimental ballads that many of the female singers performed, which also appeared on variety programs in the halls, may have been lost on many audience members. It is also possible that Farrer's description of the concert as "like music hall" referred less to the style of music, and more to the format of the evening, with several artists performing their own turn one after the other.⁵¹¹

The issues surrounding ragtime music seem to have been more complex, with a less straightforward agreement of opinion between Ashwell and the Y.M.C.A. Ragtime songs—as opposed to the piano ragtime pieces which are now thought of as the mainstay of the ragtime genre—had been growing in popularity in the U.K. since the turn of the century.⁵¹² The musical definition of ragtime song remains a contentious one, with some

⁵¹⁰ Farrer, Basil, I.W.M. interview. Catalog number 9552.

⁵¹¹ References to the way in which the performers sat on the stage together, rather than each taking to the stage in turn, appear in some newspaper articles, and may offer another explanation for the identification of the concert parties with elements of music hall style. For example, Ashwell's article in the *Echo and Evening Chronicle* refers to the singers all sitting together on a tiny platform as "minstrel style" ("Singing them to Berlin," *Echo and Evening Chronicle*, March 24, 1915, held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook").

⁵¹² David A. Jasen and Trebor Jay Tichenor, *Rags and Ragtime: A Musical History* (New York: Dover, 1989), 171.; Ray Argyle, *Scott Joplin and the Age of Ragtime* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2009), 132.;

scholars and contemporary writers linking it to the distinctive syncopations inherent to the melodies, with others defining it in terms of lyrical content, derived from the “coon” songs of the minstrel shows and relying on offensive racial stereotypes.⁵¹³ The lyrics often included references to new dance-crazes such as the Charleston, dances that were worlds away from the decorous Edwardian social dances of quadrilles, waltzes, and polkas.⁵¹⁴ Underlying these concerns seems to have been the idea that ragtime represented modernity, or an emotional intensity that Pearsall suggests had only been experienced in nineteenth-century Britain in a religious context, and that J.B. Priestley encapsulated when he wrote “hot and astonished in the Empire, we discovered ragtime... it was as if we had been still living in the 19th century and then suddenly found the twentieth century screaming at us. We were yanked into our own age, fascinating, jungle-haunted, monstrous.”⁵¹⁵ “Ragtime” was also used as a synonym for “ragtag,” or an undignified, motley, character. A popular set of *contrafacta* lyrics, sung by troops during the War to the hymn tune ‘The Church’s One Foundation’ ran “We are Fred Karno’s Army, the ragtime infantry, / We cannot shoot, we cannot fight, what bloody use are we? / And when we get to Berlin, the Kaiser he will say, / ‘Hoch hoch! Mein Gott, what a bloody useless lot,’ / The ragtime infantry!”⁵¹⁶ Another newspaper article on the question

Catherine Parsonage, “A Critical Reassessment of the Reception of Early Jazz in Britain,” *Popular Music* 22, no. 3 (October 2003): 318.

⁵¹³ Jasen and Tichenor, *Rags and Ragtime*, 3; Berlin, *Ragtime*, 11; Parsonage, “A Critical Reassessment of the Reception of Early Jazz in Britain,” 319; Michael Pickering, “Eugene Stratton and Early Ragtime in Britain,” *Black Music Research Journal* 20, no. 2 (2000): 6. See also an article in *The Era*, “B. Feldman and Co.’s Songs,” March 3, 1915, 7, which uses “syncopated music” as a synonym for ragtime.

⁵¹⁴ Theresa Buckland traces the development of social dancing during the first decades of the twentieth century in her book *Society Dancing: Fashionable Bodies in England, 1870-1920* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁵¹⁵ Pearsall and Priestley are quoted in Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, 105.

⁵¹⁶ Holmes, *Tommy*, 499.

of “good music” also used the word “ragtime” in a pejorative sense: “Of course there is a rag-time element in most soldier audiences—a set of men to whom the best does not appeal; but often it is tiny and negligible.”⁵¹⁷

Ashwell addressed ragtime twice in her autobiography, once to say that she believed that was “something” that connected ragtime with war. She provided a quotation from Julius Harrison in the *Musical Times* as explanation:

There is real genius in these despised tunes. Could you but hear these music-starved men shouting out these songs with full lung-power, you too would come to the conclusion that rag-time seems to quicken the pulse of the soldier in the most extraordinary way. They seem to be the external expression of his whole emotional being.⁵¹⁸

Harrison is able to acknowledge the “genius” within ragtime songs, even though this is, by his own implication, contrary to the opinion of his peers and colleagues, who “despise” them. This quotation also implies that the soldiers enjoy the songs because they are starved of any other musical material, or any opportunity for expressing themselves “with full lung-power.” Harrison’s description finds the outlet that this type of music provided for pent-up energy to be a redeeming quality, as the soldiers shout them rather than sing them and have their pulses “quickenened.” Ashwell connects this effect with war itself, although she is unwilling to go into further detail on the exact nature of the connection. Her implication is that, if ragtime and war are connected, it is through a release of energy and aggression that taps into a primal instinct rather than an educated, refined musical appreciation.

⁵¹⁷ Unlabelled cutting, held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

⁵¹⁸ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 27. The original *Musical Times* article appeared on July 1 1915, titled “Somewhere in France: The Adventures of a Concert Party” (held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook”).

The other reference to ragtime in Ashwell's autobiography was to a specific request from a government office for a "fine representative singer" to go to a music hall in a neutral country for propaganda purposes.⁵¹⁹ Ashwell discovered that the singer needed to be an expert in ragtime: "I could not feel that rag-time was really representative of the music of England, and so gave up the job." Ashwell's misgivings on this score are due to concerns over patriotism and national representation, despite the popularity of the genre amongst a large part of the British public. Again, if the concert parties were embodying white British culture, ragtime could not form a central part.

Ashwell's ambivalence towards ragtime music was not held by the Y.M.C.A. Official Y.M.C.A. publications were, on the whole, supportive of the enjoyment that troops derived from ragtime, with only one major article to the contrary coming from Percy Scholes.⁵²⁰ In November, 1916, a piece in the *Y.M.* giving an insight into life at Y.M.C.A. Headquarters described a Saturday night dance at the Central Hall:

From my office on a Saturday night I cross the corridor to the large hall. It is crammed to suffocation with soldiers and their friends. the band of the Scots Guards is now crashing out some magnificent masterpiece, and again setting every man's feet a-dancing with an irresistible bit of ragtime.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁹ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 189. This was not the only request of this type she received: the Ministry of Information, led by Lord Beaverbrook, had considered whether drama and music could be utilized in propaganda to neutral countries. Beaverbrook's stance on the use of music and drama as propaganda seems to have wavered: he ultimately forbade Ashwell to put on plays at the Comédie Française in Paris in the latter part of the War, with Charles Ricketts' involvement, because "neither English music nor English plays would be used for information or propaganda" (Cave and Consortium for Drama and Media in Higher Education, *Charles Ricketts' Stage Designs*, 60).

⁵²⁰ Percy A. Scholes, "The music soldiers like." *The Y.M.*, October 1917, 51-4. Scholes builds upon his reading of Plato's statement in *The Republic*, that music could strengthen or weaken moral character, and argues against both ragtime ("Plato says... that too much coarse ragtime is bad for Tommy, and that cheap sentimental song can be overdone") but also the well-intentioned performances given by "misguided damsels" performing "tiny trivialities." Scholes argues in favor of troops performing choral music, or of a string band performing Haydn's *Toy Symphony*. Scholes was director of the Music section of the Y.M.C.A., but the relationship between his work and that of Ashwell's is never commented on: this article is the only not-so-thinly-veiled allusion to his opinions on her project that I have found.

⁵²¹ "Round About Our G.H.Q. Life at London Central." *The Y.M.*, November 3, 1916. 1021.

The same publication described a member of Y.M.C.A. staff based in France, performing as one of many turns in an evening concert. Instead of singing, this woman whistled to her own piano accompaniment. Her whistling was the subject of much comment because it was seen as a typical male skill: “Eh, laddie, but she whistles almost as well as a mon,” one Scottish soldier was quoted as saying.⁵²² The description of the concert mentions that “songs and ragtime melodies” were played on the piano, with the soldiers participating in the choruses. The article notes that ragtime was “out of date” in London, but that the thousand men in the hut were able to “let off steam” through their singing: “you would be glad that such catchy things had once had a vogue and had survived in the memories of the men now ‘somewhere in France.’” Again, ragtime is identified with an emotional release, an opportunity for volume rather than finesse, but here this release is presented in wholly positive terms, without the negative qualifiers that appear in Ashwell’s autobiography and Harrison’s newspaper article.⁵²³

Although these anecdotes from *The Y.M.* describe musicians who were not part of Ashwell’s concert parties performing ragtime, evidence exists that members of some of Ashwell’s parties, at least, performed ragtime songs. *The Egyptian Gazette* reported on the first performance given by the Egyptian concert party, which included Marjorie Ffrangcon Davies singing “‘She wandered down the Mountain Side,’ ‘Somewhere a Voice is calling,’ ‘There’s a Long Long Trail,’ and many rag-time songs, all of which were vociferously encored by the men.”⁵²⁴ Another article in the same publication the

⁵²² *The Y.M.*, October 29 1915, 989.

⁵²³ The band performed before and after the singing ‘interlude,’ playing “The Bohemian Girl” (presumably *La bohème?*) and *La Traviata* (although the article does not mention which extracts).

⁵²⁴ “The Lena Ashwell Concert Party,” *The Egyptian Gazette*, December 4, 1916, held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

following week mentions a different performer, Grace Ivel, being “excellent” in ragtime songs.⁵²⁵ It is impossible to know whether Ashwell had approved these songs for these performers, or whether, once they were beyond her immediate supervision, the performers were able to alter their repertoire to suit the tastes of their audiences. It is interesting that these quotations relate to the Egyptian concert party, who remained abroad for the longest continuous period of any concert party, and which was one of the only parties not able to be personally visited by Ashwell. Jane Angell highlights the near-certainty that the repertoire of the Concerts at the Front may have strayed far from Ashwell’s claims of mainly classical music, citing an editorial in the *Monthly Musical Record* in November 1917: “there is no doubt that the members of these parties ‘play down’ considerably to their audiences—probably unnecessarily so.”⁵²⁶

Whether audiences called for more ragtime and popular choruses, or the performers drew on inherited class prejudices to assume that this, rather than classical music, was what the troops wanted to hear, it is clear that the relationship of the concert parties to ragtime music is just one example of the ways in which the attitudes of the concert parties altered as they traveled beyond the Home Front. The restrictions placed upon them by the War Office, the Y.M.C.A., and Ashwell herself, became subsumed by the troop culture and military ordinances of the parts of France, Malta, and Egypt through which they were traveling. The military regime had no regulations relating directly to the work of the concert parties: they were civilians, but traveling across the war zones rather than remaining stationed in one particular location; they were entertainers, performing some

⁵²⁵ The *Egyptian Gazette*, December 11 1916, held in Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Angell, “Art Music in British Public Discourse during the First World War,” 204.

sort of labor but ultimately engaging in social interactions with troops and therefore very distinct from the other para-military nursing and ambulance organizations; and they were made up of women as well as men, for whom there were no codified military rules. The ways in which the roles of the parties developed within the restrictions of the militarized zones, particularly in terms of their roles beyond the concert platform, are notable because they are so different to those of any other workers behind the lines in this period. Not only acting as visual reminders of the Englishwomen back home for whom the soldiers were fighting, nor simply as aural reminders of British culture and nationality, the women of the concert parties performed their femininity in other ways, through their participation in Edwardian social conventions, thereby providing another type of bridge between the Home and Western Fronts.

Beyond the stage: social conventions as communication

It was not only the domestic practices of music-making that the female members of the concert parties translated across the English Channel. A number of accounts, coming both directly from Ashwell and from other members of the concert parties, and occasionally from troops themselves, emphasize the ways in which the female performers socialized with the male troops, particularly through dances and dinners. Members of many of the other women's voluntary organizations were not permitted to participate in these activities: for example, V.A.D.s, and later W.A.A.C.s, were not allowed to dance, nor to socialize with officers.⁵²⁷ The civilian women of the concert parties were in a unique

⁵²⁷ Some correspondence in the *Times* blamed the difficulties in recruiting V.A.D.s on the "Puritanical ordinance" forbidding them to dance, although a letter in reply felt that this misrepresented nurses as frivolous. Quoted in Macdonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land*, 197. Even on the day of the Armistice, the

position to be able to do this. It is even possible that more social license was given to them precisely because of their backgrounds in the musical and theatrical industries, an association which had initially caused doubts on the part of the Y.M.C.A. with respect to the moral characters of their artists.

Social dancing formed a mainstay of leisure occupation for all social classes in pre-war Britain, with working-class girls as well as girls of higher social class having dancing lessons in order that they could participate fully. The dances, held at work places, clubs, and churches, and later at dance halls, were strictly controlled, with the masters of ceremonies separating couples who were dancing too closely.⁵²⁸ The practice of social dancing was extended into the army camps, despite the lack of female social partners. One anecdote from a member of a permanent concert party describes three women from the party attending a dance at a convalescent camp. The ratio of three women to a thousand men meant that, during the ‘flirtation’ dance in which partners are constantly changed,

the dance resolved itself into three congested groups of hopeful humanity, and in the centre of each group there danced a very hot, a somewhat breathless, and yet a wholly happy girl. Thus do we help always in that one great task of bringing Blighty to the boys, pending that great day when they themselves can return to it.⁵²⁹

The enormous amount of physical effort required of the women in this situation was still

W.A.A.C.s at G.H.Q. were not permitted to dance: Holmes, *Tommy*, 615. This does not, of course, assume that these rules were never broken: merely that the rules existed in the first place. Propriety was of enormous concern to the matrons and sisters in charge of the professional nurses and the V.A.D.s, as the nursing profession was still campaigning for a professional register, and any improper behavior could undermine this. Nurses were also still trying to become rid of their reputation as servants and women of “ill-repute”: see Christine Hallett’s chapter in Fell and Hallett, *First World War Nursing*, 97.

⁵²⁸ Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman’s Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford; New York: B. Blackwell, 1984), 69–71.

⁵²⁹ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 66.

framed in aid of extending the Home Front into the space of the military zone, bringing the social customs of “normal” British life to the troops through physical embodiment rather than solely through aural, musical reminders. The earlier part of this anecdote is also indicative of the extraordinary permutations of gender roles that these women encountered: one Tommy asked a lady to dance with him, but was not able to begin until he suddenly asked, “Would you mind taking gentleman?” The writer continues: “Poor boy, he had danced as lady so often that he could not take his proper position. A most amusing and yet pathetic incident.” In a space in which the presence of women provided a normalized social situation in a male-dominated zone, the performance of gender still remained far from clear-cut.

Other descriptions of concert parties dining in officers’ messes imply similar situations that brought normal British social conventions to the Front, albeit mainly to the officer classes. Performer Ada Ward, whose letter to her sister was published in the local Bradford paper, described a typical day’s itinerary, including supper with officers: “always a jolly meal, for we can let ourselves go after our last concert, and the officers seem so glad to entertain us.”⁵³⁰ Another account, from Bessie Unwin, recounted that she was entertained on board a monitor ship, “which is contrary to the regulations of my Lords of the Admiralty, but which was, under the circumstances, officially winked at.”⁵³¹ Rules could be bent, if not outright broken, in order to entertain these civilian women, in contrast to descriptions from the male-only concert parties, who imply that the invitations

⁵³⁰ *Bradford Weekly Telegraph*, August 6 1915, held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

⁵³¹ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, n.d., held in *Ibid.*

were rarer and that they did not receive particularly special treatment.⁵³² Some descriptions make it clear that the women's presence simultaneously made these dinners into "normal" social occasions, but also made them exceptional because of the context of the war zone. An account from one of the men-only firing line parties recounted a moment between shows when three young officers invited the concert party members to dine with them in the officers' mess before the next show. "Were there any ladies in the party? But in any case, could not the invitation to supper be accepted?"⁵³³ If women had been present, they would have made the dinner invitation 'normal' and not a strange request; but this in itself would *not* have been normal, in what was nominally a male-only zone—hence the eagerness of the officers and their slight disappointment on discovering that the dinner would remain a men-only affair.

Although the ability to entertain concert party members at dinners was limited to officers, the rank-and-file troops were able to interact socially with the performers in other ways, notably in conversations after concerts. Again, these conversations were governed both by peacetime social norms and by the exceptional wartime situation of actually having a woman present with whom to make social conversation. One concert party member described a typical scenario with a little knot of men standing a distance away while the performers packed up: "if you smile encouragingly at them, and we always do, they come forward rather self-consciously, and in the most delightful manner possible they claim a war-time acquaintance with you."⁵³⁴ Other social conventions

⁵³² For example, Nelson Jackson wrote, "We lived mostly on veal, except when we were invited to officers' mess to get a decent dinner" ("The Firing-Line Concert Party," *Musical Herald*, August 1916, held in *Ibid.*). Of course the fewer invitations would also have been due to the difficulties of operating at the front lines rather than in base camps.

⁵³³ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 163.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

related to dress codes for the troops themselves. A much-reprinted anecdote from Ashwell related to a concert at which she was performing, with about 700 Tommies in the over-heated hall. Ashwell suggested to the chairman that he ask the men to remove their tunics, but this was an “indelicate” suggestion and caused consternation. Eventually all the men followed one brave man’s example, and the audience watched the concert in their grey-back army shirts.⁵³⁵ Although by no means improperly clothed by today’s standards, or even by the standards of what was appropriate for a room of soldiers, the audience members had to be persuaded (according to Ashwell) to desert the ‘proper’ social conventions of the Home Front while a woman was present.

These social conventions, and the concomitant performance of gendered roles from both the female performers and the male soldiers, meant that as the concert parties brought social customs of Britain out to the troops in the war zone, they created an alternative mode of communication with home that was not mediated through the written (and censored) word as were the letters and packages that were the main forms of communication for the troops. One soldier equated a concert party’s visit with a letter from home, as he later wrote to a concert party member: “I was feeling rather lonely not having anybody to write to me while I was out there. I began to feel I was fighting for no one until your cheery party came along.”⁵³⁶ In particular, the touring parties rather than the permanent parties facilitated this idea of music and socializing as communication, as they were constantly moving, traveling for short periods of time before returning home,

⁵³⁵ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*. Reprinted in *Market Harborough Advertiser*, July 3, 2015; held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

⁵³⁶ “Pen-Pictures of the War,” *Dublin Herald*, July 20, 1915, held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.” It may have been that he had no-one at home to write to him, or that his family were illiterate and so were unable to write.

and therefore forming a closer link with Britain than the parties who were based in France for up to six months, or the nurses who were based in hospitals for the duration of the War.⁵³⁷

But this performance of social conventions was not a one-way operation: it also took place in reverse when the concert parties returned home. Many of the groups gave concerts to audiences in Britain of the same repertoire that they had performed abroad, performing on the same instruments even down to the same pianos, and telling anecdotes about their time with the troops, thereby recreating their experiences as far as possible for their audiences and allowing their audiences to participate in the same musical and social experiences as the troops. For example, a concert reviewer in the *Southport Visitor* described a concert party newly back from France, performing concerts across Lancashire. At the beginning of the concert, one of the performers asked the audience to imagine they were men at the Front listening to the entertainment; they also explained that the program would be “impromptu,” as the artists would “endeavour to give them [the audience] just what they give to the soldiers in France.”⁵³⁸ Another newspaper reviewer, after attending a series of performances by one of the firing-line parties at the London Coliseum, wrote, “One of the wonderful things in London during the month has been to sit in the Coliseum and imagine oneself seated at a concert on the firing line. It was near to reality, but not quite.”⁵³⁹ These concerts created an idealized version of wartime experiences for audiences at home, who would not have wanted to be reminded

⁵³⁷ Ashwell had to get special permission for the shortness of the permits for the touring concert parties: the War Office typically did not issue permits for civilian workers for shorter than three or four months, but the concert parties received permits for four to six weeks. (Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 35.)

⁵³⁸ *Southport Visitor*, August 1916, held in “Lena Ashwell’s Press Cuttings Scrapbook.”

⁵³⁹ *Musical Herald*, August 1916, held in Ibid.

of the less uplifting and heroic aspects of war. This was a type of communication loop that other workers at the front could never achieve. Many medical workers struggled to find words to describe their harrowing hospital experiences, or when they did they openly acknowledged that audiences back home did not want to know the graphic details of their work. Helen Zenna Smith, an ambulance driver during the War, wrote a biting, furious account of her war work in *Not So Quiet: Stepdaughters of War*. One passage in particular apostrophizes her mother and a philanthropist character called Mrs. Evans-Mawnington; the author writes graphic accounts of men spewing blood, gassed men coughing up “clots of pinky-green filth,” feet rotting from trench-foot, and throughout the section comments on the revulsion of her imagined audience:

Shut your ears, Mother and Mrs. Evans-Mawnington, lest their groans and heart-rending cries linger in your memory... You can't watch him? Why not? *Why not?* I have to, every night. Why the hell can't you do it for once? ... What? You cannot stick it any longer? You are going? I didn't think you'd stay.⁵⁴⁰

The concert parties had the luxury of creating an entirely different experience for their audiences at home, using musical performances as a means of creating the illusion of a shared experience. They could bring the experiences of the troops to the audiences at home without needing to describe their work only in terms of suffering and pain. This illusory embodiment of the Western Front for the Home Front audiences was an idealized one; as was the reciprocal version, in which women performed lively songs and smiled brightly for the troops, without voicing the hardships that working-class women in

⁵⁴⁰ Helen Zenna Smith, *Not so Quiet: Stepdaughters of War* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1989), 90–96. Another difficulty with nurses publishing memoirs was encountered by Enid Bagnold, whose memoir was seen as painting such a vivid picture of her work during the War that she was instantly dismissed from her post for breaching confidentiality (Fell and Hallett, *First World War Nursing*, 91).

Britain were facing as they worked in factories and on the land, running their households without the help of the absent men and dealing with food shortages and rationing.

This idealized communication loop became even more closely knitted with Ashwell and the Y.M.C.A.'s establishment of an evening club in London, a respectable venue suitable for men home on leave to take their female acquaintances for a night of entertainment.⁵⁴¹ The club was called *Ciro's*, and had previously been for members of the theatrical professions: it had once been raided, according to Ashwell, which lent the club a further sense of excitement. The Y.M.C.A. at first resisted organizing events in this venue—"it was a tremendous departure for so conservative an organization"—but eventually *Ciro's* became established as the first Y.M.C.A. hut where women were welcomed along with the men, and as a place "where self-respect and respect for the other fellow were expected... even though *Ciro's* is situated in Leicester Square, the very heart of London."⁵⁴² To add a further layer of respectability, the club was presided over by 'lady hostesses,' all of whom were middle-class or upper-class, titled, women.⁵⁴³ Ashwell was in charge of organizing music for the evening entertainments (Sir Arthur Yapp, the head of the Y.M.C.A, suggested she took on the entire venture, but she declined), and recruited performers who had been members of her concert parties; she also used these performances as opportunities to try out artists before sending them

⁵⁴¹ Despite a certain amount of leave entitlement being granted to all troops, officers received much more leave than ordinary service members. In June and July 1917, more than 107,000 British soldiers had had no leave for eighteen months. (Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918*, 72.) It remains somewhat unclear as to when exactly *Ciro's* fell under the governance of the Y.M.C.A.; an article in *The Y.M.* describes the work at *Ciro's* in May 1917, but *The Era* records the re-opening of the club in April 1915.

⁵⁴² Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 211–12.

⁵⁴³ The Hon. Mrs. Stuart-Wortley, "What We Are Doing at *Ciro's*," *The Y.M.*, May 25, 1917, 467.

abroad.⁵⁴⁴ The music was mainly classical; Ashwell highlighted a performance of Roger Quilter's songs given by the composer along with singer Gervase Elwes.⁵⁴⁵ Although Ashwell and the Y.M.C.A. were keen to emphasize that it was not a night club, but rather a reputable establishment for dining and highbrow entertainment, the *Era* recorded that at the opening night the members enjoyed themselves by dancing until two a.m.⁵⁴⁶

In this venue in the heart of London, soldiers and civilians could share in identical musical experiences, that could otherwise only take place in vastly different circumstances. *Ciro's* was a meeting-place, a space where the Home Front and the Western Front could co-exist, not solely through the presence of both troops and civilians but also through the music-making of the Concerts at the Front as one of the only forms of shared entertainment that was available on both sides of the Channel. Ashwell's parties provided the soundtrack for a moment of direct connection between soldiers and civilians in this one venue in London, in contrast to other venues around Great Britain and France, Malta and Egypt in which they provided the soundtrack for imagined connections.

Conclusion

The work of Ashwell's concert parties was not, on the surface, radical. They entertained troops, performing concerts of classical and modern popular music. The female members of the parties were admired for their looks, and their presence was fêted at dances and dinners. They participated in traditional middle-class British social conventions, while

⁵⁴⁴ Additional notes inserted in Ashwell, *Concerts at the Front*. See also article in the *Musical Standard*, n.d., held in "Lena Ashwell's Press Cuttings Scrapbook."

⁵⁴⁵ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 212.

⁵⁴⁶ "Ciro's in London," *The Era*, April 21, 1915, 12.

legitimizing their presence within the militarized zones through rhetorics of medical care and education. Particularly when compared to female ambulance drivers, and nurses who left their organizations and set up encampments close to the Front lines, or even middle-class women who trained as V.A.D.s and learned to care for soldiers with amputated limbs and life-threatening injuries, the work of the concert parties appears to have been overwhelmingly safe and traditional.

It seems ironic that the women for whom Ashwell fought so hard to be permitted to travel to the warzones ended up perpetuating very conventional gender roles once they got there. Ashwell herself commented on this irony: after visiting one concert party and walking through the officers' mess, as hundreds of men stood to attention, she wrote: "all the standing and attention I received was not because I was an actor, but only because I was a woman."⁵⁴⁷ However, by reading these traditionally-gendered roles in the context of the exceptional circumstances in which they took place, we can reflect upon the different sorts of labor that they performed. These roles as fantasized surrogate wife, or mother, or sweetheart, or as dance partner, as dinner guest, as nurse, or even simply as conversation partner at the end of a concert, were exceptional both in the context of the military regime and the carefully chaperoned lives of the mainly young, middle-class women, and played an important part in the war effort, boosting morale and patriotism and forming a unique type of communication loop between Britain and foreign fronts. Ashwell's own work, as figurehead and organizer of the parties, was typical of the organizational roles undertaken by many middle-class women during the War, but also exceptional because of her individual negotiations with massive institutions, and her

⁵⁴⁷ Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours: A Record of Concerts at the Front*, 30.

commitment to personally traveling vast distances to provide a constant flow of funds and performers into the scheme. The Concerts at the Front program was also the precursor to the official programs of entertainment for troops in the Second World War, both for Britain's Entertainments National Service Association (E.N.S.A.) and America's United Service Organizations (U.S.O.): the legacy of Ashwell's work continued long after she extended the program through demobilization and past the end of the First World War.

This close examination of the Concerts at the Front demonstrates the ways in which women's work as entertainers can become imbued with traditional gender roles in exceptional circumstances, in this case providing a sense of national identity and a unique type of communication between Home and Western Fronts. In translating the gendered practices of the Home Front across the Channel, Ashwell's parties capitalized on the liminality of their position: their geographical movement within a space of military law, in which the performers were ungovernable because they were not within the military, allowed for the bodies of the performers, female performers in particular, to extend the Home Front abroad, temporarily blurring the borders between home and away.

Conclusion

These four case studies have exposed an increasingly intricate network of music-making in London during World War One: not only in terms of the musicians and performers involved, but also in terms of the extensive intersections of broader themes of creative labor and women's labor. These chapters have, to varying degrees, situated women's music-making alongside other forms of women's wartime labor. They have demonstrated ways in which performers worked in service of the state, perpetuating government propaganda and enacting forms of social discipline on their audiences through their affective labor in ways similar to female police officers and social workers. They have highlighted the material labor of music-making, and its overlap with issues surrounding women in industrial workplaces, including the ways in which women both capitalized on and were exploited through the opportunities afforded to them by the mass exodus of men from male-dominated industries. They have shown how performers became aligned with traditional female roles of nurses and educators, in order to legitimize creative labor within traditional forms of feminine labor.

Importantly, they have also extended this network, suggesting ways in which women's wartime labor extended beyond the bounds of other, more familiar forms of war work. Some performers used their creative labor to move into military zones, extending the purview of their work once they moved beyond direct institutional governance. Others used their music-making to further their personal political projects, of socialism and suffrage, and of compassion for marginalized communities in the face of strict government censure and surveillance. Individual performers reflected wartime

masculinities back to their audiences through the vehicle of their female bodies, suggesting music's capacity for reflection on the gendered divisions of the War.

There are other avenues of investigation that this project could have taken in terms of examining women's music-making during the First World War. In London alone, opportunities for further research could extend to amateur music-making, including orchestras and choirs; other professional performers, including classical musicians and other music hall acts; the theatrical troupes associated with the suffrage movement, such as the Pioneer Players, and their combinations of drama and music; and the gramophone industry's permeation of homes and private spaces. Expanding beyond London, a survey of the creative labor of the First World War would do well to consider the specific contexts of other towns and cities with different demographics and musical scenes. Work on non-urban soundscapes suggests further possibilities: for example, Michelle Meinhart's work has focused on music-making in England's stately homes, many of which were turned into hospitals for the duration of the War.⁵⁴⁸

Yet expansion of this project will necessarily be limited by the amount of archival material that remains: the absences and silences within these archives have already marked my four case studies. Extant archival material is centered around individual "notable" women: the star performers and the successful impresarios, rather than the working women who performed the physical labor of music-making, or who listened to music rather than taking center-stage themselves. In particular, the relative scarcity of sources on Stoll's female orchestras and on the United Suffragists' Women's Club has

⁵⁴⁸ Michelle Meinhart, "Memory and Private Mourning in an English Country House during the First World War: Lady Alda Hoare's Musical Shrine to a Lost Son," *Journal of Musicological Research* 33, no. 1–3 (July 3, 2014): 39–95.

made for sometimes frustrating study; perhaps future archival work will yield more sources, but more likely, the sources were simply not considered to be worth preserving, a reminder of the power imbalances that resulted in their erasure from the historical record.

This dissertation also comes just too late to permit direct ethnographic research. My grandmother, who was seven years old when the First World War began, died in 2012: with her went her recollections of the songs about the War that she sang with her friends, of the popular songs she heard whistled and sung, and of her life with her father after he fought in the conflict, marked by his exposure to gas and his shell-shock. In the same year, Florence Green, the last surviving veteran of the First World War of any nation, also died. As the voices of the people who were our last direct links with the conflict fall silent, the nature of our historiography of the First World War must necessarily change. The possibility for different first-hand accounts and narratives to emerge, and for scholars to seek out alternative histories through these sources, has gone. What remains is for researchers to continue to unearth the material traces of the conflict, and of the culture and lives of the people who endured it: and if we are to continue to dismantle the hegemonic narratives of the conflict based around the white, male, heroic soldier, we must begin to look to different kinds of sources for these traces, sources that include popular culture and sonic artifacts.

One hundred years on: the politics of war remembrance

The goals of this dissertation, and its contribution to the historiography of the War, are not purely academic. The way the First World War is remembered and taught is of

immediate political concern, if we consider that the conflict remains at the heart of British conceptions of war and its commemoration. According to Nataliya Danilova, the First World War functions as “a national master narrative of war,” and the “mythical nature” of its commemoration has decontextualized the rituals of its commemoration from the specific circumstances of the conflict.⁵⁴⁹ State-promulgated annual rituals of remembrance serve to perpetuate the image of the conflict as a “sphere of masculine attainment and suffering.”⁵⁵⁰ The unthinking reliance on the First World War as the dominant symbol of British warfare removes everyone except the young, white, heroic soldier from national commemorations of past and present conflicts, glorifying their sacrifice in service of a supposedly noble cause: part of a current agenda of nationalistic propaganda that also promoted and supported Brexit, for example.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁹ Nataliya Danilova, *The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia*, 2015, 96. Every November, the rituals of Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday take place across Britain: although they ostensibly call to mind members of the Armed Forces who have died in every conflict of the twentieth century, they are all grounded in imagery relating to the First World War. The symbol of the poppy is ubiquitous, with wreaths of poppies laid at war memorials across the country, including by the Queen and the Prime Minister at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. A national two-minute silence is observed at 11 a.m. on November 11: the exact moment of the declaration of the Armistice. Church services held on Remembrance Sunday include the “exhortation,” comprising lines from Laurence Binyon’s poem, *For the Fallen*, which Binyon wrote in 1914 to commemorate the British soldiers who had died at the Battle of Mons and the Battle of the Marne.

⁵⁵⁰ Meyer, *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, 1.

⁵⁵¹ Since the 1980s, the field of memory studies has explored how the conflict has shaped modern memory and how memorial culture has developed as a result of the War. In particular, debate has centered around war commemoration as a public, political practice, as opposed to a private, personal expression of mourning. See in particular J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); J. M. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 1998); Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940*, *Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare* 25 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, eds., *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, *Routledge Studies in Memory and Narrative* 7 (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

The centenary of the War in Britain has occasioned, to some degree, a public re-examination of how the First World War is remembered. Artistic contributions have formed a central part of the centenary commemorations, in a way that has not been the case for the “usual” annual rites of remembrance. However, it has proved almost impossible for the most successful of these artworks and installations to escape the same nationalistic and glorifying bias. For example, *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* was an installation by Paul Cummins and Tom Piper that became a national focal point for the beginning of the centenary commemorations. It consisted of 888,246 ceramic poppies filling the Tower of London’s moat and cascading out of its windows, each one representing a British or colonial soldier who died during the First World War. Attracting huge public and media attention, the installation was described as “a success of almost unimaginable proportion.”⁵⁵² When I interviewed visitors to the installation, its scale was the aspect that struck them most: “It really demonstrated the number of people who were killed during the war;” “they really bring home just how many people died;” and the



Figure 5-17: *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* at the Tower of London. Photograph by JeyHan (Own work), licensed under Creative Commons.

⁵⁵² India Knight, “Let the poppies stand and our respect for the fallen will wither,” *Sunday Times*, November 9, 2014.
<http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/comment/columns/indiaknight/article1481039.ece>.

unusually-phrased, “You are impressed by how many deaths occurred.”⁵⁵³ The stunning scale of the installation concealed the political decisions behind the figure of 888,246, which excluded soldiers of other nations involved in the conflict, as well as civilians who were killed both on the Home Front and serving abroad in non-military capacities: its audiences were given no means to remember anyone other than British men.⁵⁵⁴

For some viewers, the poppies corresponded on a one-to-one basis with the soldiers who had been killed, made evident by a quotation from a volunteer poppy planter: “One lady next to us broke a petal when planting the poppy into the ground and choked up immediately – “it’s like I’ve hurt one of the soldiers again”, she said.”⁵⁵⁵ For other visitors, the soldiers became homogenized through the sea of more-or-less identical poppies, which forced viewers to remember the entire body of British and colonial soldiers rather than focusing on individuals. The artwork’s form removed the possibility for individual stories to emerge out of a regimented narrative, and thereby enable a more multidimensional conception of the conflict, as I have argued for in this dissertation: it created a smooth, rather than striated, space of remembrance.

⁵⁵³ I conducted these interviews for a research paper focused on the installation, as part of my coursework at the University of Pennsylvania in December 2014.

⁵⁵⁴ Other art installations linked to the centenary of the First World War that have received national attention include “Letters to an Unknown Soldier,” by Neil Bartlett and Kate Pullinger, which focused on the statue of an unknown soldier reading a letter at Paddington Station. The artists invited members of the public to write their own letters to this anonymous figure. 21,439 letters were received and published on the project’s website (<https://www.1418now.org.uk/letter/>). This memorial placed the figure of the soldier at the center of public thought about the War; as did Turner Prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller’s project “We’re Here Because We’re Here.” Deller collaborated with theatres and arts organizations to find volunteers to dress up as First World War soldiers, representing soldiers who were killed at the Battle of the Somme on July 1, 1916. These volunteers appeared in public spaces around the country on the hundredth anniversary of the Somme. They did not speak: instead they handed out cards to passers-by detailing the name, age, and regiment of the soldier they represented. Again, silence and the body of the soldier, heroically martyred at a young age, was at the heart of this event. The project’s website is at <https://becausewearehere.co.uk>.

⁵⁵⁵ Carmen Fishwick, “The Tower of London poppies are not ‘a Ukip-style memorial,’ say volunteers,” *Guardian*, November 1 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/nov/01/the-tower-of-london-poppies-are-not-a-ukip-style-memorial-say-volunteers>.

Where *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* was successful was in temporarily making visible the material and affective labor of its artists and audiences. The artwork required the delicate manufacture and installation of hundreds of thousands of individual works of art, now owned by members of the public around the world. It also laid bare, through stories like that of the volunteer's broken poppy and the public debate around the afterlife of the artwork, the emotive, psychological work of mourning and remembering: something that is usually masked by the insistence on silent, wordless remembrance in the annual two-minute silence of Remembrance Day.⁵⁵⁶

The silence of remembrance has also been disturbed by way of musical “commemoration concerts” undertaken by some British orchestras, with programs of canonic classical music selected for their ability to convey affects of mourning and solemnity. For example, the Philharmonia Orchestra performed a “First World War Commemoration Concert” in October 2014 that included Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin*, Elgar's Cello Concerto, and Vaughan Williams's Symphony No. 3, *Pastoral*. The description of the concert, taken from the Philharmonia's website, described the three works as pieces that “meditate upon the appalling carnage of the First World War in strikingly different ways, ranging from Ravel's tantalising neoclassical restraint and the

⁵⁵⁶ The two-minute silence is derived from the first two-minute silence established by the British government as a “ritual of legitimation” and a “defence of the existing order” in 1919 (Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946*, The Legacy of the Great War (Oxford; Providence, RI: Berg, 1994), 10). The silence was re-established in 1995, after a cessation during the Second World War, and became a symbol of conservative nationalist politics that was presented as an unbroken tradition supposedly stemming directly from the First World War. Nataliya Danilova has described the British Legion's campaign for the re-introduction of the silence at the end of the twentieth century: “This re-adjustment of the First World War template allowed for the re-nationalisation and militarisation of remembrance in Britain.” Danilova, *The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia*, 101. Trudi Tate and Kate Kennedy's edited volume explores the echoes of the silence of the Armistice in literature, publishing, art, and classical music, confronting the inter-disciplinary possibilities for reading silence and trauma: Trudi Tate and Kate Kennedy, eds., *The Silent Morning: Culture and Memory after the Armistice*, Cultural History of Modern War (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Pr, 2013).

impassioned nostalgia of Elgar to Vaughan Williams's haunting eloquence that Holst considered 'his very essence.'" However, although the limitation of the program to works by canonic white male composers was not out of the ordinary for classical orchestras, when described specifically as a "First World War Commemoration Concert" it served to reinforce the narrative of war commemoration as a masculine sphere.⁵⁵⁷ It seems that the dilemma I described in the Introduction, of whether it is possible to entertain creative responses to the War that look beyond the conflict's enormous and traumatic loss of life, is one that remains almost impossible to overcome.

This is further problematized by musical performances surrounding the centenary that have openly solicited very specific affective responses in their audiences, responses that fulfil the emotional work of mourning and grief. The London Symphony and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras recorded the last movement of Brahms's *German Requiem* and Butterworth's *A Shropshire Lad*, to be played at the St. Symphorien military cemetery in Belgium on August 4, 2014, alongside a performance of one of Bach's Cello Suites and a choir of British children performing a song of their own composition. The *Guardian* quoted Sir Nicholas Kenyon, the Managing Director of the Barbican, as saying, "The mood of this event is going to be respect for the dead... There won't be a dry eye in the house."⁵⁵⁸ Kenyon had no doubt that he could determine the "mood" of people's remembrance, setting an agenda of an almost voyeuristic contemplation of grief and mourning. If, as my dissertation has suggested, music-making is a site of affective labor

⁵⁵⁷ Similarly, newly-commissioned works have maintained the focus on the war dead, for example with Sally Beamish's commission from the London Symphony Orchestra, *Equal Voices*, setting texts by Poet Laureate Andrew Motion based on First World War soldiers' and doctors' memories of the conflict.

⁵⁵⁸ Mark Brown, "Berlin Philharmonic and LSO join forces for first world war centenary," *The Guardian*, July 18, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/18/berlin-philharmonic-lso-first-world-war-centenary>.

that can reinforce or negate political and social agendas, then the work of performances such as this one is limited to perpetuation of a patriotic nostalgia for bygone heroism. Without a critical consideration of the role of affective labor in these rituals of war commemoration, all of which are founded on presuppositions of which genders, races, and classes of humanity are “worthy” of mourning, we risk losing sight of the potential for creative acts to change—or perpetuate—current political climates of nationalistic insularity, fascism, and xenophobia.

Attention is already turning to the forthcoming major commemorations of the Second World War; and fortunately, questions are beginning to be asked about how commemorations of both wars will shape the cultural memories of the conflict, particularly among “young people.”⁵⁵⁹ This dissertation has suggested that perpetuating over-arching narratives of specific conflicts results in the preservation of stereotypes and narratives that exclude many people and many forms of culture and labor. Although comparative work can prove fruitful, finding commonalities and differences in wartime experiences, I suggest that a focus on individual moments rooted in specific cultural contexts is also vital to considering how culture is constructed, and, in turn, constructs the social and political context in which it exists, particularly in moments of political exception. My case studies have allowed moments of productivity, change, and friction to emerge from within the broader picture of British wartime culture. The production of popular culture, with all the various permutations of labor that it entails, is as much a part

⁵⁵⁹ For example, a conference is scheduled for September 2017 at King’s College, London, titled “Their Past, Their Memory?” This interdisciplinary meeting will focus on the commemorations of the First and Second World Wars, and the ways in which these “cataclysmic” events are taught, how young people interpret the cultural memory messages embedded in their learning experiences, and the relationship between education and commemoration. See <http://www.criticalheritagestudies.org/announcements-1/2017/4/5/cfp-their-past-their-memory-kings-college-london-september-2017>.

of First World War historiography as the production of munitions and uniforms, and the labor of soldiers and nurses. Conceptualizing music-making as labor broadens the scope of scholarship on wartime labor and its intersections with issues of gender and class, and suggests the possibility of inserting music into war remembrance not simply as a tool of nostalgia and solemnity, but as a vital instrument for political and social action.

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