The cover illustration shows Alfred Rethel’s ‘Death as a Cutthroat’. It was inspired by the outbreak of cholera during a Paris carnival in 1832.

Music, Death and Grief in the Long Nineteenth Century

One Day Conference | Thursday 4 June 2015
Penthouse Suite, Collingwood College, Durham University
In association with
Centre for Death and Life Studies | International Network for Music Theology
Department of Music, Durham University
Welcome

“Oh may I join the choir invisible, of those immortal dead who live again In minds made better by their presence” (George Eliot)

We are delighted to welcome you to our one-day conference on Music, Death and Grief in the Long Nineteenth Century. We hope that it may be a stimulating and fruitful event. It is our particular pleasure to welcome Rev Dr Ian Bradley to deliver a keynote address at the end of the day. Responses to death in the nineteenth century were often musical. Whether it was the massed choir singing for the funeral of the Duke of Wellington in 1852, or a pious evangelical woman reciting the text of a favourite hymn on her bed as she died a ‘good death’, music was employed to comfort the dying and the bereaved. The ‘work of mourning’ could also be achieved in a variety of ways through musical composition and performance.

Today’s three panels will examine the subject from a variety of fascinating perspectives. In ‘Death and Remembrance in Songs of the People’, we will learn of the prominence of motifs about death in repertoires which expressed communal sentiments: the French revolutionaries, the Canterbury catch singers and the English soldiers of the first world war.

The second panel will examine the way in which we understand composers of the Romantic era and their music in terms of their experience of death and grief. This will feature a lecture-recital from the mezzo-soprano Susie Self.

We will conclude with a musical examination of the theological and philosophical approaches to death that prevailed in the nineteenth century, with case studies in Mormonism and evangelicalism followed by a discussion of music in terms of nineteenth-century phenomenology.

About CNCS

CNCS was founded by Professor Bennett Zon to increase and enhance research in nineteenth-century studies at Durham University and internationally. Incorporating the contributions of postgraduates working in the field of nineteenth-century studies to publications, conferences and research conversations, the centre seeks to build on the success and excellence of current research projects to improve and deepen our understanding of the nineteenth century. CNCS hosts regular research conversations for academics and postgraduates to foster interdisciplinary dialogue across the humanities, sciences and social sciences. The centre seeks to develop links not only in higher education but through cultural and heritage exchange both regionally, nationally and internationally. CNCS strives to advance and generate new methods of studying the nineteenth century by bringing academics and postgraduates from across disciplinary boundaries together to shape and invigorate future research.

Our Next Event

One-Day Conference: Romantic Orients

Friday 3 July 2015, Van Mildert College

Keynote Address: Professor Michael Franklin, University of Swansea

The increased global prominence of Asian economies has entailed greater scholarly attention to historic interactions with the East. This one-day conference will explore perceptions of Asia during the Romantic period, with focus on literature and its interdisciplinary dialogues, and the possibility of theorising Orientalist modes of the time.
Acknowledgements

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Centre for Death and Life Studies, Durham University
International Network for Music Theology, Durham University
Music Department, Durham University
Collingwood College, Durham University
Event Durham
Durham University Business School
CNCS Advisory Group

Conference Organisers

Professor Bennett Zon, Music Department; Director, CNCS
Joanna Heath, Music Department
Andrew Moss, Department of Theology & Religion
Siobhan Harper, Department of English Studies
Roisin McCloskey, Department of English Studies

Conference Schedule

0900—0930 | Registration, Tea and Coffee

0930—1100 | Paper Session 1

Death and Remembrance in the Songs of the People

Jonathan Huff—King’s College London
Sacred Ashes and Melancholy Sighs: Musical Representations of Death and Self-sacrifice during the French Revolution

Chris Price—Canterbury Christ Church University
“The Folly of the Farce is Done”: Death and Grief in Convivial Song

Michelle Meinhart—Martin Methodist College, Tennessee
“No Other Shall Sing These Songs”: The English Country House Music Collection as First World War Memorial

1100—1130 | Tea and Coffee Break

1130—1300 | Paper Session 2

Death and the Romantic Composer

Julian Horton—Durham University
Death and Poetic Allusion in the Andante of Brahms’s Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 83
1300—1400 | Lunch Break

1400—1530 | Paper Session 3

Music and the Theology and Philosophy of Death

Douglas Davies—Durham University
Singing Death through Evangelical and Mormon Emotions

Joanna Heath—Durham University
Heavenly Songs of the Nonconformist Missionaries

Martyn Evans—Durham University
Death, Music and the Ineffable

1530—1550 | Tea and Coffee Break

1550—1650 | Keynote Address

Ian Bradley—University of St Andrews
“It may be that only in heaven I shall hear that grand Amen”: Arthur Sullivan, Adelaide Procter and the Victorian love-affair with death

1650—1700 | Concluding Remarks and Close

Keynote Address

“It may be that only in heaven I shall hear that grand Amen”
– Arthur Sullivan, Adelaide Procter and the Victorian love-affair with death

Ian Bradley, University of St Andrews

In his keynote address, Ian Bradley explores the central themes of the conference through a detailed analysis of the context, composition, music and lyrics of ‘The Lost Chord’, Arthur Sullivan’s setting of a poem by Adelaide Procter which became the biggest selling parlour ballad of the nineteenth century, immortalised by Dame Clara Butt and achieving iconic status. He looks at how it fits into Procter’s overall poetic output and takes its place among a number of sacred ballads set by Sullivan focusing on the themes of grieving, longing for death and heaven. Why did these themes appeal to Sullivan, who was himself such a lover of life? Bradley locates ‘The Lost Chord’ in the context of Victorian sentimentality and Sullivan’s corpus of sacred music, drawing on his recent pioneering study, Lost Chord and Christian Soldiers: The Sacred Music of Arthur Sullivan (2013).

Ian Bradley is Reader in Church History and Practical Theology at the University of St Andrews as well as Principal of St Mary’s College. He teaches and publishes in the areas of contemporary British Christianity, Scottish Christianity, Celtic Christianity, worship, hymnody, religion and popular culture and broader cultural history. He is an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland as well as a prominent figure in religious journalism, having been Head of Religious Broadcasting at BBC Scotland and writing regularly for national newspapers.
then in death we are dissolved back into it. Beyond this we can say almost nothing – yet in music, Schopenhauer believed (along with a substantial cohort within nineteenth-century metaphysics of music), we directly and uniquely glimpse the noumenal: music’s uniqueness among the arts lies chiefly here.

But from this it seems that in music we glimpse also our own post-dissolution destiny: music comprises existential songs of finite experience and transcendental songs of dissolution into the ineffable.

I shall try to elucidate and defend this provocative claim.

About our supporters

The Centre for Death and Life Studies exists to foster and conduct research into life-values, beliefs, and practices that relate to living and dying. It seeks to encourage and facilitate interdisciplinary approaches wherever possible between the humanities, the social and life-sciences and medicine. It also benefits from the support of Durham University’s Institute of Advanced Study. For more information about the Centre and its projects, please visit the website: www.durham.ac.uk/cdals

The International Network for Music Theology is a cross-departmental venture at Durham University that seeks to initiate and facilitate research which will sustain and expand the growing field of Music Theology. The network aims to create to provide an international centre unifying musico logical and theological work carried out within academic universities, institutions, and other public and relevant private organizations. INMT presents conferences, seminars and lecture series in support of international and national interests in Music and Theology and identifies and develops new methodological frameworks for Music Theology. Find more about INMT by visiting: www.durham.ac.uk/musictheology

Death and Remembrance in the Songs of the People

Sacred Ashes and Melancholy Sighs: Musical Representations of Death and Self-Sacrifice during the French Revolution

Jonathan Huff, Kings College London

These lines are taken from a French Revolutionary hymn composed by the dramatist A.F. de Coupigny in 1794, apotheosising the violent death of thirteen year-old Joseph Barras in battle. Initially seized by the authorities as a propaganda opportunity, Barras’s death soon became the subject of hundreds of similar hymns written by citizens from across the entire spectrum of society, and not merely the nation’s recognised composers. As such, they represent an invaluable insight into the Revolutionary conception of death—yet along with the vast majority of the Revolutionary repertoire, they have been consigned to relative ignominy.

Focussing on musical representations of self-sacrifice during the French Revolution, this paper argues that a more sensitive examination of the Revolutionary repertoire more generally could afford musicologists striking insights into the Revolutionary perspective. It contends that despite their musical simplicity, such works reveal a striking complexity inherent in Revolutionary attitudes towards death and self-sacrifice that belie their reputation as ‘rabidly ideological’ vehicles for propaganda, as Winton Dean once termed them. By building on the theoretical model proposed by Jesse Goldhammer in The Headless Republic (2005), it is argued that these works, just like Revolutionary sacrifice itself, have “too many different modalities and

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meanings to be reduced to one function”: that of mere propaganda. Instead, these musical representations of ‘martyrdom’ indicate a subtler myriad of attempts to come to terms with the acts of savage violence that the Revolution unleashed, by constructing frameworks for catharsis, expiation, and redemption. But equally, in responding to Goldhammer’s ‘top-down’ model suggesting that the authorities determined the Revolutionary perspective of heroic self-sacrifice, this paper maintains that these works also reflect the people’s response to a catastrophic violence which rent a great wound in the normality of their everyday life.

‘The Folly of the Farce is Done’: death and grief in convivial song

Chris Price, Canterbury Christ Church University

Death, grief and mourning hardly seem appropriate topics for compositions intended for alcoholic accompaniment amidst jovial company in a tavern, but the catches and glees which achieved tremendously widespread popularity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries turned to such subjects with remarkable frequency. Catches on the subject are usually wryly ironic, but the more serious glees of the period may achieve a compressed poignancy all the more effective within such a diminutive genre.

This paper will aim to set such varied responses in the context of the sentiment of the age, and of the literature which inspired the composers of the period. Using recorded examples from the beautifully preserved collection of music and other archival records bequeathed to the city of Canterbury by the Canterbury Catch Club (1779-c.1870), the paper will examine particular representations of death, grief and mourning including Paxton’s setting of "Sonnet in the Character of Werther", John Stafford Smith’s treatment of Henry d’Urfey’s "Sleep, Poor Youth", Arne’s “The Emperor Adrian, Dying, to his Soul”, Clarke’s “Hymn for the Dead”, and a number of wry epitaphs. In the face of such diversity, the paper suggests that this repertoire shares a quintessentially English perspective which stands directly in a line connecting Shakespeare, Swift, Sterne, Trollope, and others in a recognition that however dignified or dissolute a life, "the folly of the farce" will one day be done.

clear that the proliferation of ‘heavenly songs’ in the nonconformist repertoire had more to do with living than with dying. They were the songs of the new life offered through the revivalist experience, encouraging endurance of life’s struggles.

How, then, were missionaries able to respond to death in the mission field? Were the constraints and customs of their British life to be applied in contexts where singing at death was of greater importance, or could the ‘heavenly songs’ find an even greater significance at times of death than they could be granted at home? With particular reference to the experience of the Baptist missionaries in Mizoram, this paper will seek to introduce and discuss these issues.

Death, music and the ineffable

Martyn Evans, Durham University

The plausible view that music conveys the ineffable was as widely-held in the nineteenth-century as it was before or since. This paper offers the suggestion that through some nineteenth-century metaphysical conjectures, death – improbably – offers a clue to understanding music’s ineffability.

Music’s intrinsic ineffability, part of the larger problem of music and meaning, is adroitly caught in Mendelssohn’s dictum that music is ‘too definite to be put into words’. But music is also a response to a wider, extrinsic, ineffability. If the ineffable emerges within experience – things that we just know, yet know (or can say) little or nothing about – it also frames our finitude. In particular, death is an event outside our experience (outside life, as Wittgenstein has it). Our experience arises without antecedents and disappears without remainder. One response to this finitude is a sense of wonder; another is, on occasion, the production of music.

We can explore this link fruitfully through Schopenhauer’s ambitious metaphysics. Proceeding from Kant, Schopenhauer reasoned his way to the inaccessible (and ineffable) ‘noumenon,’ the timeless reality that must underlie the ordinary ‘phenomenal’ world of everyday experience. If in birth we somehow fall out of the noumenal into the phenomenal,
Music and the Theology and Philosophy of Death

Singing Death through Evangelical and Mormon Emotions
Douglas J Davies, Durham University

This paper provides a comparison of two sources of nineteenth and early twentieth century hymnody, the revivalist-framed Sankey and Moody Hymnbook on the one hand and earlier and later the Hymnbooks of Mormonism on the other. Emphasis will be given to the preferred theological ideas and allied patterns of emotions related to grief embedded in these traditions.

Heavenly Songs of the Nonconformist Missionaries
Joanna Heath, Durham University

One of the defining documents of the late nineteenth-century revivalism that changed the face of British evangelicalism is Ira Sankey’s Sacred Songs and Solos. Its enormous collection of hymns, numbering 1200 at its final edition in 1910, not only inspired a generation of non-conformist missionaries, but was also taken by them to their mission fields and translated into local languages. In Mizoram, Northeast India, the hymns were among the first texts to be translated into the Mizo language by the pioneer Baptist missionaries who arrived in 1894.

It is often acknowledged that a great proportion of the repertoire has an eschatological orientation. Whether categorised as songs explicitly containing ‘Aspirations after Heaven’ or ‘Heaven Anticipated’, or simply possessing a characteristic final verse that turned the singers towards heaven, the desire to be somewhere other than the present life on earth certainly seems to be one of the most prominent themes. However, it is less often acknowledged that such songs did not ordinarily find their place at times of death or grief in the Victorian home. Music was limited at most funerals, and congregational singing was especially discouraged. There are rare accounts of nonconformists, including Quakers, breaking these rules and mumbling ‘quiet hymns’ at burials, which suggest a certain desire to ‘sing against death’ through such songs, but it seems

‘No Other Shall Sing These Songs’: The English Country House Music Collection as First World War Memorial
Michelle Meinhart, Martin Methodist College, Tennessee

In the fall of 1915, Lady Alda Hoare needed a distraction from worrying about her son, Harry, a British officer fighting at the Ottoman front. So she began playing music with the English, Canadian, and Australian soldiers convalescing at the nearby military hospital, even inviting them to her home, Stourhead (in southwest England), for more extended musical parties. Although she admits in her diary that allowing these common Tommies from the “backwoods of Canada” free reign of her Palladian mansion was probably against her better judgment, these musical parties engendered an unlikely special bond between her and them. Soldiers began bringing new parlor songs for her, whom they affectionately deemed their “Stourhead mother,” and she bought the new raucous American songs about Tennessee and Texas she knew her “soldier sons” would enjoy. She documented these experiences, as well as the tragic fates of many of these beloved Tommies after they returned to the war fronts, in poignant annotations on the sheet music they had performed with her. Immediately following the death of her son in December 1917 moreover, she inscribed memories of their music making and her intense grief on the music they had shared and performed together. All of this annotated music she bound and carefully preserved.

Drawing on Jay Winter’s work on grief, memory, and the First World War, this paper theorizes Lady Alda’s music volumes as war memorials. Her response to death, they purposefully commemorate the singing soldiers, including her own son, who fell. Such use of material objects as sources of consolation became substitutes for the normal ritual of burials, since soldiers’ bodies were not sent home. Emphasizing the autobiographical function and materiality of sheet music collections, this paper reveals the inventive ways in which survivors expressed grief and memories of lost lives were preserved.
Death and Poetic Allusion in the Andante of Brahms’s Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 83

Julian Horton, Durham University

Dillon Parmer (1995) has argued that Brahms’s tendency to embed song self-quotations in his instrumental works should cause us to re-evaluate the composer’s traditional image as an ‘absolute’ musician standing in opposition to the Lisztian concept of programme music. Parmer instead construes Brahms’s allusive instrumental works (he cites opps. 5 and 78 in particular) as covertly programmatic, embodying poetic cyphers, which locate these pieces centrally along a continuum between overtly programmatic and single-mindedly formalist compositional aesthetics.

This paper revisits Parmer’s perception as the basis for understanding an under-investigated song allusion in the Andante of the Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 83 (1881): the Più adagio central section, which recomposes the second part of Brahms’s song Op. 86, no. 6, a setting of Max von Schenkendorf’s ‘Todessehnen’ of 1807. I argue that the poetic text to which the Più adagio refers sediments an extra-musical agenda, which amounts to a concertante realisation of the familiar Wagnerian trope of transfiguration through death. Recognition of this subtext permits both a re-conception of the Andante’s meaning, and of key aspects of the Concerto’s design, especially Brahms’s decision to eschew a summative finale in favour of a lieto fine.

Exploring Wagner’s psychological response to grief and death through his compositional process in the Wesendonck Lieder and Tristan and Isolde.

Susie Self, Cambridge University

The Wesendonck Lieder were composed by Richard Wagner during the late 1850’s. He was also working on Tristan and Isolde at the time. The poems are by Mathilde Wesendonck, wife of one of Wagner’s patrons Otto Wesendonck. During this period Wagner and his wife Minna lived on the Wesendonck estate in Zurich. It is thought that Wagner and Mathilde had an infatuation or possibly an affair. This may have contributed to Wagner’s intensely conceived opera Tristan and Isolde which finds its resolution in death.

Mathilde’s poems are pathos-laden and influenced by Wilhelm Müller whose poems were set by Schubert. Whether or not the affair was consummated the overwhelming sense of grief of unrequited love influenced Wagner in his choice of Tristan and Isolde. The opera explores one of Wagner’s main obsessions: the gaining of a perfect love united in death rather than in a sexual relationship. The musical connections between the lieder and opera are clear. Wagner called two of the songs in the cycle "studies" for Tristan and Isolde. In "Träume" composed in December 1857 the roots of the love duet in Act 2 can be heard and in "Im Treibhaus" composed in May 1858 the foundations of thematic material are laid down for the prelude to Act 3. The chromatic-harmonic style of Tristan that pervades all five songs and opera is a psychological reflection of Wagner’s response to grief and death.

This presentation/recital features performances of extracts of the Wesendonck lieder and Tristan interfaced with an analysis of the composer’s compositional process.