

## **The Politics of Representation and Subversion in Victorian Soundscape: An Ideological Study of Music**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper attempts to investigate the intricate, essential and yet rarely addressed relationship between music and politics in Victorian era. Based on the theoretical traditions of influential scholars including Terry Eagleton and Jacques Attali, it first discusses the rationale and means of Victorian dominant middle-class in their ideological control of music. Then, it points out the inherent unstableness and slipperiness in Victorian music as a cultural signifier, namely over-reliance on text, corporality in performance and excessive pleasurable sensuality; it also discusses the attempts of those marginalized musicians from working class and females in making their “(non-)music” legitimately heard. The ambiguous nature of music itself and the increasingly democratic efforts from outside both contribute to the deconstruction of Victorian totality in music, heralding the rise of 20th century new democracy and democratic music.

**Key Words:** Music, Politics, Ideology, Representation, Floating Signifier, Subversion

## 1. THE LOGIC OF APPROPRIATING MUSIC: POLITICIZATION OF THE AESTHETIC

Tonality/atonality<sup>1</sup>, angel/demon, good/evil, centre/periphery...The all too familiar binary oppositions are now constantly contested and questioned. However, in Victorian England, these terminologies were employed as handy tools for the middle-class hierarchy in ideological construction of music and many other cultures it intended to appropriate. Layers upon layers of duality were piled up to form a clearly-demarcated totality with differences taken for granted. In fact, their accessibility and practicality seemed to justify their unacknowledged “legitimate” status.

Of course, the status of “legitimacy” did not come out of thin air. It was supposed to be justified. This was part of the wit or trickery of the dominant bourgeoisie. Sharp-eyed critics like Terry Eagleton have already shed light on the secret yet steady process of the politicization of the aesthetic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As he put it, “the category of the aesthetic assumes the importance it does in modern Europe because in speaking art it speaks of these other matters too, which are at the heart of the middle-class’s struggle for political hegemony. The construction of the modern notion of the aesthetic artifact is thus inseparable from the construction of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society, and indeed from a whole new form of human subjectivity appropriate to that social order.”<sup>2</sup> No art form, including music, can self-righteously claim themselves free from the influence of a set of notions and assumptions from the dominant class. Music and politics are not correspondent in every way, but their connection and even constant collusion can never be easily slipped by, as most of the musicologists still doggedly do. Music is no longer innocent or absolute as a cultural signifier. In an era of “progress” fired by industrial and imperial expansions, the Victorian dominant class was feverishly obsessed with certainty, fearing and hating the semantic excess of music and other cultural practices. They needed to domesticate, not directly “police”, music in a non-coercive and implicit way.

Unlike the preceding aristocracy, the dominant Victorian middle-class hierarchy was arguably in the “representation”<sup>3</sup> phase, as Jacques Attali beautifully put it. In the previous phase of “sacrifice”, for the aristocracy, music, like so many other cultural forms, was nothing but a ritual sacrifice, the scapegoat. It was the power’s means to get people to “forget”. In other words, music was considered to be an extra, a necessary redundant that consumed itself in

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, the word “atonality” officially appeared only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century starting with Schoenberg, but the duality of “tonal (musical)” and “non-tonal (non-musical)” obviously took their roots in the Victorian minds.

<sup>2</sup> Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell. 3, (1990).

<sup>3</sup> See Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Translated by Song, Sufeng and Weng, Guitang. Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press. 63, (2000). Besides the word “representation”, the words “forget”, “enactment” and “believe” appearing in this section of my paper also serve as useful terminologies in this book. Unfortunately, the book in the French original cannot be secured in China.

others' consumption. The best form of music was purely devotional music; it should even be silent, as pure abstraction, as a nonsonoric science. As John Aubrey noted, "statics, music, fencing, architecture and bits of bridges are all reducible to the laws of geometry."<sup>4</sup>

The Victorian dominant middle-class, on the other hand, intended to make such full use of music that they incorporated music into their active (rather than passive) mechanism of ideological control. That is, music became a means of "enactment" or "representation". It was intended to get people to "believe". They needed music to be their supporter and spokesman. At the same time, they also harboured deep anxieties about the feasibility of control. However, compared with the suspicious aristocracy, they seemed to be more confident in their ability to appropriate music. They secretly believed that they could stabilize the musical semantics. At least they tried to do so in vigorous ways.

## 2. STRATEGIES OF REPRESENTATION IN VICTORIAN APPROPRIATION OF MUSIC

To achieve their goal of ideological control, the dominant middle-class roughly took several steps to appropriate music for their own use.

### 2.1 Arbitrary Division of Musical Types

The Victorian dominant middle-class strictly separated their so-called "authorized" "good" music from "low" music. That "good" music should be "moral"<sup>5</sup>, including purely religious music, domestic ballads, operas<sup>6</sup> and art music<sup>7</sup>, while the music of the streets like bawdy songs tended to be labelled as "immoral" and even banned. The remnant "religiosity" in the hymns and sacred songs, the mild and tender atmosphere created by domestic ballads, the simulacrum of grandeur and order in grand operas, and the much-hyped ethereal quality of art music, all served the interests of the dominant middle-class, who secretly hoped to achieve a semi-god status on earth.

### 2.2 Intellectual Support of the Victorian Leading Thinkers

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<sup>4</sup> Stephens, J. E., ed. Aubrey on Education: A Hitherto Unpublished Manuscript by the Author of "Brief Lives". London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 113, (1972).

<sup>5</sup> Even today, in various universities in Britain, like Cambridge, the moralist literature still occupies a significant part of education. The Victorian vigorous attempt to wed music to morality, in fact operated as a smoke screen for anxieties about identities grounded in nation, class and gender.

<sup>6</sup> When it came to opera, it has to be noted that it used to serve always as an aristocratic entertainment before the middle-class takeover. Considering the special situation in England where the middle-class much aped their predecessors and in some ways maintained a complicit relationship with the declining nobles, it is not hard to understand they had something in common in art.

<sup>7</sup> Art music is also variously called classical music or serious music, most often German music. Still in his bestseller *Music and Morals*, Haweis summarized the hierarchical structure of types of music like this: "It would not be difficult to show in great detail the essentially voluptuous character of Italian music, the essentially frivolous and sentimental character of French music, the essentially moral, many-sided, and philosophical character of German music" (61).

The Victorian dominant middle-class enthusiastically sought the intellectual support of leading thinkers of its time, who consciously or unconsciously became their eloquent spokesmen for their “authorized” forms of music. Thomas Carlyle wrote in *The Opera*: “Music is well said to be the speech of angels; in fact, nothing among the utterances allowed to man is left to be so divine...He who forsakes that business, and, wasting our divinest gifts, sings the praise of Chaos, what shall we say of him!”<sup>8</sup> John Ruskin pushed it further by explicitly pointing out the links between music-policing and the dominant middle-class’s vital interests, “Music is thus, in her health, the teacher of perfect order, and is the voice of the obedience of angels, and the companion of the course of the spheres of heaven.”<sup>9</sup>

### 2.3 Moralists’ Promotion of Mind Reformation through Music

Avid moralists and educationalists tirelessly promoted the moral and spiritual reformation of men through music and musical education. Among them, the most famous was arguably H.R. Haweis, whose immensely influential book *Music and Morals* provided an insightful guide on the Victorian mentality on the issue of music-making. In that book, he investigated the object of art—is it for the production of pleasure or promotion of morality? Of course, he intended to redirect people’s attention to their moral improvement through sound music featuring the expression of “true feeling, disciplined feeling, or sublime feeling”<sup>10</sup> in eternal war against “false emotion, or abused emotion, or frivolous emotion”<sup>11</sup>. Besides the theoretical build-up by people like H.R. Haweis, the practice of Joseph Mainzer’s “singing for the million” offered large numbers of amateur music lovers a chance of collective choral singing. The sensational sight of sounds tended to be interpreted as a telling marker of the dominant middle-class’s achievement in getting across its notions of community and conformity to the “masses”, gaining their vocal support and cementing their relationship. As Mainzer put it, he hoped them to “produce simultaneously *the same* words, sing *the same* air and thinks *the same* thought...uniting *the same* promises and chanting *the same* melodious accents at *the same* moment and as if they issued from *only one mouth*”<sup>12</sup>.

### 2.4 Propaganda of Mass Media

Newspapers, magazines and conduct books in wide circulation accelerated the propaganda process initiated by the dominant middle-class. In fact, they were better known to the general public for their immediacy and accessibility. Figureheads like Eliza Cook tried all means to domesticate music, making it a vital part of Victorian “home and hearth”. Music seemed to be

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted from Clapp-Itnyre, Alisa. *Angelic Airs, Subversive Songs: Music as Social Discourse in the Victorian Novel*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1, (2002).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Haweis, *Music and Morals*. New York: Harper and Brothers. 57, (1877).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Mainzer, Joseph. *Singing for the Million*, iv.vi. 1841. Intro. Bernarr Rainbow. Kilkenny, Ire.: Boethius Press, 1984. The italics are mine.

no longer a site of struggles and fights. It was no longer an active discourse in construction, but a passive and dormant decoration for the surface's sake. For Victorian women especially, music became something alongside their other skills like sewing, cooking and nursing children.

### **2.5 Domestication through the Household Purchase of Pianos and Sheet Music**

The easier accessibility of pianos and sheet music made drawing-room domestic music-making become much more regular. On the one hand, the lowering of prices in the sales of pianos and sheet music added to their increasing affordability; on the other hand, the strongly stimulated need for the family to prove its decent status made the purchase of a piano a seemingly inevitable trend, without which the house seemed to be incomplete. On a deeper level, the very presence of a piano in a house, served as an important marker of the Victorian dominant middle-class's success in integrating its notions of domesticity and order into the very core of its units that formed the very core of the nation.

### **2.6 Control of Music Production through Conservatoires and Other Institutions**

The establishment of conservatoires and other institutions made music-making more professionalized. There is no doubt that academic trend of music largely heightened its independent status, which was seldom seen in the previous musical history in England<sup>13</sup>. However, what remained beneath the surface was that the increasingly systemized music was in fact more easily appropriated for the dominant middle-class's use on various occasions. The music-germinated fervid patriotism soon grew to imperialism of overseas colonies. With the last-century precedent of Thomas Arne's *Rule Britannia*, Victorian main-stream professionals never ceased to produce imperialist anthems<sup>14</sup>. Also, with the academies' rigid disciplining and purification of their minds, more and more free musical talents turned into dogged conservative professionals more in line with the state's requirements.

### **2.7 Display of Wealth and Power through Concert Halls**

Fast taking the place of the old courts, churches and private houses, the newly emerging concert halls gave Victorian middle-class more chances to display their wealth and power through their subscriptions and ensured their dominant status in music and other cultural activities. The declining aristocracy could no longer afford to keep the musicians at their private home, so they had to share, if not shift the power of viewing in the public concert halls with the dominant Victorian middle-class. Due to their lack of income, the working class members were also excluded outside this rich man's sphere. The concert hall certainly served as a very

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<sup>13</sup> For a long time, England had been dubbed as a "land without music", for since the death of Henry Purcell, England failed to produce a world-prodigious composer until the emergence of Edward Elgar in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The much-revered Handel, after all, was not born in England. The increasing professionalization of music in the latter half of the nineteenth century gradually helped England regain its reputation and ensured its preeminent status in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Now most of the influential classical musical companies and records were British, as well as the most influential classical music magazines and radios.

<sup>14</sup> A good collection of important imperialistic anthems from 18<sup>th</sup> century to 20<sup>th</sup> century can be found on this website. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/rulebritannia.html>

distinguished marker of the dominant middle-class's privileged power. Inter-class and inter-sect bigotries and hatreds inevitably ensued in the wake<sup>15</sup>.

### 3. MUSIC'S INHERENT SUBVERSION AGAINST VICTORIAN APPROPRIATION: A SIGNIFIER WITH MULTIPLE SIGNIFIED

The dialectic is always a dynamic process, allowing for no simple "either/or". The Victorian dominant middle class's attempt to appropriate music proved to reap only futility. Human constructs always bring with them seeds of deconstruction and subversion, which are bound to blossom in due time. Music, unlike no other, is not that easy to control as a discourse. As Terry Eagleton aptly put it, "the aesthetic, understood in a certain sense, provides an unusually powerful challenge and alternative to these dominant ideological forms, and is in this sense an eminently contradictory phenomenon."<sup>16</sup>

In the Victorian period, the so-called "official" or "authorized" music itself was a highly slippery and ambiguous practice. It features three potentially subversive elements.

#### 3.1 Music's Overreliance on Text

Opposed to the Continental (especially German) preference for purely instrumental music, Victorian music was often "texted", that is, Victorian sounds could hardly divorce themselves from the lyrics, the words, the language.

Richard Leppert provides an almost word-play-like discussion of the dilemma of music blended with text. "With...texted music---words' effects are by contrast degraded by acoustic transliteration. Expressing the same thought conversely, all that music adds to words is in fact taken from *words*. Whether in song, cantata, opera, oratorio, text depends utterly on sonority at the same time that sonority robs text of its word-driven sign value...To be sure, words still mean when paired with music, but music takes nearly full charge of them...Texted music acts in discursive excess of words..."<sup>17</sup> Given the superiority of sonority in textured music, the words are easily replaceable without needing to alter the music itself. However, once the text is edited, the newly textured music may make a radical departure from the old one, arousing utterly different associations and interpretations (maybe misinterpretations) with exactly the same sounds.

Technically, a patriotic song can be easily changed into a reactionary one, and a religious song can also become a worldly or erotic ditty just with a few corrections in wording, utterly going against its original intentions.

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<sup>15</sup> So far, the best book discussing the social structure of concert life in Victorian London is still William Weber's classic sociological text *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna*. London: Croom Helm (1975).

<sup>16</sup> Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell. 3, (1990).

<sup>17</sup> Leppert, Richard. *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 87 (1993).

In the famed Victorian writer George Eliot's classic realistic novel *Adam Bede*, the key characters' careless "editing" of the originally religious texts provide an eloquent proof of the textual slipperiness in Victorian music with words.

Adam Bede, the first baritone to make his presence felt, is certainly highly charged with religious implications, as can be easily guessed from his name. He starts with Bishop Ken's *Morning Hymn*.

'Awake, my soul, and with the sun  
Thy daily stage of duty run;  
Shake off dull sloth..." (*Adam Bede*, 1)

This selective singing is highly problematic in that it should contain four lines, not merely three. The alarming absence of the last line, 'To pay thy Morning Sacrifice' completely eradicates the holy message, changing the hymn into a worldly utilitarian discourse characterized by work ethic with the popularization of Samuel Smiles.

Adam continues his singing,

'Let all thy converse be sincere,  
Thy conscience as the noonday clear.' (2)

Although in line with the spirits of Christianity, the theme of mere "conscience" still weakens or fails to arouse concrete religious associations. The acclaimed supremacy of morality inherent in religion is hard to discern.

Seth Bede, Adam's younger brother, offers an even more telling example of the irony of a texted song with textual changes.

Compared to Adam, Seth makes a striking contrast by being less penetrative in vocal power and more tender and modest. However, in "editing" religious lyrics, he is certainly more daring, attempting to turn the priestess Dinah Morris from a professional independent woman into an object of sexual gazes.

In his hands, a hymn of John Wesley's is randomly changed into a worldly song for courting ladies.

'In darkest shades if *she* appear,  
My dawning is begun;  
*She* is my soul's bright morning-star,  
And *she* my rising sun.' (28; my italics)

Even now, the religious purists should feel alarmed to see such naked changes. The reason lies in the fact that this hymn is intended to sing praises of God for His salvation of humans, but

Seth puts “she (namely Dinah)” in the place of “thou”, thus charging the hymn with a strong erotic feel instead of sacredness.

### 3.2 Corporality in Musical Performance

Victorian music was still highly visual and “embodied (or corporeal)”, that is, the spectacle of “seeing” music and musicians was no separate matter from “listening to” music, unlike the phonographs and digital records that enable us now to concentrate on music itself<sup>18</sup>.

The conjunction of music and the body was highly problematic. Once again, it is Richard Leppert who makes provocative and yet rhythmically hypnotizing arguments on the daunting problems of music blended with body. “The body is a sight, in essence a sight of sights. It is also a site, a physical presence that is biologically empowered to see at the same time it is being seen... The body sounds: it is audible; it hears...The body is a sight and a sound<sup>19</sup>”.

Thus, it is hard to see what the audience was actually doing at that time---- “legitimately” “gazing” at the beautiful face and body of a diva in the disguise of hearing her voice? Admiring the jumps and slides of a Liszt-like finger on the piano and possibly indulging in the fantasy of the keyboard master’s equally wonderful phallus? In his *S/Z: An essay*, Roland Barthes went so far as to completely equal the body with sexuality in the reception of a musical performance: “Music, therefore, has an effect utterly different from sight; it can effect orgasm.”<sup>20</sup>

The assumptions above are not as overdone as they may seem at first glance. Take an example from another novel of George Eliot’s---*The Mill on the Floss*. In her most accessible novel, Eliot convincingly shows us the use of officially endorsed pastoral music in the middle-class male sexual predation of musicians, especially women musicians. They either render the music and bodies ambiguously blended or simply reduce the singing or listening women musicians to objects of predatory gazes.

The first man to appropriate pastoral music in manipulating women is Philip, the seemingly innocent music-loving Maggie Tulliver’s childhood friend. Philips always prefers to sing Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, one of the officially-approved pastoral operas, yet in fact a highly

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, in the present age, the mass productions of phonographs, vinyl and cd records have problems of their own, such as the spread of uncopyrighted copies, as well as loss of appreciation and respect for originality---you can easily get a cd of any maestro like Karajan and Richter with a few bucks, and that uniqueness the Victorian audience felt at each face-to-face hearing of the performer is irrevocably gone. But this should be discussed in another paper.

<sup>19</sup> Leppert, Richard. *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Introduction, XIX, (1993).

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Leppert, Richard. *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 212, (1993).



erotically-charged opera<sup>21</sup>. Like Galatea to Acis, Maggie is placed by Philip as an objectified, silent object, not the singer, not invited to sing either. Philip's singing offers two important messages to Maggie: first, music is a referent to many worldly elements, like sexuality and display; second, technical, elitist expertise through training is another part of music, thus the dichotomy of music. Even in the early stage of Maggie's life, she has already realized the intricacy of pastoral music.

The second man to use "healthy" pastoral music for flirtatious use is Stephen Guest. The duet he chooses to sing with Lucy "Graceful Consort" from Haydn's *The Creation*, an oratorio based on the text of Milton. Eliot's version conflicts with the traditional pastoral Garden of Eden in several ways: first, the spiritual context of the hymn versus focus on sexual bliss in a secular love song; second, evocation of a beautiful natural world versus the clear gender and class social constructs – Stephen's request for Lucy to "sing the whole duty of woman"<sup>22</sup>; Stephen and Lucy's self-conscious awareness of their artistic performances. Besides, in this drawing room, Maggie is again reduced to the position of auditor. What's more, by emphasizing music as acting and camouflaging the emotions they have shared in the Red Deeps, even Philip aligns himself with the aestheticism of Lucy and Stephen.

### 3.3 Music's Excessive Pleasurable Sensuality

Unlike the German lieder or symphonies, Victorian music tended to be too seductively "pleasant" for hearing. It is no fun to make this argument. The Victorian songs and keyboard music could hardly escape from the shadow of pleasing the ear, not the soul. The most popular music at this time often featured tuneful and catchy melodies and simple harmonies, like *Home Sweet Home*. Even if it was an aria taken from a grand opera, it should pose no great difficulty or become simplified for home use. Otherwise, it could not have been popular. The overwhelming emphasis on the sensual element of music instead of depth in content or breadth in scope, necessarily posed potential threats, for the moral message assigned by the dominant middle-class to it could easily be drowned in the "siren" sounds.

The evidence for music's seductive dimension due to overdue pleasantness can be again found in George Eliot's last key text *Daniel Deronda*, like Gwendolen Harleth's Bellini aria, a favourite in Victorian times, which is nevertheless accused by the well-known music master Herr Klesmer as something "beneath" her, "a form of melody which expresses a puerile state of culture---a dandling, canting, see-saw kind of stuff---the passion and thought of people without any breath of horizon."*(Daniel Deronda* 79) <sup>23</sup>For Klesmer, music putting too much stress on

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<sup>21</sup> For anyone with certain knowledge about music history in Victorian England, it is a commonplace fact that Handel's oratorios and operas were placed in a prominent position. In a way not exaggerating at all, he is the representative of music at that time.

<sup>22</sup> Eliot, George. *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Gordon S. Haight. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 367, (1981).

<sup>23</sup> Eliot, George. *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Barbara Hardy. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 79, (1967).

mere beauty of melody and intending to please ordinary taste is not only wasteful, but also dangerous. Its function is no other than that of opium, mesmerizing a weak and narrow mind.

#### 4. REVOLTS AGAINST THE GRAIN FROM OUTSIDE: CLASS AND GENDER POLEMICS

Besides the subversive nature of music itself, those suppressed or debased forms of Victorian music never ceased their struggle to make themselves heard or recognized again, thus constantly blurring the arbitrary boundary between officially good music and bad music.

##### 4.1 Threatening Outcries from the Working Class

The music of the streets, such as the harvest songs or drinking songs by working class, constantly defied the label of vulgarity, lowliness, or simply “noise”<sup>24</sup> imposed on them against their will. The working class members themselves organized their own bands (sometimes no less professional) or went to affordable music halls for entertainment. There was an anecdote which went like this: During a charity concert, a cello was accidentally broken. Suddenly a man came out of the audience, saying he would fetch his own one from home, which he often played for practice. That man turned out to be just a common working class member. Not only did working class members often show uncommon musical taste and proficiency, their common songs time and again found their way into the middle-class repertoire with the editing of their original lyrics. That is to say, ironically, by various means, some of the so-called middle-class drawing-room ballads actually evolved from these “lowly” tunes the middle-class despised so much.

##### 4.2 Discordant Voices from New Women

Domestic women, most of them amateurs, individually attempted to create their own musical tradition against the grain of middle-class ideology, which doggedly persisted in the binary opposition of masculinity versus femininity. They sought various means to prove their equality in musical talents, like composing, performing musical instruments (especially the piano and the harp, gradually expanding into all other traditionally ascribed “male” instruments), singing, teaching, and other music-related matters. Certainly, the new women were “encroaching” on so-called exclusively males’ spheres, which used to forbid women’s approach.

For example, in the sphere of opera, notable Victorian sopranos already made their formidable presences much felt, from Patti to Albani, Trebelli and Nilsson. They earned extremely high fees and won applauses from all levels of society. Despite the constant unfair associations of them with prostitutes or sirens<sup>25</sup>, they still succeeded in stamping their footprints in the concert halls. The passion and abandon usually exhibited by these divas were gradually no longer

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<sup>24</sup> Ironically, it is exactly “noise” utterly unacceptable in the Victorian period that offers an alternative for 20<sup>th</sup> century master composers like Schoenberg, Cage, Varese, Stockhausen, among many others.

<sup>25</sup> The irony is, the concert-hall audience often took a self-conflicting attitude towards these divas. On the one hand, they enjoyed their performance; on the other hand, they despised them, calling them names on their back.

considered to be merely theatrical play or related to moral deficiency. Instead, these traits were more and more respected as essential for good art. This certainly made invalid the dominant middle-class patriarchy's abuse of female body and voice without feeling any gratitude for them.

In the sphere of composition, Victorian women composers like Alice Mary Smith (1839-1884) and Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) struggled to pave the way for their fellow followers. The former was the first British woman to write symphonies, while the latter was the first influential British woman composer with quite a few operas to her credit. Arguably their achievements still failed to match their male counterparts due to various restrictions on their compositional activities, but they certainly pointed paths for later followers like Rebecca Clarke, whose voice is heard louder and louder, as can be testified by her numerous records in circulation at present.

In the sphere of instrumental players, there emerged on British concert stages famous women violinists like Wilma Neruda, pianists like Teresa Carreno. Unlike the "ladylike" piano, the violin, "the devil's instrument" used to be considered unbecoming to women because of the so-called awkwardness and distortion in the player's stance and movement. However, several factors contributed to the demise of the ban on women's violin-playing, a big defeat for the dominant middle-class patriarchy's wilful ideological construction. The first factor was certainly the female St. George---Wilma Neruda, who showed the possibility of equal excellence and undiminished grace for women in violin playing. Second, the growing current of opinion associated with the reform of female education and, more intensely, with the feminist movement, a trend that questioned much received notions regarding the totality of restrictions on girls and women's role in society. Third, the love of the chamber music repertoire developed as audiences gradually familiarized themselves with the works brought to them by the justly renowned Popular Concerts. Fourth, female violin-playing answered the social need brought about by the democratization of the piano.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Like all other cultural forms, music is a discourse that carries semantic implications liable for ideological appropriation. However, unlike other cultural forms, music is a highly ambiguous and floating signifier that is hard to fixate in meaning or to affiliate with a single interested gendered or classed group. That is why the Victorian middle class was doomed to failure in their non-coercive domestication of music to "represent" their legitimacy. That is also why the next century---the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed greater varieties of music hardly thinkable for Victorian middle-class, most notably among them, "noise" (Edgar Varese's *Amériques*) and meaningful "silence" (John Cage's 4:33).

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