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Shopping and Fricker: the origins of the Cheltenham Festival of Modern British Music and the ‘Cheltenham Symphony’

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IT REMAINS A REMARKABLE FACT that during World War 2 a civic entertainments manager in the Cotswolds planned a festival of modern music. The Tory council supported his idea. He staged it merely five weeks after the war’s end, and it continued yearly and continues still. Cheltenham’s summer festival of music occasionally tweaked its name to meet the evolving demands of marketing, as Table 1 shows, while the share of new music in it steadily dwindled. Yet it has remained a presence on the festival calendar and in certain contemporary music circles for 70 years.

I argue here that the festival’s precepts are tied to the political and economic strategies of Cheltenham town itself. Even so, the origins of the festival in wartime England deserve wider examination for three reasons. Firstly, Britain’s integrative national arts policy is based on a 1940s formula in which Cheltenham became the first peacetime example of that system in action for new music. Secondly, Cheltenham initiated the postwar arts festival movement. According to the British Arts Festivals Association there are around 140 such festivals in force, and 2,000 in general across the United Kingdom. Thirdly, the Cheltenham Festival was dedicated from its inception in 1945 to new British work. Having survived somewhat in this aim, it enables us in a consistent manner to survey the course of British contemporary music, the mediated perception of that especially through the press and radio, as well as the shifts in institutional support. We may learn from it how taste groups of ‘reactionary’ or ‘traditional’, ‘progressive’

Table 1: Festival Titles

NO.	YEAR OF CHANGE	TITLE
01	1945	(1st Annual) Cheltenham Music Festival
02	1946	(2nd) Cheltenham Music Festival of British Contemporary Music
03	1947	(3rd) Cheltenham Festival of British Contemporary Music
04	1963	(19th) Cheltenham Festival
05	1974	(30th) Cheltenham International Music Festival
06	2005	(61st) Cheltenham Music Festival

or ‘radical’ formations fought for ascendancy across the postwar years. It was observed by regulars that if you walked in the mid-1950s into the Cheltenham Town Hall’s ballroom after a Festival concert, you could roam between the factions of composers billeted not too far from the lengthy bar. There was Vaughan Williams and his followers (who Elisabeth Lutyens christened the ‘corn merchants’), elsewhere the tweed jackets of the Fricker ‘intelligentsia’, the ‘Taffia’ group led by Daniel Jones, and eventually the Searle-Lutyens axis of ‘12-tone Reds’ (as Walton dubbed them) with their fellow-travellers like Rawsthorne and Frankel.¹

Cheltenham was globally the first town to construct its postwar identity using modernist music, preceding postwar Darmstadt by a year and the renewed Donaueschingen by five (see Table 2). The town was mainly known across the 19th and 20th centuries as an attractive Regency spa resort in the West Country catering for wealthy visitors, especially those in need of recuperation or convalescence rather than medical treatment. My argument is that Cheltenham Corporation, which ran the 1945 festival, did not chiefly do so in order to market the town as a supreme facility to encounter aural modernism, and thus raise revenue out of a slim body of enthusiasts. Councillors did so to retain their town’s brand as an elitist enclave. I am suggesting in a more general sense that to consider music festivals in terms of marketing, focused consequently on commodification, is to miss the essential point that they exist to increase, in worth, the value of the locale. Festivals shape land.

For centuries Cheltenham was little more than a one-street farming village next to the River Chelt. In the 17th century it was spotted that a spring near the river left a deposit of salts with purgative properties. A well was dug nearby from which the saline water was drawn. In 1738 a pumping system was introduced and the site commercially developed by entrepreneurs. A ballroom and a billiard hall were built near the well and the Well Walk avenue was cultivated. To entertain the growing crowd of tourists, cock fighting, bull baiting and cudgel matches took place outside the main inn. The town’s historian Gwen Hart² points out that the main agents of 18th-century development were newcomers to Cheltenham and that a shortage of lodgings and a lack of comfort in what was ‘fit for the reception of wealth and title’ added to ‘evidence that the inhabitants themselves were not anxious to attract visitors to the town’.³ A sightseer to the well, the Honorable John Byng, complained in his diary about the company of ‘widows wanting husbands, old men wanting health, and misses wanting partners’.⁴ A contradiction grew between the economic imperative for inclusion on the one hand and residential constraint on the other. This conflict persisted so long that we may judge the postwar festival itself to be part of the project to resolve the tension.

1. Mrs Ann Wilkinson, interview, Cheltenham, 2003.

2. Gwen Hart: *A history of Cheltenham* (Leicester, 1965), pp.124–33.

3. Thomas Dudley Fosbroke: *A picturesque and topographical account of Cheltenham* (London, 1826), p.25.

4. Hart: *A history*, p.133.

Table 2: Significant domestic and international music festivals: a chronological perspective

ERA	TITLE	COUNTRY	YEAR(S)	NOTE
-1	Three Choirs	England	c.1714–current	Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester Cathedrals
	Norwich & Norfolk	England	1772–/1824–1976/ 1988–	Triennial
	British Choral Festivals/ Handel Festivals	England	1784–/1859–85	Handel commemoration festivals, charity fund-raising
	Birmingham	England	1784–1914	Triennial
	Leeds	England	1783–1912	Triennial
	Bayreuther Festspiele	Germany	1876–	Wagner Festival
	Salzburg Mozart Stiftung	Austria	1877–	Mozarteum
	National Eisteddfod	Wales	1880–	
	Nordic Music Days	Scandinavia	1888, 1897, 1919, 1921, 1927, 1932, 1934, 1938/ 1947–	Works by Scandinavian composers only
	Queen’s Hall Promenade Concerts	UK	1895–1926	See BBC below
	0	Salzburg	Austria	1920–23/1925–43/ 1945–
Donaueschingen		Germany	1921–30/1950–	‘Musiktage für Zeitgenössische Tonkunst’
ISCM		Europe	1923–39/1946–	Contemporary music
BBC Promenade Concerts		UK	1927–/1944–	Some concerts broadcast
Venice		Italy	1930–	Biennial
Maggio Musicale, Florence		Italy	1933–40/1946–	Opera
Tanglewood, Boston		USA	1934–	
Glyndebourne		England	1934–	Opera
Ravinia, Chicago		USA	1936–	
Lucerne		Switzerland	1938–	
1	Cheltenham	England	June 1945–	British contemporary music
	Hitzacker	West Germany (border with East Germany)	1946–	‘Sommerliche Musiktage’
	Prague	Czechoslovakia	May 1946–	
	Darmstadt	West Germany	1946–70/1972–	Course: ‘Ferienkurse für internationale neue Musik’; later biennial
	Edinburgh	Scotland	1947–	Arts festival; originally offshoot of Glyndebourne
	Ojai	USA	1947–	
	Avignon	France	1947–	Arts festival (Theatre)
	Holland	Netherlands	1948–	Arts festival
	Besançon	France	1948–	
	Aldeburgh	England	1948–	
	Aix-en-Provence	France	1948–	
	Bath	England	1948–	Regency theme
	Tokyo	Japan	1948–	Arts festival
	Aspen	USA	1948–	
	Dresden	East Germany	1948–	‘Musiktage’

Cheltenham Spa developed briskly after 1788, following a widely-publicised five-week stay by George III and his family.⁵ New wells were dug while three small theatres and the new Assembly Rooms provided diversions that included balls, card games and concerts. Aided by the passing of the Inclosure Act of 1801, which allowed owners to sell land for building, a staunch effort was made to erect villas and spas, lay out Crescents and Walks and improve roads. Hart claims that the architectural development of Cheltenham, from around 1815 to 1835 – producing the Regency town we most recognise – was borne of a common cause among its speculative builders. Chief among these was Joseph Pitt who opened the Pittville Pump Room on his newborn estate in 1830. Pitt and his kind ‘wished to attract wealthy and cultured visitors and residents to the town’. To do so they ‘realized that their arrangements must be in the best contemporary taste’ provided by a unity ‘of background, of purpose, of style, and of material’. Thus the Assembly Rooms received ‘the first personages of the country, in station, affluence and respectability, whilst no unprivileged footstep is suffered to intrude upon the circle of their pleasures’.⁶ The annual Cheltenham Races (founded 1819) and Berkeley Hunt added to the attractions by which the town was acclaimed in doggerel ‘the merriest sick resort on Earth’. Among the new residents came Major Agg ‘who had acquired a handsome independence in the Bengal Corps of Engineers and returned home to become deputy Lord Lieutenant of the County’.⁷ Agg was the first of many from the East India Company to retire to the town, bringing wealth they had acquired from that continent.

While visitors to the waters slowly ebbed away, the town grew in its trades, shops and domestic service to meet the needs of its wealthy residents. A niche but formidable development was the construction of the Cheltenham College for boys (1841), the Ladies’ College (1853) ‘for the daughters of Noblemen and Gentlemen’, and a Training College (1847) for ‘masters and mistresses upon scriptural and evangelical principles’. Hart observes that the ‘the new educational institutions [replaced] the Spa as a source of revenue by attracting [...] people from many parts of the world’.⁸ The town was badly affected by the military casualties of the Crimean War (1854) and the Indian Mutiny (1857), leading to the town’s first crisis over properties left for sale. Cheltenham nevertheless conformed to various tendencies of urban Victorian life. By the 1860s, for example, there were two principal musical societies. One was ‘recruited from the best families, [where] the greatest vigilance was exercised’ in admission, while the other drew ‘its support from the middle classes’.⁹

Residents opposed many features of progress. The Public Libraries Act of 1855 offered the chance for the town to provide a free library if two-thirds of the ratepayers voted for it. But, following a church father’s

5. Simona Pakenham: *Cheltenham: a biography* (London, 1971), pp.71–77.

6. Samuel Griffith: *Griffith’s new historical description of Cheltenham and its vicinity* (London, 1826), p.63.

7. William Hickey: *The memoirs of William Hickey* (1749–[1809]), vol.2 (London, 1918).

8. Hart: *A history*, pp.213–16 & 241.

9. JJ Hadley: *Hadley’s shilling guide to Cheltenham* (Cheltenham, 1863).

pronouncement that ‘for the poor [...] there was no positive Commandment for supplying mental wants’, such a library was not built for another 33 years. In the 1870s the upper class did not want the town to advance to Borough status. The Baron de Ferrières, subsequently the town’s MP, argued at an inquiry that ‘Cheltenham Society is peculiar. We have no Merchants, no Manufacture, only Trade the Mayor and Aldermen would not wish to intrude into the Balls.’ But they did. In 1891 the new Council purchased the neglected spas of Pittville and Montpellier, resurrected public gardens, built the Promenade Fountain (1893), an Art Gallery (1899) and ultimately erected the Town Hall (1903) as a public venue with a large concert room seating 1,200. These progressive measures were made in order to regain the town’s reputation as a spa and tourist destination, as it otherwise lacked means to develop income. The Council paid for a seasonal spa quartet, a spa orchestra expanded to 42 players on Sunday nights (costing £35 a week), a military band, and the salary of a Musical Director. This focus on seasonal tourism detracted attention from local awareness that the town itself was falling into ‘a state of incipient decay’. Made worse by First World War fatalities, a local newspaper dubbed it in 1919 ‘A Town To Let’. During the interwar period up to 800 properties were enduringly vacant.¹⁰

While Cheltenham slid from its Edwardian zenith as a touristic honeypot, it haplessly retained the features of one. When the new aviation industry set up in the region in the 1920s, Cheltenham took its share, leading to the invention there by Frank Whittle of the jet engine. But the light engineering factories were placed in suburbs out of sight, with housing estates added to serve them. Meanwhile a resurgent Council during the Depression of the 1930s was buoyed, like others, by the policy of local government investment in capital projects advocated by the economist John Maynard Keynes. Councillors made plans to modernise the core (mainly in neo-Georgian fashion) as a stylish attraction for tourism and conferences. World War 2 delayed this campaign, which re-emerged as a post-war aspiration.

It was in this context that the Cheltenham Festival was founded. One night in June 1944, members of the Cheltenham Spa Rotary Club met to discuss the town’s regeneration in peacetime. Members agreed that postwar Cheltenham should drop its health-cure image to follow, in the words of the Mayor of the time, ‘a policy of developing the town as the social centre of the West Country’. The positioning of Cheltenham Spa as a ‘centre’ had been crucial to its municipal persona for a 100, in its direct competition with nearby Bath as ‘the’ Regency spa town.¹¹ In harness the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club endorsed the consensus view of rate-payers that, from now on, Cheltenham Spa should remain a town of residence and private education. No attempt should be made to compete with other towns for a position of supremacy as an industrial or commercial centre. Given the

10. Steven Blake & Roger Beecham: *The book of Cheltenham* (Buckingham, 1982), p.131.

11. See for example *The Cheltenham Spa official guide* (Cheltenham, 1947), pp.11 & 12.

touristic resources the town had invested in, they needed visitors but only to a level that met the seasonal economic imperatives; controlled tourism through festivals would provide the solution.¹² Their aim was to raise their standard of living, but to do so without increasing the urban population other than those who would fill existing empty properties. A cultural strategy was a key device by which to achieve exclusivity. It was designed to draw professional institutions to the town, those whose employees would underwrite the conservation of the locale's thoroughbred image. These bodies included the Countryside Commission, a number of insurance companies, the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) and the Foreign Office's top-secret spying post, GCHQ. In other words, Cheltenham Spa had adopted a policy of binding elitist cultural provision to an objective of occupancy. To use the vernacular of the time, Cheltenham Spa became a town full of boffins and eggheads.

So it was from this meeting that a voluntarist body called the Cheltenham Cultural Council met and proposed to the Corporation a number of practical initiatives to gain the town a sophisticated cultural image in tune with its lofty objectives.¹³ It was easy for the group to find the Council's ear, as its honorary secretary was George Wilkinson, the Borough Entertainments & Advertising Manager. Among the Rotary Club plans for regular tea dances and café chansons still in the tradition of a spa town there was a section of nine ideas headed 'Special Festivals and Weeks'. It is there that we find a professional Music Festival listed, although there is no mention yet that this Festival should comprise British contemporary music. Wilkinson worked-up these ideas and presented them inclusively to the Borough's Entertainments Committee in November 1944, then the more powerful Re-Organisation Sub-Committee in December. He estimated the cost at £1,000 on which the corporation would lose £200–300, although this 'must be set against the very valuable publicity which this town would receive from the festival'.¹⁴ It was Wilkinson himself who added the notion of contemporary music. He took it directly from the last music festival the Council had managed. In March 1927 the Corporation had successfully held a Civic Reception to honour the locally-born composer Gustav Holst. Holst conducted two concerts of his symphonic music in the Town Hall. He called it 'the most overwhelming event of my life'.¹⁵ It was this model that led George Wilkinson to declare that each Town Hall concert should contain at least one work directed by its composer. At first Wilkinson thought that, like Holst, the composers would have a local affiliation. In its claims to be the cultural centre of the Cotswolds, Cheltenham Corporation was able to point out that several of Britain's leading composers came from those parts. Holst, Vaughan Williams, Ivor Gurney and Herbert Howells were born in Gloucestershire and Parry brought up there; Elgar came from

12. A Literature Festival was added in 1949, Jazz in 1996, Science in 2002.

13. See Gloucestershire Records Office 63G060 and CBR/C2/2/6/4–5.

14. Report to Entertainments Committee 11.11.44, p.9.

15. Michael Short: *Gustav Holst: the man and his music* (Oxford, 1990), p.251.

the neighbouring county. However, this geographic affinity was already exploited by the Three Choirs Festival nearby. In its competitive objective to be inimitable, Cheltenham avoided choral repertory and focused on symphonic attractions.

Thoughts at the war's end that Britain must define its own peacetime future under terms of modernity – the impetus of the Rotary Club meeting – was consolidated in Winston Churchill's famous VE Day speech on 8 May 1945, with its ringing slogan, 'Advance Britannia!'. The wartime Prime Minister's coupling of progress and nationalism was echoed in the very notion of a Cheltenham Festival of British Contemporary Music. This was hardly a coincidence. A secondary but potent figure in the wellbeing of the festival was Lord Hastings ('Pug') Ismay (1887–1965), Churchill's chief of staff in wartime. He lived in nearby Stanton, and he was made President of the festival in 1948, the same year that he was appointed Chairman of the Festival of Britain; Ismay was later selected as the first Secretary-General of NATO.¹⁶ During the war he had been charged by Churchill to keep a benevolent eye on the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley (GCHQ). Consigned in peacetime to the dull London suburb of Dollis Hill, by 1947 GCHQ was pleading for a new site. Ismay indicated two complexes near Cheltenham that were built in 1940 for the possible evacuation of the government. The move to Cheltenham was completed by 1954, adding 3,400 to the electoral roll. In his history of the intelligence agency, Richard Aldrich claims that soon 'almost everyone had a family member or a friend that worked at GCHQ' and it was 'contributing an enormous amount to [the town's] intellectual and artistic life'.¹⁷ Due to its secrecy, it is difficult to identify links between the agency and the festival, at least until Sir Peter Marychurch, uncovered as Director of GCHQ during the 1980s, was appointed the festival's chairman in 1992.

In the spirit of Churchill's slogan, the 'First Annual Cheltenham Festival of Music' took place over three evenings in mid-June 1945. The event was funded entirely by the Corporation, which had not revived its military band after wartime and reduced the work – eventually disbanding – its spa orchestra. For the three nights the London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO) was engaged with conductor Basil Cameron, who gave way on the podium to a composer at each concert: Britten with the concert premiere of his *Four Sea Interludes* from his new opera *Peter Grimes* together with the *Canadian carnival* of 1939, while the next night Walton directed his *Sinfonia Concertante* and at the final concert Bliss over-conducted (as Boult would have it) extracts from his ballet *Miracle in the Gorbals*. In his otherwise cosmetic chronicle of the first 20 festivals, *Times* critic Frank Howes pointed out with some pertinence that Britten was in his thirties, Walton in his forties and Bliss his fifties.¹⁸ Britten was certainly the star of the early years, until

16. Hastings Ismay: *The memoirs of General Lord Ismay* (Westport, 1960), pp.448–62.

17. Richard Aldrich: *GCHQ: the uncensored story of Britain's most secret intelligence agency* (London, 2010).

18. Frank Howes: *The Cheltenham Festival* (London, 1965), p.6.

his own Aldeburgh Festival – founded in 1948 – became an aesthetic, social and economic competitor to Cheltenham. Table 3 lists the most-played composers across the first 25 festivals. Britten was shunned in the 1950s; instead the festival organisers counted on Alan Rawsthorne (in his forties) and Peter Racine Fricker (in his thirties) to maintain a brand of modernity by which the festival could maintain public intrigue. The festival was quickly able to expand and spread its programming due to the establishment of state support for the arts under Attlee’s Labour government. The newly formed Arts Council of Great Britain offered the festival an annual grant.¹⁹ Strictly by the book the quango could not offer money to the Corporation but it could give aid instead to a Festival Trust where the town councillors re-appeared as trustees.

A parallel change took place in 1948 when Manchester’s Hallé became the resident orchestra under its chief, John Barbirolli. In order to acquire the dates, the orchestra’s management made a deal to absorb the costs of extra rehearsals needed for new work. This was one of the most intractable problems for constructing a festival around orchestras and premieres. It was one that George Wilkinson was not prepared for when, at the second festival, Britten insisted on an extra rehearsal for his Piano Concerto and the

19. George Lockwood: *Cheltenham Music Festival at 65* (Cheltenham, 2009), p.10.

Table 3: Cheltenham Music Festival (first 25 years): most-performed British 20th-century composers

NO.	COMPOSER	NO. OF WORKS	NOTES
01	Benjamin Britten	34	Works played 1945–50, then 1961–70; no performances 1951–60
02	Alan Rawsthorne	25	
03	Lennox Berkeley	18	Family historically connected to the area (Berkeley Castle, Hunt)
04	William Walton	17	Played consistently though the 1950s
05=	Arnold Bax	15	Died 1953
05=	Arthur Bliss	15	President of the Festival from 1962
07=	John Ireland	14	Died 1962
07=	Ralph Vaughan Williams	14	Died 1958 (all works played by 1958)
09=	Peter Racine Fricker	13	Lived in USA from 1964
09=	Michael Tippett	13	No symphonies performed
11	Gustav Holst	12	Born Cheltenham, died 1934
12	Elisabeth Lutyens	11	
13	Peter Maxwell Davies	09	Local school teacher until 1962
14	William Alwyn	08	
15	Alexander Goehr	07	
16=	Harrison Birtwistle	06	Early works chosen by SPNM
16=	Geoffrey Bush	06	
18=	William Mathias	05	
18=	Humphrey Searle	05	
20=	Malcolm Arnold	04	
20=	Alun Hoddinott	04	Performed more often in 1970s

Grimes passacaglia. The LPO wanted paying, which Wilkinson could not afford. Wilkinson quick-wittedly joined the players on their train up and appealed effectively to their goodwill. Nevertheless, Wilkinson's late widow Ann referred to the fact that the LPO's distinguished manager, Thomas Russell, was a communist, and there was a local reaction to having a 'red' orchestra. So the Hallé and Barbirolli, cheaper and bluer, began their 15-year association with Cheltenham. As the festival expanded, so did Barbirolli's presence as a demigod. He joined dinners and dances, acting in one year as a cricket umpire and in another as a judge of fancy dress. He formed the musical link to a network of social events designed to underline the 'festival' nature of the enterprise, which from 1948 lasted a fortnight. One of the ideas in George Wilkinson's 1944 Council report had been a Shopping Week, and from 1953 the Cheltenham Festival of British Contemporary Music ran a Window-dressing Competition, a Veteran Car Club Rally, a Searchlight Tattoo, a Festival Ball (the ticket declared 'Evening Dress and Uniform only'), a Festival Luncheon, a Festival cricket match, a Festival Service, a Regency Rout, a Donkey Derby, a marathon race through the town organised by the Cheltenham Harriers and a more leisurely Concours d'Elegance along the town's main shopping street, The Promenade.

But what was good for marketing proved bad for programming. Barbirolli was fretful and nervous with new pieces. The Hallé Concerts Society started to veil the size of the preparatory costs his insecurities were causing. Living in an Edwardian bubble, he lacked the technical capacity to conduct anything metrically abstruse. He turned this against the composers and complained of their unmusical deficiencies. When Barbirolli premiered Peter Racine Fricker's First Symphony in 1950 he dubbed it 'Frickery trickery'. In 1953 he asked Richard Arnell for cuts amounting to 20 minutes for passages in the composer's Third Symphony that he found awkward to perform, even though the work had been broadcast in full a year earlier by the BBC Northern Orchestra, the Hallé's local rival.²⁰

In 1949 the trustees set up an advisory panel in order to trim the programming power that Barbirolli had quickly gained, but his disposition proved the stronger. Not only making safe choices, Barbirolli used his celebrity status in the town to insist on a more reactionary repertoire in general. In doing so he raised a series of aesthetic tensions between the festival, the Arts Council, and eventually the BBC, which relayed some of the concerts. For example in 1953 – in response to a drop in audiences over the previous two years – he persuaded the festival to commission a work from the light-music luminary Eric Coates, even though the Arts Council declined to support it. The Arts Council's Music Director John Denison told Wilkinson 'that if there was any more of that, there'd be no more this', referring to the annual grant.²¹ Denison advised the orchestra to employ a

20. Patrick Jonathan, custodian of Arnell's work, has confirmed this, having seen Barbirolli's edited score.

21. Mrs Ann Wilkinson, interview.

deputy conductor (it eventually used George Weldon) and get the Composers' Guild of Great Britain more involved in programme selection in order to widen Barbirolli's options, joined from the 1956 festival by the Society for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM). A general investment in chamber music events helped this course of action. Thanks to the Composers' Guild and the SPNM, the festival office started to receive unbidden scores, so great a volume that they gave Denison at the Arts Council the opportunity to push for a Reading Panel (1956–61 festivals) on which he sat with specialists such as William Glock of Dartington's Summer School, the young *Times* critic William Mann, conductor Reginald Goodall, and Eric Warr from the BBC's music department. They proposed works by reading scores in turn and making individual reports: 'A breath of fresh air [...] expert and lively' wrote Glock of Francis Burt's *Iambics*, while Warr conceded that 'the composer does not fumble' although 'I recommend it but not very warmly'. The management committee had to work its way through a range of personal judgments.

FROM ITS EARLIEST DAYS the festival had inadvertently developed the phenomenon of the 'Cheltenham Symphony'. Under this title a work in symphonic form was associated with the festival, even though it was not commissioned for the town nor truly given its premiere there. Table 4 lists the symphonic performances over the first 20 years, from Rubbra's Second Symphony of 1946 to Rawsthorne's Third Symphony of 1964, and it can be seen that 24 symphonies were given some sort of concert 'premiere' at Cheltenham, and 35 symphonies by living composers played in total. At the same time the composers of the 24 symphonies listed wrote in total 111 symphonies, so it was presumably thought there was a market elsewhere for these works of major personal investment.

Yet the development of the Cheltenham Symphony was itself economically determined. It has already been noted here that Cheltenham focused on instrumental music to distinguish it from the Three Choirs Festival. It was the Hallé orchestra who complained that Wilkinson's notion of the composers themselves conducting did not work – aside from Malcolm Arnold – because most composers lacked the confidence and know-how required, wasting rehearsal time. The management committee agreed therefore that only one work by a living composer should be played per concert. Cheltenham's trustees decided that if there was to be only one work then it must be the most substantial, cost-effective event of the evening and therefore it should be a symphony. And there was no need in the early days to commission one, because it can be seen from the list that there were all too many scores on offer. The second most sizeable concert genre was the concerto, and if we can talk of the Cheltenham Symphony, we might also talk of the Cheltenham

Table 4: Cheltenham Festival: ‘The Cheltenham Symphony’: symphonic premieres or performances from the 1st to the 20th Cheltenham Music Festival (1945–64)

NO.	YEAR	COMPOSER, SYMPHONY NO.	NOTE
01	1946	Edmund Rubbra S2	1937, revised 1945
02	1947	Ian Whyte S1	
03	1948	Arthur Benjamin S1	Written 1944–45
04	1949	Richard Arnell S4	Written 1948
05	1950	William Alwyn S1, Anthony Collins S2 (for strings), Peter Racine Fricker S1	
08	1951	Malcolm Arnold S1, John Gardner S1 ‘in D minor’, Arnold Van Wyck S1 in A minor’, (Rubbra S5)	Arnold written 1949; premiere conducted by Arnold. Rubbra 5 (1947) premiered London 1949, recorded by Hallé 1950
11	1952	John Veale S1	Written 1944–47, first performed Birmingham 1948, then revised
12	1953	Richard Arnell S3, Iain Hamilton S2, William Wordsworth S3 ‘in C major’	Arnell written 1943–45; Barbirolli asked for 20 mins of cuts; Hamilton and Wordsworth written 1951
15	1954	Stanley Bate S3, Geoffrey Bush S1	Bate written 1940
17	1956	Daniel Jones S3	Written 1951, first broadcast 1952
18	1957	Arthur Butterworth S1, Robert Simpson S2	
20	1960	Benjamin Frankel S1 (‘British premiere’)	Premiere in Germany 1959
21	1961	Malcolm Arnold S5	Conducted by the composer
22	1962	Frankel S2, Alun Hoddinott S2 (Festival commission), (Simpson S2)	Simpson 2 repeated from 1957
24	1964	Alan Rawsthorne S3 (Festival commission)	

Table 5: Cheltenham Festival: concerto premieres 1945–62

YEAR	NO.	CONCERTO
1946	01	Britten: Piano Concerto (revised)
1947	02	Rawsthorne: Concerto for oboe and strings
1948	03	Rawsthorne: Violin Concerto (no.1)
1949	04	Handel-Barbirolli: Concerto for viola and strings
1950	05	Francis Baines: Concerto for trumpet and strings; Bax: Concertante for piano (left hand) and orchestra
1951	07	Rawsthorne: 2nd Piano Concerto (‘first performance outside London’); Handel-Barbirolli: Clarinet Concerto
1952	09	Arthur Benjamin: Piano Concerto quasi una fantasia
1954	10	Whettam: Viola Concerto; Fricker: 2nd Violin Concerto; Hoddinott: Concerto for clarinet and strings
1955	13	Finzi: Cello Concerto; Alwyn: <i>Autumn legend</i> for cor anglais and strings; Easdale: <i>Concerto lirico</i> for piano and orchestra; Searle: Piano Concerto no.2
1956	17	Leighton: Cello Concerto
1957	18	Arthur Cooke: Concerto for clarinet and strings; Arnold: 2nd Horn Concerto; Gardner: Piano Concerto (no.1)
1958	21	Williamson: Piano Concerto; Hoddinott: Harp Concerto; Seiber: <i>Tre pezzi</i> for cello and orchestra
1959	24	Cooke: Violin Concerto; Lipkin: Piano Concerto; Hamilton: Violin Concerto
1960	27	RW Wood: Piano Concerto
1961	28	Rawsthorne: Concerto for ten instruments
1962	29	Goehr: Violin Concerto

Concerto, of which there were also 29 ‘premieres’ up to 1964 (see Table 5). In total, 37 concertos by living composers were played there.

As to the impact of these works on the listening public, it appears from BBC audience feedback that a significant percentage viewed Vaughan Williams as advanced, Fricker as avant-garde (one audience member called Fricker’s First Symphony ‘a veritable hullabaloo’), and Searle as experimental.²² But residents could more easily accept modernism if it came in the recognised ‘grand statement’ of a symphony, or a concerto. So when Peter Maxwell Davies – then a local school teacher – appeared with the *St Michael* Sonata for wind in 1959, it wasn’t actually the stylistic elements that caused consternation so much – because to the audience it was another ‘wrong-note’ piece; to their ears it wasn’t that far removed from Fricker – but it was the implication that traditional symphonic form could be sidelined when it came to serious intent. Similarly Harrison Birtwistle’s *Refrains and choruses* was premiered by the SPNM at the 1959 Festival and audience members scoffed not at the vocabulary but at the suggestion in the programme note that it was based on the form of a ‘Round’ – so they sang *Frère Jacques* out of key to ‘imitate’ Birtwistle.²³

By the early 1960s the Reading Panel was finding it hard to recommend almost anything, as the growth of festivals elsewhere gave composers other prospects; in 1961 it endorsed nothing. The festival took a dramatic turn by disbanding the panel and creating a Programme Planning Committee chaired by the reactionary Frank Howes, former chief critic of *The Times*. He wrote condescendingly in the 1962 programme that to ‘encourage modern music we have decided to have a complete holiday from it. Not one solitary problematical note will disturb the summer night at Pittville.’ Modern music was being better encouraged elsewhere, chiefly at the BBC when from 1959 a more progressive policy was established, marked by the appointment of the Reading Panel’s William Glock as the corporation’s Music Controller. Up until then the BBC had used Cheltenham as a sounding board for new work that could be recruited for the Proms, but now Glock moved this a step further and considered the festival in terms of specific employment for his house orchestras. The BBC Symphony and Northern orchestras supplanted the Hallé, which led to ill feeling between the factions for some years. Meanwhile Glock’s young Midland region Music Director, John Manduell, joined the festival’s planning committee. He introduced the idea of programme themes, and saw his own chance to support current – though less acute – musical tendencies; what Glock was sidelining in London could now find shelter in the West Country. From 1966 a significant number of Eastern European composers and artists were invited to the hometown of GCHQ. Manduell became the festival’s programme director in 1968, holding the position for 25 years.²⁴

22. BBC Written Archive Centre, Cheltenham Festival R30/321/1–3.

23. Mrs Eleanor Budge, interview, Cheltenham, 2003.

24. See *Cover story: 70 Festivals year by year* (Cheltenham 2014), especially 1962 onwards, and Lockwood: *Cheltenham Music Festival*, p.75.

Table 6: Cheltenham Municipal Borough Council population figures

CENSUS YEAR	CHELTENHAM MUNICIPAL BOROUGH	CHELTENHAM MUNICIPAL + RURAL
1931	58,300	70,782
1951	62,850	91,369
1961	72,154	110,747
1971	74,356	124,910
AVERAGE GROWTH PER YEAR:		
	TOWN	REGION
1931-51	0.4%	2.9%
1951-71	0.9%	2.5%

How successfully did all this supposed modernism help the Cheltenham residents to raise their standard of living? Table 6 displays the growth figures for the town over the 50 years from 1931. The administrative area of Cheltenham was divided into the Municipal Borough of the spa town itself and the outlying Rural Borough where industrial development had been encouraged. It can be seen that the postwar Spa town kept a tight hold on its size, allowing the minimal growth replacing deaths and departures, while allowing stimulated growth out of bounds, as it were. The Festival was of benefit to Cheltenham Spa in term of its aims for an exclusionary profile and a restrictive domicility. However, as the figures show, Cheltenham faced a decrease in population and, in the 1972 Cheltenham Plan, the Council devised new strategies by which to invigorate the town's economy. In line with this the 1974 Festival changed its title to the Cheltenham International Music Festival (see Table 1), to reflect not only the Borough's objectives but also Britain's accession to the European Economic Council and the creation of the West of England Tourist Authority subsequent to the Labour government's 1969 Development of Tourism Act. But it also dropped the percentage of music by living composers to an average of 23% and that of British living composers to 11%. That ultimately this caused no detriment to Cheltenham the brand is revealed by another set of figures. Over the last 30 years average earnings have remained 126% above the national average, while gross domestic product lies at 124% above the national average.²⁵ When it came to shopping and Fricker, shopping won.

25. Source: Cheltenham Borough Council development team.

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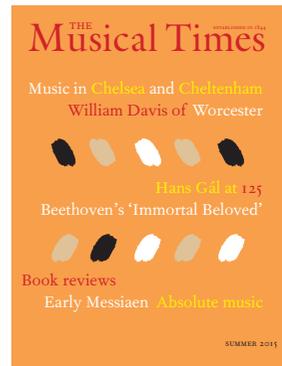
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