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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

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The summer of 2025 witnessed various commemorations of the eightieth anniversary of V-J day, when victory over Japan – albeit after the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – brought an end to the Second World War. In Britain, veterans, now in their late nineties or even older, offered their memories of active service as young men. Elderly civilians talked of childhood street parties, of flags and cake, of hearing the King speak on the wireless. What form of commemoration the actual wartime centenaries in 2039 or 2045 will take is for the future to decide, but one thing will be certain. Those military veterans, those elderly civilians, will no longer be with us to speak of the lived experience of a world war. Posterity will need to reconstruct it through what they have left us; through their letters and diaries, through their photographs, through newspapers and film footage. In doing so, it will be necessary to tread carefully between those sources which give us an official, and perhaps selective history, and those which speak of the everyday lives of those who lived through the conflict. And in terms of music, we shall have the scores and recording of those works to which the conflict gave rise, but here too we shall have to delve more deeply if we are to create a broader context from the sources we inherit; to explore, for example, the critical reception of new, wartime music, the promotion and attendance of concerts, the displacement of professional artists or the role of amateur music-making within local communities.

With the First World War we are already there. Even when centenary commemorations began in 2014, the 'war to end all wars' was already beyond living memory. Yet it had acquired a place in the British national psyche that the next world war has so far rarely been able to equal. It is the First World War that has given us those grand war memorials, the red poppies of remembrance, even the manner in which acts of remembrance are enacted. It is rarely absent from a school's history syllabus, for instance, just as poetry from or about the war features in that for English Literature. The pacifist poems of Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, rather than the jingoistic verses of John Oxenham or Jessie Pope, belong to a cultural legacy which continues in artistic creations across, not just literature, but film and television. The war lurks, consciously or unconsciously, behind the musical legacy of British works as varied as Elgar's *For the Fallen*, Bliss's *Morning Heroes*, the third and fourth symphonies of Vaughan Williams, or Holst's *Planets Suite*. It can even spill over into the musical legacy of the Second World War; Britten's *War Requiem* turned to Wilfred Owen's poetry from the 1914–18 conflict in order to create a work commissioned to mark the rebirth of Coventry cathedral, an architectural victim of the conflict of 1939–45.

A century or more of commemoration has certainly bequeathed a whole panoply of imagery through which, in the minds of many people, the war is evoked. Ask a random

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group of people what comes to mind when they think of the First World War and the likelihood is that their mental image will be of soldiers in muddy trenches, war memorials, vast war cemeteries full of white tombstones, and poppies. It is an imagery of destruction, loss and ultimate futility. Is this, though, how the war was seen at the time, or is it a posthumous view which arose in the inter-war period, when the land fit for heroes failed to materialize and the epithet 'war to end all wars' seemed increasingly hollow as the threat of another European conflict loomed ever larger?

How do we look beyond these posthumous responses and begin to understand the lives and thoughts of those for whom the First World War was a lived experience? In its attempt to do this the project *Everyday lives in war* was well named.[1] Funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, it ran during the centenary of the war with the University of Hertfordshire as its lead institution. Other universities involved included those of Essex, Northampton, Lincoln, and the Universities of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) and the West of England (UWE). A stipulation was that projects that bid for funding had to be collaborative. An overall aim was to connect academic research with research being undertaken at community level, the latter often focussing on the impact of the war on specific regions or even single towns. Fifteen projects were funded in three rounds of funding. In 2017, in the second round, the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) was successful in obtaining funding for its proposed project *Making Music in Manchester during World War I*.[2] Led by the then RNCM Director of Research Barbara Kelly, it was envisaged as a collaborative project between the RNCM and Manchester Central Library but expanded to draw upon the archives of the Hallé Orchestra. Research was undertaken by a mixed group of academic and freelance researchers, assisted by a number of volunteers. The 'everyday lives' here were those of musicians, whether they were students, teachers, solo artists, orchestral and chamber players, or brass or military bandsmen. A city with so strong a musical heritage as Manchester was able to offer, through the participating institutions, a rich archive of source material, which was moreover supplemented by contributions from the public in a number of open days held as part of a commitment to community outreach. In the case of the RNCM, a substantial amount of the research from this project was able to inform the related 2018 collaboration with the Paris Conservatoire *Paris–Manchester 1918: Conservatoires in Time of War.* [3] As part of this, the joint Anglo-French conference *Les Institutions musicales à Paris et à Manchester durant la Première Guerre mondiale* was held in Paris in March 2018.

The articles presented here are a direct outcome of *Making Music in Manchester during World War I*. Although each examines a different aspect of the impact of the war on the city's music making, they share a common theme in revealing a determination that concert life should continue despite the upheavals that it faced. It is a story told, not in the trenches, but in the concert halls and the classrooms. It speaks, not of loss and commemoration, but of the role music played in keeping alive the belief that ultimately something better and lasting might emerge from the conflict. It is a story that needs to be told because in the small, but growing, field of British music in the First World War studies, Manchester's rich musical heritage has hitherto not yet found a voice – although that is not to say that some of its more overarching themes have not been taken up elsewhere. Significant among other writings prompted by the centenary is the 2014 themed issue of the *Journal of Musicological Research*, edited by Deborah Kauffman.[4] It contains, inter alia, writings by Jane Angell on the Music in

[1] https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk (accessed 27 August 2025).

[2] https://everydaylivesinwar.herts.ac.uk/making-music-in-manchester-during-world-war-i-2 (accessed 27 August 2025).

[3] Paris–Manchester 1918 – Royal Northern College of Music https://www.rncm.ac.uk/paris-manchester-1918/about/ (accessed 27 August 2025).

[4] 'Music and the Great War', special issue edited by Deborah Kauffman. *Journal of Musicological Research* 33/1–3 (2014).

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Wartime and War Emergency Entertainments Committees,[5] Vanessa Williams on wartime concert life in London[6] and Zoë Lang on the impact of the war on concert repertoire.[7]

The centenary also produced a number of monographs, some by authors also involved in the *Everyday lives in war* project. One such is Emma Hanna's *Sounds of War*, a pioneering study of music as an agent of recruitment, morale boosting, fundraising and therapy.[8] Rachel Moore[9] and Jillian Rodgers have both examined musical life in France during and after the war, drawing both parallels and contrast with the situation in Britain.[10]

The Articles

Ali Ronan's discussion of the wartime correspondence between Hope Squire and her husband Frank Merrick, both pianists and teachers at the Royal Manchester College of Music (RMCM), comes closest to the overarching theme of *Everyday lives in war* in focussing as much on the domestic background to their careers as musicians. Apart from one, brief overview from 2008, it is the first detailed study of the letters held in Bristol University Archives.[11] The letters emanate from two very different environments: Merrick's from Wormwood Scrubs and Wandsworth Prison, where he was imprisoned for part of the war as a conscientious objector, and Squire's from the predominantly middle-class south Manchester address where the couple otherwise lived. Merrick's moral stance as a conscientious objector also picks up a theme explored by other projects within the parent project.[12] Their letters speak of their shared interest and values: socialism, pacifism, vegetarianism, Esperanto and women's suffrage. Squire's letters in particular tell us something of the circles in which they moved and the colleagues – not necessarily musical – who shared those values. These, and the unnamed members of the public she encountered, offer us a glimpse into their own everyday lives.

Squire also gives us an insight into her experiences as a member of staff at the RMCM during the war. The impact of the war on what was still a relatively new feature of Manchester's musical landscape is taken up more fully in Barbara Kelly's article on the college during wartime. Her approach is very much one of contextualization, placing the specific period 1914–18 within the broader field of its prewar existence (it opened in 1893) and more significantly, how the war nuanced the kind of college that was to emerge in the postwar period, including, as far as possible, tracing the subsequent careers of certain students. Her discussion thus takes in issues of gender balance within the student body and the way in which this was changed by the war, the range of instruments studied (which was itself nuanced by gender), the changing demographic background of the students and the repertoire taught and performed. Of particular interest is her discussion of the major changes in student intake

[5] Jane Angell, 'Music and Charity on the British Home Front during the First World War', *Journal of Musicological Research* 33/1–3 (2014): 184–205.

[6] Vanessa Williams, '"Welded in a Single Mass": Memory and Communities in London's Concert Halls during the First World War', *Journal of Musicological Research* 33/1–3 (2014): 39–95.

[7] Zoë A. Lang, Creating a War Repertoire: *Music für Alle* and Domestic Music during the First World War, *Journal of Musicological Research* 33/1–3 (2014): 206–40.

[8] Emma Hanna. *Sounds of War: Music in the British Armed Forces during the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[9] Rachel Moore. *Performing Propaganda: Musical Life and Culture in Paris during the First World War* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018).

[10] Jillian C. Rodgers. *Resonant Recoveries: French Music and Trauma between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[11] C.f. David Johnson, 'The Frank Merrick Archive at Bristol University', *CHOMBEC News* 6 (2008): 9.

[12] C.f. *Richmond Castle: Voices of Rebellion. Social Attitudes to Conscientious Objection* (Leeds University/English Heritage Trust) and *Re-Imagining True Social Order: How the Aftermath of War Shaped Quaker Social Witness* (Leeds University/ Britain Yearly Meeting of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

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occasioned by its being a beneficiary of the Government Scheme for the Higher Education of Ex-Servicemen, which brought a substantial number of such ex-servicemen – and women – into the RMCM. Kelly is also able to bring her expertise in French music of the period to broaden her contextualization to include a comparison of the experience of the RMCM and the Paris Conservatoire during the war.

By the time war was declared in 1914, several of an earlier generation of RMCM students had already begun their professional careers as players in the Hallé Orchestra. The orchestra's Archivist Eleanor Roberts was able to draw on a large number of archival sources in her investigation of how the Hallé weathered the war years. Although the orchestra itself has spawned a number of published historical studies, most subsume study of the war years into the larger contextual discourse.[13] Roberts argues that the overriding concern for the Hallé Concerts Society was to maintain, as far as possible, business as usual. She outlines the many problems they faced in achieving this. Financial worries led to cuts in players' salaries. The apparent disadvantage of players missing on active service proved advantageous, at least for the time being, to the women who were able to take their place. Solo artists were not always available, leading to programme changes. Above all there was the problem of Britain being at war with a country which had given the Hallé Orchestra its founder, provided a number of its players, and appointed as Charles Hallé's successors conductors from the German and Austro-Hungarian empires who performed a largely Austro-German repertoire. Moreover, the orchestra was in Manchester, which had the largest German population in the UK and where many of its supporters and benefactors were drawn from the city's well to do and culturally aware German citizens. Yet, as Roberts illustrates, even here the challenge could be turned to advantage, with visiting conductors bringing new French, Russian and British repertoire while maintaining a balance with existing German music.

As one letter writer complained to the *Manchester Guardian* some ten months before the outbreak of war 'the support for music in Manchester is mainly from the large colony of Germans residing there. They ... with but few exceptions, really care about the production of music.'[14] The notion that questions were being raised about the future of music in Manchester even before the challenge of the war emerges as one of the themes in Geoffrey Thomason's article centred around chamber music and the establishment of the Tuesday Mid-day Concerts. The concerts were prompted by a number of things beyond a perceived decline in support for prewar models. They grew out of the wartime scheme of providing music in hospitals for convalescing servicemen, aimed to provide work for musicians whose careers were blighted by the war, and offered a series of short, lunchtime chamber concerts rather than the full-length evening ones which were otherwise the norm. They grew, above all, from the initiative of Manchester cathedral's organist Sydney Nicholson. Nicholson is chiefly remembered as the founder of what is now the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM), but his earlier career, including his years in Manchester, has hitherto received no attention. Thomason's article acknowledges Nicholson's role not only in setting up the Tuesday Mid-day Concerts, but in providing a viable model for lunchtime chamber concerts which, as he hoped, survived the war and continues to this day.

Unlike the Second World War, the First was fought largely away from the everyday lives of those whom it affected. The abiding images, though, remain linked to the military conflict itself. Rachel Johnson turns to overtly military themes in her article in the role of Manchester's military bands in propaganda and recruitment for war. Again, *pace* Hanna's above-mentioned monograph, the role of bands as part of the recruitment process throughout the UK during this period has been but little discussed. Johnson also raises the importance of seeking out the lived experiences of those whose everyday lives are under

[13] See Eleanor Roberts' article in this issue.

[14] 'An English lover of music'. Letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, 7 October1913, 13.

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discussion, and the need to set it against posthumous accounts or analyses. In the case of the lived experience, what accounts we have of military recruitment, training and active service music need themselves be filtered to eliminate the genuine experience from that synthesized by propaganda.

Reviewing several of the monographs cited here another scholar associated with *Everyday lives in war*, Michelle Meinhart, headed an article 'Oh, what a musical war! A retrospective after the First World war centenary'.[15] Acknowledging a certain amount of "centenary fatigue" she spoke of "new voices" and "these authors [who] start to look at what a decolonized look at the war might be for musicology". It is the wish of the authors represented in this themed issue to be seen as making a start for Manchester, highlighting both the immediate impact of the war on the city and the way the way its concert life met the challenge of maintaining continuity when faced with the need to adapt and embrace change. The articles here are but pieces in a much larger jigsaw – a jigsaw that is still in the making, but whose Manchester-shaped pieces have hitherto been missing. Many of them are indeed by 'new voices' who offer the research they embody as a contribution to an unfolding broader narrative of wartime musical life in the city. They hope, too, that, taken as a whole, the hitherto untold stories presented here can play their part in creating the larger national picture of *Everyday lives in war* – a picture which continues to grow, to fascinate us, and to encourage us towards further exploration.

[15] Michelle Meinhart, 'Oh, What a Musical War! A Retrospective after the First World War Centenary', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 146/1 (2021): 231–47.

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