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The Economics of Opera in England: 1925-1939

Helen Richardson

King's College London

August 2019

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Music.

Abstract

The focus of my study is the financial management of opera in the UK during the inter-war years. The early years of the 20th century were witness to huge shifts in the 'business' of opera as it progressed from the old model of elite patronage towards a more socially democratic art-form, in line with the class and moral changes of those times. This thesis presents a series of case studies that illustrate how opera in Britain was funded during the years prior to the formation of the Arts Council: in particular, they reveal how opera survived during these years, thanks to the efforts of several unsung heroes and their search for a financial solution. It has at its heart a simple question: why was it that opera in England, which had been profitable in the late years of the nineteenth century, was by 1945 financially unsustainable? My research, based primarily on business archives, reveals perspectives on changes in the 'ownership' of opera: from when it ceased to be a commercially viable enterprise to when it was partially funded by government and considered by some to be part of the welfare state. I use three case studies to illustrate social and economic changes in the British public's relationship with opera and how different funding models were employed with varying degrees of success. The first investigates the efforts of Elizabeth Courtauld at Covent Garden during 1925-27; the second is a detailed investigation into the circumstances surrounding the first government grant to opera in 1930; the third considers the actions of John Christie at Glyndebourne during the period 1934-39. My analysis of these years makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the national operatic heritage and of the institutions and systems of funding of opera that exist today.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This research project began with my interest in opera and its funding. I embarked on the Masters at King's in 2009 having completed my first degree at the Royal Academy of Music, 27 years earlier. I had worked in the city as a Chartered Accountant during the eighties and nineties and I realized that I could usefully combine my accountancy and finance skills with my interest in opera. I wrote my Masters' dissertation tracing the progress of the Labour government's opera subsidy in 1930-33, drawing on the business archives at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden from the interwar years. For the present doctoral study, I wanted to explore the topic further and write a thesis that combined urban musicology with economic musicology – both emerging subdivisions of musicology.

While researching my dissertation, I realized that there was no economic history of opera in the UK, nor any more general economic history of opera. There are certain individual case studies that focus on particular areas of opera history and these were of great interest to me; but I was confused by the general perception that opera had never made money. This assumption warranted further investigation: it became clear to me that the financial model for opera had changed considerably during the first half of the twentieth century. I wanted to understand more about how opera had become part of the welfare state when it had only relatively recently been the exclusive preserve of the country's aristocrats and gentry.

I am fascinated by the endeavours of the promoters of opera during the first half of the twentieth century. Much is written of the accomplishments of people such as Thomas Beecham, Ethel Smyth and Lilian Baylis, but there is little or no mention of my champions of opera – Elizabeth Courtauld, Eustace Blois, Frederick Szarvasy, Ethel Snowden or Emerald Cunard (who was Beecham's partner and fund-raiser) – who were passionate about maintaining the institution of opera in the UK, and devoted a significant part of their lives to it. As I began my research for this project it struck me that a number of these earnest endeavourers were female and I wanted to investigate further whether it was gender issues that caused their exclusion from a place in history.

I have been fortunate to be able to base this study on the archives at Covent Garden, the Royal Opera House Collections (ROHC): thanks to the assistance initially of Francesca Franchi and subsequently Laura Brown and Julia Creed. Despite frequent closures, I have spent much time copying from their archives. The ROHC pre-war business papers are not filed in good order but contain much valuable information. ROHC also have wonderful newspaper cuttings files, which helped me to shortcut otherwise lengthy searches at Colindale and the British Library (few of the relevant newspapers are available online). It was clear from my Masters' dissertation that the ROHC papers did not present a complete picture, and I was delighted to discover that the BBC Written Archives Collection held many more papers on the subject of the efforts to fund opera in the early 1930s. Their archive contained some fascinating correspondence which was revealing in terms of personalities and legal structures. I would like to thank Matthew Chipping at the BBC: his patient sharing of knowledge was invaluable. The BBC archives also permit researchers to photograph the documents – so I have been able to take time studying the approximately 2,000 documents that form the basis of my second case study. The Glyndebourne archives were much easier still, as they are meticulously maintained and available to the public: here again, the news-cutting files were of immeasurable help in researching contemporary views on Christie and his opera project. I am very grateful to Julia Aries, the archivist at Glyndebourne, who made this part of my study so enjoyable.

I am grateful to the community at King's College who have helped me immensely during my studies. I didn't find it easy to integrate myself into student life, but I have learned so much from the openings offered by the department – wonderful opportunities to understand more of the process and share my experiences with others. There are many individuals who have helped me along the way, including Flora Willson, Kate Guthrie, Emma Adlard, Yvonne Liao, Roberta Collingwood, Sue Daniels, Howard Webber and many others who have read and commented on my thesis. There are many members of staff who have been incredibly encouraging, especially when I have found things difficult, including Emma Dillon, Andy Fry, Michael Fend and Heather Wiebe. I have also been privileged to be able to share my Ph.D. journey with

my school friend Rosey Davies, who has been a tower of strength and an amusing companion along the way.

I have been so lucky to have had the encouragement and support of Roger Parker in working towards this thesis: his wealth of experience in shaping my thesis and cajoling me towards this final goal has been wonderful and I am forever in his debt.

Finally, I acknowledge and sincerely thank my daughter Grace and husband Graham, who have helped me through this lengthy process and unquestioningly accepted my studies as part of their life. Their moral support and encouragement at times of crisis have saved me from the brink on numerous occasions: I know I would not have been able to cross the finishing line without them.

Introduction

This thesis has at its heart a simple question: why was it that by 1945, opera in England had ceased to be commercially viable? In order to address this question, I will present a series of case studies that investigate the funding of opera in Britain prior to the formation of the Arts Council in 1945-46. These cameos offer a broad understanding of why opera was thought essential to the nation at the end of the Second World War even though it was also considered financially unsustainable. There is a dearth of literature relating to opera in Britain between the wars. My research is the first detailed exploration of these socio-economic trends in opera during this period.[1]

The modern-day organizational and financial structures of opera in the UK are idiosyncratic. The evolution of these unique financial models will be explored in this thesis, along with the reasons for the frequent funding deficit crises that accompanied their development. My thesis will thus have things to say about the structure of regional opera that exists today and – to take an example more-or-less at random – will help to explain why there are two opera companies in London with a tradition of one singing in English and the other not. Many people struggle to understand why opera tickets are so expensive when opera companies have what appears to be a plethora of non-ticket income streams. Opera is, after all, funded by both the Arts Council and the National Lottery as well as by a host of wealthy donors: a complex system of costly memberships that secure priority booking and sponsorships, both private and corporate, support opera companies.[2] What is more, other opera festival

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[1] In the world of opera during this period, 'British' often meant London or perhaps the South East of England, simply because that was where the cultural elite was centred; it was generally accepted that there was almost no opera in Scotland, Ireland or Wales. I refer to 'Britain' as a concept formed by contemporary perceptions of what being British meant rather than a geographical location: this subject is examined by Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). During the period under review, there was almost no difference between 'British' and 'English', the two words appearing virtually interchangeable in news reports. In the interwar years, concepts of 'British-ness' and English national culture were significantly influenced by national sensitivities regarding Empire: for more on this, see Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003). Jed Etsy also proves useful for understanding the detail of the operatic landscape: he describes a 'culture of retrenchment' in Britain reflecting the decline in empire and a nation seeking a new identity; see Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[2] These concepts and structures are described in detail in David Ranan, *In Search of a Magic Flute: The Public Funding of Opera* (Bern: P. Lang, 2003).

companies such as Glyndebourne thrive with only limited government funding.[3] The marked differences between the funding of British opera and that in other parts of the world prompts further questions. Opera in mainland Europe receives predominantly state funding; in the United States, it is predominantly private. Are these national discrepancies pertinent or are they simply historical accidents?

The survival of opera in Britain may be a matter of periodic concern, yet as a national institution, opera still remains central to the idea of UK culture. The substantial government funding is a reminder of the importance afforded to the preservation of this part of the nation's cultural heritage. For its supporters, opera reflects the state of the nation and is a physical manifestation of cultural importance: opera continues to sit atop the cultural sector as a jewel of the nation's art.[4] For detractors, opera is to be viewed with suspicion and is considered unworthy of subsidy, particularly in times of austerity.[5]

From the moment that opera became funded by the state it entered a new part of the political arena. Prior to the first instance of state funding in the UK, which will be the subject of my second case study, while decisions made by proprietors might have provoked comment, the public were not stakeholders. But as soon as opera received state funding, it became a perennially divisive political issue and to this day has continued to provoke criticism, especially during times of governmental change. To put this another way, its system of subsidy means that opera is somehow part of the welfare state: but it sits uncomfortably within that mechanism because it is neither free nor geographically available to all, and because its success or otherwise cannot be measured in the same terms as education or the health service. In our modern, neoliberal democracy, opera appears to belong more to the right wing of the political

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[3] The Arts Council England funds Glyndebourne's touring operations but not the main opera festival.

[4] Ruth Berenson, *The Operatic State: Cultural Policy and the Opera House* (London: Routledge, 2002), 97 and Norman Lebrecht, *Covent Garden the Untold Story: Dispatches from the English Culture War, 1945-2000* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 1.

[5] 'Developing and diversifying the opera audience have become of particular concern in the UK, because the British media is inclined to portray opera as an expensive entertainment for the upper classes and snobbish intellectuals, funded by excessive demands on the ordinary taxpayer'; Anastasia Belina-Johnson and Derek B. Scott, *The Business of Opera* (London: Routledge, 2016), 5.

sphere because of its elitist links; but left-wing governments have not put a stop to the funding, often because of the perceived importance of opera to the nation.[6]

Maintaining the nation's cultural reputation may be one justification for the continued state funding of opera; others include obvious benefits such as education and the stimulation of creativity, together with aspirations that participation in such cultural activities might promote social inclusivity and improve the mental welfare of the least privileged. But the determination of an appropriate level of investment is complex and always political. Calculation of value for money in this field is extremely problematic: it is, indeed, a longstanding concern that has challenged the minds of some of the country's finest economists and continues to perplex.

Drawing on archival material, my three case studies have been selected to illustrate cultural, social and economic changes in the British public's relationship to opera from 1924 to 1939: it is, in part, a business evaluation of the leading opera managers active during the interwar years, whose efforts have been all-but-forgotten. The archives provide only an incomplete record but my aim is, wherever possible, to subject the available financial information to modern business analysis. This type of analysis would be considered standard practice in preparing a medium-term financial strategy for one of today's major opera companies. But such financial evaluation – of the commercial drivers of financial performance and sustainability – needs also to be considered in the context of a broader range of legacies relating to the ritual of opera and its popularity: in particular, how social structures, cultural, national and gender issues influenced the evolution of opera during the interwar years. What motivated my champions of opera to act as they did is of great interest, not least because several of them were women.

My case studies engage with five dilemmas central to the problem of funding opera during the interwar years. The first was: should opera be elite or could it be 'opera for all', offered in a diluted form to wider audiences? In essence, was opera inherently 'highbrow', or could emerging technology and lower price points encourage 'middlebrow' audiences? The second dilemma concerned the funding of opera: should

[6] David Hesmondhalgh, Melissa Nisbett, Kate Oakley and David Lee, 'Were New Labour's Cultural Policies Neo-Liberal?', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 21, 1 (2015), 97-114, esp. 108.

private and/or corporate finance be held responsible or should some of the funding come from central government as part of the wider welfare state? How could the system of funding by the country's wealthiest be transformed into a financial model suitable for the twentieth century? The third dilemma concerned the language of opera performances: should opera should be performed in English or in the language in which it was written? During the previous fifty years there had been a substantial growth in demand for English opera (both in terms of opera written in English and of opera performed in English translation). All the characters described in the three case studies had to make decisions about whether the opera they presented should be in English or in its original language: this question resonated with contemporary sentiments surrounding economic protectionism in terms of choice of repertoire and performers. The fourth dilemma revolved around resources and commercial assets: could these be shared? Should there be only one opera orchestra and chorus that worked year round, in London and on regional tours, and/or should the various opera companies benefit from sharing one London property? The fifth and final dilemma was in many ways the most important: was there sufficient public support for the notion that opera was central to perceptions of national prestige? As Britain's power as a world-leading nation was eclipsed by others in the interwar years, so this question became increasingly significant.[7] Did the nation perceive opera as a national 'treasure' to the extent that it was central to Britain's dignity as a nation, something that needed to be preserved for future generations? The answer to this all-important question was, as will become evident, critical to the survival of opera.

These five dilemmas remained with John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) when he created the Arts Council, as they had with the individuals discussed in my case studies. All sought to find a solution that enabled financial stability. As will be revealed in the unfolding of my thesis, the various solutions proposed by most of my campaigners were flawed and, partly for this reason, their endeavours were not lastingly successful. Similarly, the solutions that remain today are by no means perfect

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[7] Oliver Bennett, 'Cultural Policy in the United Kingdom: Collapsing Rationales and the End of a Tradition', *The European Journal of Cultural Policy*, 1, 2 (1995), 199-216.

and indeed remain the cause of the financial crises frequently suffered by opera companies.

My case studies are taken from various periods in the interwar years: as such, they form an important part in the arc of cultural development that led to the formation of the Arts Council in 1946.[8] The progress towards state funding was not driven solely by commercial constraints: the overarching advance of democratisation and the increase in Socialist notions of public ownership, which led to the creation of the welfare state, were factors that affected public opinion as to whether state support was appropriate. It is clear that the First World War laid the ground for a widening of public interest in the arts; but civic debate in the interwar years was complicated by the emergence of mass entertainment, the cinema, radio and the gramophone; and by widespread disagreement about the relative value of highbrow and lowbrow art. Pessimists were worried that the 'machine' would render live performance redundant.[9] This served to emphasise the chasm between the cultured elites and the wider population, the latter often characterised as more interested in lowbrow entertainment. The government position was unclear: in many ways it appeared to support the arts but it was not prepared to lift the onerous Entertainments Tax, a levy on live performance that had been imposed during the First World War, and that remained a significant burden for opera.

Cultural historians often suggest that opera slumped markedly during the first half of the twentieth century and that it was only the inspired vision of Keynes's Arts

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[8] The cultural histories I am discussing define culture as the product of artistic activity: this definition covers such activities as drama, dance, music, opera, etc., and the term 'cultural policy' relates to state policy regarding such products. Many academic texts avoid the issue of definition by using terms such as 'arts policy'; this also is problematic because it requires a definition of 'art'. Umbrella terms such as 'cultural economy' and 'cultural industries' are used here within a discourse that has developed since the Frankfurt School and are used here broadly in the tradition of Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of 'cultural capital'; see Bourdieu, *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts,* ed. Michael James Grenfell (London: Routledge, 2012). Alaine Touraine offers a valuable analysis of the class implications of state cultural policies; see Touraine, *The Post-Industrial Society: Tomorrow's Social History: Classes Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed Society* (New York: Random House, 1971), 34.

[9] Pat Thane, *Divided Kingdom: A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 122.

Council that facilitated its triumphant re-emergence.[10] It is certainly true that the creation of the Arts Council crystallised many aspects of the system of arts funding and informed various cultural categories and organizations that remain today; my research, however, suggests that these developments were at least partially informed by the experiences of my advocates of opera and were certainly not solely the inspiration of Keynes. My analysis of the different solutions selected by the various opera champions answering the questions that I have posed above is relevant because it offers some alternative ideas on opera funding: ones that might have been significant in the years following the formation of the Arts Council – and perhaps could even be significant now.

The current chief executive of the Arts Council England, Darren Henley, has suggested that it is the term 'subsidy' that causes the problems: if, he says, we considered such support 'investment' then the principle would be less difficult.[11] Semantics aside, subsidies to opera have been an issue for the entire time since Keynes outlined his ideals for the Arts Council in a radio programme shortly before his death in 1946.[12] Of course, perspectives have changed since 1945; in considering the case of opera, one of the most notable changes is the increase in financial pressure involved in funding the welfare state, something that has, so far, only partially affected opera funding. But retaining state funding has many advantages, such as ensuring that modern opera managers justify their government support by means of educational enterprises that are both socially inclusive and multicultural. However, other

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[10] Clive Bell described Keynes as having 'benefitted all the Arts by the creation of the Arts Council'; see Clive Bell, 'Maynard Keynes', *A Bloomsbury Group Reader*, ed. S.P. Rosenbaum (Oxford: Basil Blackwood Oxford, 1956).

[11] Darren Henley, *The Arts Dividend: Why Investment in Culture Pays* (London: Elliott and Thompson, 2016).

[12] Keynes's vision for the Arts Council was broadcast in a talk he later published in the *Listener,* on 12 July 1945. It is reproduced in full in *John Maynard Keynes: The Essential Keynes*, ed. Robert Skidelsky (London: Penguin, 2015), 91-5. The Arts Council itself was incorporated under Charter in 1946, after Keynes's death earlier that year. Like many of the others involved in opera, it was the opera house (although ballet was being performed that night) that caused Keynes' death: he had a heart attack just before the royal party arrived at Covent Garden on the post-war opening night, 20 February 1945. He continued with his duties that evening, dealing with the royal family and others during both intervals: he died on 21 April 1946. See also the Arts Council's first Annual Report: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20Arts%20Council%20of%20Great%20Britain%20-%201st%20Annual%20Report%201945_0.pdf>

fundamental dilemmas of opera remain unchanged: managers, from before the creation of the Arts Council until today, still have to find ways of resolving the dichotomy between elite and commercial art, balancing the books with limited resources while striving for artistic excellence. My study will, through the examination of the legacies which remain from the times before the Arts Council, increase our knowledge of arts funding models and thus permit a close consideration of whether Keynes' vision remains appropriate in modern times.

Twentieth-Century Cultural Narratives

In most of what remains of this introduction I present a contextual review of relevant musicological texts, encompassing a review of the development of opera in English during the early years of the twentieth century, followed by a summary of the chapters of this thesis. But those subjects need to be seen in the context of the trajectory of arts funding: and this section offers a literary review of cultural histories, including the legacy of Keynes, a figure central to the cultural transformation of the twentieth century. His presence is indeed apparent throughout my case studies – either by himself or in connection with his friend, Samuel Courtauld. Most cultural analyses of Britain in the twentieth century place the formation of the Arts Council as a central event, critical proof that state funding was inevitable.[13] Keynes' vision is considered transformational and the application of his monetary theory to the arts widely welcomed: his economic theory – briefly that spending in times of economic Depression would regenerate the nation – was a notion that could also be employed to regenerate the arts. My review of the academic texts on this subject reveals a variety of conclusions: some decide that state funding was an inevitability; others suggest that it was the result of initiatives that originated from members of the Bloomsbury group; still others suggest that the authorities were acting on the initiative of wealthy philanthropists. These narratives do not place any significance on the efforts of those individuals who struggled to ensure the survival of opera in the interwar years, nor did

[13] For example, Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (New York: New York University Press, 1977) and Ruth Berenson, *The Operatic State: Cultural Policy and the Opera House* (London: Routledge, 2002). This subject is discussed in more detail below.

Keynes himself appear to have considered the efforts of my individuals in his solution.[14]

It has become normal to chart the development of the Arts Council as a wartime impetus with little or no prehistory.[15] The creation of the Council in 1945-46 is, in other words, seen as a wonderful outcome of the war: it was created out of the wartime Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) to represent the continued defiance of a nation who had survived (and indeed won). Biographies of Keynes form an important part of this cultural history: D.E. Moggeridge makes no reference to opera prior to the Arts Council, mentioning only that Covent Garden had been let on a commercial basis to Mecca Cafes as a dance hall. Robert Skidelsky offers a summary of the activities of CEMA and of Keynes's role there and concludes that the Arts Council and the Royal Opera House (together with the Cambridge Arts Theatre) were his chief public legacies: he is dismissive of the work of my individuals, allocating only a few sentences to opera in the interwar years.[16] Skidelsky is also dismissive of the work of John Christie, the subject of my final case study. He suggests that Keynes did Christie a favour in refusing Glyndebourne funding from the Arts Council as his enterprise was all the better for being entirely privately funded; he gives no credit to Christie's claim that Keynes stole his ideas in forming the Arts Council.[17]

Skidelsky states that no one succeeded with opera before the creation of the Arts Council, and goes on to suggest that Beecham was the most likely individual to find a financially successful way to proceed, a point repeated by Andrew Sinclair in his

[14] Keynes did not leave any written record of his philosophies regarding the Arts Council. The transcript of the radio broadcast mentioned above is the only record of his thoughts on the subject that remains.

[15] The Arts Council website charts its history: '1940 – Committee for Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) set up by Royal Charter; 1941 – John Maynard Keynes becomes Chair of CEMA; 1945-46 – Art organizations are funded by CEMA; 1946 – Keynes dies shortly before Arts Council charter drafted; 1948 – Local government authorises spending on the arts': <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-organization/our-history>

[16] This is from Skidelsky's condensed one volume study of Keynes; Robert Skidelsky, J*ohn Maynard Keynes, 1883-1946: Economist, Philosopher, Statesman* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 837. See also Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Britain, 1937-46* (London: Macmillan, 2000) and D.E. Moggridge, *Maynard Keynes: An Economist's Biography* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[17] Keynes described Glyndebourne as being 'a rich man's treasure, with no claim upon the tax-payer': Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Britain*, 297.

history of the Arts Council.[18] Certainly Thomas Beecham (1879-1971), with his father Joseph Beecham (1848-1916), put a substantial amount of money into opera and had every opportunity to create an English opera legacy in London: as we shall see, though, Beecham failed repeatedly. In my analysis, he appears a belligerent individual, privileged, arrogant and not prepared to work with other bodies to ensure the survival of his favoured art form: he also failed to see his own shortcomings, choosing instead to blame others for the failures of his projects. His defiant attitude to John Reith, Director General of the BBC, and to the team at Covent Garden in the early 1930s, not to mention his public reputation as a bankrupt spendthrift, make Skidelsky and Sinclair's comments somewhat ill-informed.[19] In my analysis, at least, any of my champions would have been more likely to succeed in ensuring the survival of opera than Beecham: although he was a significant player in the UK's musical heritage, he had little financial acumen. Sinclair also signals the importance of Samuel Courtauld's funding of art, but makes no mention of Elizabeth Courtauld's parallel efforts in music, an omission I consider in detail in my first case study.

Janet Minihan offers an examination of the changes in attitude to state funding over a wide arc of time, with a focus primarily on the funding of museums and fine art collections.[20] Her chapter on the interwar years considers opera in the context of other arts. She reviews public opinion on government subsidies, as sentiment shifted from suspicion to an acceptance that state funding was the only way to ensure the survival of important artistic institutions. Minihan describes the development of increasing levels of state funding (and intervention) as a natural corollary of the growing sophistication of democracies: the move towards state funding was facilitated by 'statesmen' and is presented as an inevitable consequence of war and social change. She is umfairly dismissive of the team at Covent Garden and accuses them of an anti-British bias, suggesting that they were unwilling to support UK nationals and the British National Opera Company (BNOC).[21] Ruth Berenson's *The Operatic State: Cultural Policy*

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[18] Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995).
[19] Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Britain,* 295.
[20] Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture.*
[21] For more on the BNOC, see below.

and the Opera House also considers opera in a wide context, looking at financial models in several countries: her chapter on opera in London, 'The Disunited Kingdom: London's Operatic Battles', allocates only one paragraph to opera in the early twentieth century. She characterizes opera during that time as continuing in the tradition of the previous century, and accuses those in charge of ignoring the contributions of Beecham and Christie.[22] Neither Minihan nor Berenson includes any detail of opera during these years; what is more, their generalizations do not match my findings.

Some cultural histories assert that the Arts Council had its roots in the ideologies of Roger Fry, Clive Bell and the Bloomsbury group. Anna Upchurch expands this theory as she considers the history of cultural policy in the UK, USA and Canada. In her book, *The Origins of the Arts Council Movement: Philanthropy and Policy*, she asserts that governments responded more to private philanthropist's efforts to keep important cultural institutions afloat than had previously been claimed.[23] Upchurch agrees with Minihan's theories that the passage from private philanthropy to partial public funding over these years was not simply an inevitable augmentation of the welfare state. Upchurch's conclusion owes much to the attitudes of Fry and Bell towards state funding, in particular an emphasis on arm's-length government support; she also asserts that Keynes acted during the war years as part of an elitist group that shaped cultural policy, a group that included Samuel Courtauld.[24] Upchurch's new

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[22] Berenson, *The Operatic State*, 63-97, esp. 83.
[23] Upchurch places great importance on an article by Roger Fry from 1924, one that criticized the government's encouragement of mediocrity and challenged it to provide a cultural policy. This refers to Fry's 'Art and the State', published in the *Nation and Athenaeum*: his essay warned of the problems of state interference in the arts. Upchurch argues that Fry's essay was significant in the eventual adoption of an 'arm's length' policy by the Arts Council; see Anna Upchurch, 'John Maynard Keynes, the Bloomsbury Group and the Origins of the Arts Council Movement', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 10, 2 (2004), 203-17; and Anna Upchurch, *The Origins of the Arts Council Movement: Philanthropy and Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Also relevant is Raymond Williams, 'The Significance of "Bloomsbury" as a Social and Cultural Group', in *Keynes and the Bloomsbury Group*, eds. Derek Crabtree and A.P. Thirlwall (London: Macmillan, 1978), 40-67. Fry's essay is included in Craufurd D. Goodwin, *Art and the Market: Roger Fry on Commerce in Art, Selected Writings* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 194-204. See also Kevin V. Mulcahy, 'Cultural Policy: Definitions and Theoretical Approaches', *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 35, 4 (2006), 319-30, and D.E. Moggridge, 'Keynes, the Arts, and the State', *History of Political Economy*, 37, 3 (2005), 535-55.
[24] *Essays on John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Milo Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 268, 280.

perspective credits a wider range of influences on Keynes's vision than some of the other summaries; but it does not credit any influence from those actually managing opera. Another commentator Oliver Bennett offers an analysis of changing attitudes to culture; while the Victorians confidently employed culture to 'adorn' the nation, this idea had slumped by the 1920s to a more defensive position because of the onslaught of American media, most notably Hollywood.[25] He points out the significance of what went before in the actions of philanthropists and state funding, citing the BBC as an example, and also the Socialist government funding of opera in 1930; but he moves on very swiftly to the Arts Council without pausing to consider the work of my supporters of opera.

D.L. LeMahieu's analysis of the rise of new cultures in the 1930s offers a more pertinent starting point for my thesis.[26] He does not specifically consider opera but his case studies resonate with my findings because he finds value in how producers of the time were able to mould opinion and shape tastes, even though such change was always contingent on public support. He describes the relationship between the established 'cultivated elites' and the emerging mass media, highlighting the differences between the old elites, who tried to distance themselves from new lowbrow technologies, and those who tried to make use of such technologies to educate the masses. As culture was made more widely available, LeMahieu's intellectual elite strove to defend their authority by categorizing works according to the 'highbrow' or 'lowbrow' distinction.[27] Press barons and media executives such as Reith had to employ smart public relations in order to win cultural approval from the working class. He illustrates his case describing how the BBC had initially been unduly influenced by the opinions of cultivated minorities; in the 1930s, though, the organization found a more relevant common culture, gradually permitting a grudging reconciliation between the elite and the masses. His analysis of the diminishing

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[25] Oliver Bennett, 'Cultural Policy in the United Kingdom: Collapsing Rationales and the End of a Tradition', *European Journal of Cultural Policy*, 1, 2 (1995), 199-216.
[26] D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
[27] <https://obertobrookes.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/rescuing-opera-from-stereotypes.pdf>

influence of the cultural elite offers me a framework to apply to my campaigners in the world of opera, none of whom were from culturally privileged backgrounds.

Multidisciplinary Musicological Texts and Other Opera Schemes

Traditional musicological texts, composition- or composer-based studies, do not often consider opera in London during the interwar years (nor in the previous century); what writing there is certainly does not offer any financial analysis. Three of my four case studies concentrate on opera at Covent Garden; by 1924, the most important opera venue in London.[28] In terms of musicological texts that inform my thesis, the approach introduced by Cyril Ehrlich and John Rosselli in the 1970s and later is most relevant to my thesis because they consider the economics of music in the context of their wider evaluation.[29] More recently, musicologists such as Stefano Baia Curioni, Paul Kildea and John Drysdale have developed this type of writing further and produced economic analyses that I have found invaluable as templates for how best to present financial information.[30] The seminal text on Covent Garden is Harold Rosenthal's *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden,* which is an accurate compendium, a catalogue of performances together with contemporary reviews, immaculately researched by

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[28] The Covent Garden theatre was distinguished from a large number of others, and from music halls, through its legacy of serious drama; historically it was one of the only two Theatres Royal in London licensed for drama, an arrangement that dated back to the Restoration. A third theatre, the King's Theatre on the Haymarket (later Her Majesty's Theatre), was also given a licence and became London's main opera theatre during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The monopoly held by the three theatres over drama and opera was broken by the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843; the management at Covent Garden and Drury Lane began to put on summer seasons of opera to supplement reduced revenues from drama; during the latter part of the nineteenth century a tradition of summer seasons of 'Royal Italian Opera' at Covent Garden was established, that theatre subsequently becoming the primary venue for opera in London. See Jacky Bratton, *The Making of the West End Stage: Marriage, Management and the Mapping of Gender in London, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[29] Ehrlich's studies are: *The Piano: A History* (London: Dent, 1976); *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); *Harmonious Alliance: A History of the Performing Right Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); and *First Philharmonic: A History of the Royal Philharmonic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). John Rosselli's books of this type are *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi*: *The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[30] Stefano Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera. Storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2011); Paul Kildea, *Selling Britten: Music and the Market Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Drysdale, *Louis Véron and the Finances of the Académie Royale de Musique* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003); and John Drysdale, *Elgar's Earnings* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013).

Rosenthal during his years as archivist at Covent Garden. His work is indispensable for reference; but although there is some financial information, he does not include any in-depth analysis.[31]

There are other financial models for opera during the period covered by my case studies that could be relevant but, for reasons of space have not been included in this thesis. The obvious omissions are the various models employed by Lilian Baylis (1874-1937); by the BNOC; by the Carl Rosa Opera company, and by Beecham's Imperial League of Opera (ILO). Baylis worked with opera at the Old Vic and subsequently at Sadler's Wells from 1912 until her death: most agree that her vision, of creating a 'people's opera house' was extraordinary and important.[32] As a drama and opera theatre manager she was remarkable for her time not least because, unlike most female theatre managers who preceded her, she was able to continue in the industry for a considerable length of time. Her enduring survival in the theatre world must have served to reassure Elizabeth Courtauld and Ethel Snowden as they entered the field of opera. Baylis worked towards popularizing opera for the benefit of the occupants of the slums of south London. She found a solution to the matrix of dilemmas by offering opera at incredibly low prices in English. Her model was sustainable because she made sure that her costs were controlled but as a result, her opera was often of very poor standard, plagued by bad translations and amateurism.

Baylis was an important contributor to opera in English over a relatively long period, commentary on her efforts is relatively plentiful and forms what is probably

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[31] Harold Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* (London: Putnam, 1958), *Opera at Covent Garden: A Short History* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967) and *Covent Garden: Memories and Traditions* (London: Michael Joseph, 1976). Other standard texts on Covent Garden history are: Henry Saxe-Wyndham, *The Annals of Covent Garden Theatre in Two Volumes* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1906); Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *Covent Garden* (London: Max Parrish, 1948); *Survey of London Volume XXXV: The Theatre Royal Drury Lane and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden,* ed. F.H.W. Sheppard (London: Athlone Press, 1970); Lord Drogheda, Ken Davison and Andrew Wheatcroft, *Covent Garden Album: 250 Years of Theatre Opera and Ballet* (London: Routledge, 1981) and Andrew Saint, B.A. Young, Mark Clark, Clement Crisp and Harold Rosenthal, *A History of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, 1732-1982* (London: The Royal Opera House, 1982).

[32] Cecily Hamilton and Lilian Baylis, *The Old Vic* (London: Cape, 1926); Sybil and Russell Thorndike, *Lilian Baylis* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1938); Richard Findlater, *Lilian Baylis: The Lady of the Old Vic* (London: Allen Lane, 1975); Elizabeth Schafer, *Lilian Baylis: A Biography* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2006); Susie Gilbert, *Opera for Everybody* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009); Terry Coleman, *The Old Vic: The Story of a Great Theatre from Kean to Olivier to Spacey* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014).

the standard academic narrative on British opera before the formation of the Arts Council.[33] By comparison the BNOC receives little coverage: this opera group, producing opera in English, came into existence in 1921, emerging after Beecham's early operatic ventures had failed, and included many musicians who had previously worked for him.[34] The company had a novel structure, funded by a public share issue, with a democratic decision making process, had included choice of repertoire by public ballot; it only performed opera in English, with a protectionist policy of employing solely UK nationals. This was the first of a series of ventures that sought to place the ownership of opera in public hands. The determinedly British nature of the company meant that it had every opportunity to establish a national opera company but failed to do so owing to a fundamental flaw in its model. Because of the precedent set by Beecham and Oscar Hammerstein who both had significant independent financial resources, there was an expectation that opera in English would be available at 'popular' prices, an insistence on low ticket prices which the BNOC found it could not afford, particularly with their ambitious repertoire and regional tours.

Beecham's ILO was launched in September 1927 and spanned the period covered by my first two case studies. Beecham expanded on the BNOC's attempt to move the ownership of opera into the public realm, in this case by making use of crowd funding.[35] Having previously vowed to have no further involvement in opera, Beecham saw the ILO as a vehicle that would put him back at the helm of a national

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[33] See for example Michael Epstein writing in the introduction to Tom Sutcliffe's *Believing in Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), xiii. Baylis' contribution to opera is widely discussed in the bibliography listed above, most significantly Gilbert, *Opera for Everybody,* 43-62 and Schafer, *Lilian Baylis*, 261-72, but see also Norman Tucker, 'The Place of Opera in the Artistic Life of the Country', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 110, 5074 (1962): 752-63.

[34] Beecham's ventures have been briefly mentioned on p.17 but are examined in more detail later in this thesis. Daniel J. Chamier, *Percy Pitt of Covent Garden and the BBC* (London: Arnold, 1938), 192–212; Eric Walter White, *The Rise of English Opera* (London: John Lehmann, 1951) and *A History of English Opera* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983); Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 411-21 and Harold Rosenthal, 'British National Opera Company', in *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, Web. 21 Oct. 2013i
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04014>

[35] Standard texts on Beecham include: Thomas Beecham, *A Mingled Chime* (London: Hutchinson, 1959); Neville Cardus, *Sir Thomas Beecham* (London: Collins, 1961); Charles Reid, *Thomas Beecham: An Independent Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961); Richard Capell, 'Sir Thomas Beecham', *The Musical Times*, 102, 1419 (May 1961), 283-286; Alan Jefferson, *Sir Thomas Beecham: A Centenary Tribute* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1979); and John Lucas, *Thomas Beecham: An Obsession with Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008).

opera company. His scheme famously challenged 150,000 supporters to pay 2d a week, an amount that would raise £60,000 annually to fund his operatic institution. There was a powerful logic to his campaign: the idea that the man in the street could be a part of the movement with such a small subscription resonated with many music lovers. Cleverly, Beecham targeted a large customer base by offering opera outside London, and much of his marketing drive was in major towns outside the capital.[36] One of his first subscribers was the Prince of Wales, who donated £1.[37]

Summary of Content

After the present Introduction, Chapter One provides a history of opera in London during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The history of opera in the UK has not been the subject of many academic texts: my review offers only a limited background and focuses primarily on the financial aspects of opera production. This prehistory is followed by a more detailed review of the history of opera in the UK in the early years of the twentieth century and thus offering context for my case studies. In this chapter I seek to provide an overall understanding of what had gone on before the period of my case studies, in order to place the latter in a continuum of operatic endeavours. This chapter will examine what my individuals would have understood about the legacies and finances of opera when they took up the cause; it will also review the wider sentiments of the time. As my investigation into opera's relationship to status, class and ideology is intrinsically interdisciplinary, this chapter will offer a brief economic history of opera in Britain by extracting financial information from a variety of texts: ones that should be considered together with the cultural analyses already discussed in relation to Keynes's contributions. As mentioned earlier, opera in London, which had historically been produced for the aristocracy and the gentry, changed during the late eighteenth century and became a broader, more profit-motivated activity. Ventures such as Carl Rosa's and other touring opera companies had been significant in

[36] He justified the requirement for such a large amount with a claim that opera in Paris was operating at a loss of £70,000 annually; he also promised a triumphant widening of the operatic repertoire and, with characteristic flair, concluded with a threat: that if the scheme didn't work in the UK he would take it to the USA; see *Manchester Guardian*, 15 September 1927.

[37] *Manchester Guardian,* 26 November 1927.

increasing the popularity of opera to a wide cross-section of classes: so much so that by 1900 opera could legitimately be described as a popular art form.[38] But such touring ventures declined significantly at the start of the twentieth century: the era of opera impresarios was coming to an end; losses from opera seasons gradually became inevitable and seasons could only be staged by sharing the costs between a syndicate of wealthy aristocrats.[39]

Themes of democratization and modernism dominated the nation during the years immediately after the First World War. An increasing portion of the community was wealthy enough to seek cultural leisure activities and also to assume authority as arbiters of taste.[40] Of significance also was the continued weakening of the power of the aristocracy in terms of wealth and control of culture: in a process that had started toward the end of the previous century, opera continued to become the concern of a much larger section of the public. The post-First World War surge in patriotism and unease about the state of the nation, taken together with the fact that the new custodians of opera were not typically as comfortable with foreign languages or experience of travel as previous patrons, contributed to a powerful movement supporting opera in English. By 1924, English opera groups represented a significant 'Other' to productions at Covent Garden.[41] This thrust of native performance was a significant movement away from the past, a challenge to well-established aristocratic sovereignty and an anti-establishment effort to democratize opera for a wider audience. However, opera in English was marketed at 'popular' prices, similar to

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[38] Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England 1840-1914: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 81, and 'Reaching the Operatic Stage: The Geographical and Social Origins of British and Irish Opera Singers, C.1850–C.1960', *Cambridge Opera Journal,* 29, 3, (2017), 312-52.

[39] The decline of such ventures during the first twenty years of the twentieth century is discussed fully in Steven Martin, 'The British "Operatic Machine": Investigations into the Institutional History of English Opera, c. 1875–1939' (Ph.D. dissertation, Bristol University, 2010), 103-44.

[40] 'Leisure … is now abundant for all except the housewife…. We are beginning to realize in a practical way that … it is a mistake to suppose that life is for working instead of working for life': 'A Report of the Proceedings of the National Conference on the Leisure of the People', *Spectator,* 23 April 1920. See also Jacques Barzun, *The Culture We Deserve* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 32, and Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (Oxford: Routledge, 1989).

[41] Until the formation of the Arts Council, the terms 'grand opera' and 'international opera' were used to refer to the works of the Continental European tradition, which were sung in the original language. In contrast, 'English opera' referred to opera sung in English, either written in that language or performed in translation.

theatre ticket prices but lacked the social cachet and elite association of foreign opera; meanwhile opera from mainland Europe in its original language continued to be regarded as a means of social betterment for the middle and working classes. And while English opera companies such as those of Baylis and Carl Rosa have formed the subject of academic studies, the development of international opera in the UK has been broadly neglected.

This first chapter concludes with a discussion of opera in London in 1924. As the year of the Empire Exhibition, which had been staged to promote patriotism when the Empire was beginning to lose power, this year serves to illustrate the importance of the opera season within the national ceremonies. The operatic event in question, the invitation to a foreign opera company to present a season of opera at Covent Garden caused controversy in the press and thus offers me an opportunity to examine policies of protectionism and the power of the Trades Unions. In short, the 1924 moment marked a time when opera was no longer profitable; opera by syndicate – the interim solution in which a group of well-connected aristocrats and gentry underwrote opera seasons – was at the end of its life. By the end of 1924, opera had entered its wilderness years and was widely considered financially 'impossible': its place in London cultural life was threatened because there was no obvious way to fund it.

My first case study, in Chapter Two, considers the years from 1925 to 1927, in which Elizabeth Courtauld (1875-1931) contributed to the funding of opera at Covent Garden through private philanthropy: she was married to one of the country's richest industrialists, Samuel Courtauld (1876-1947), and spent three years of her life trying to ensure the survival of opera. Her enterprise was a private philanthropic effort and also an innovative instance of commercial sponsorship. Using her husband's money, derived from his successful fabric company, she was motivated not by profit but by a wider altruistic effort ambition to expand audiences. Her project failed, fundamentally, because her efforts to provide opera were based on an incorrect assumption: that the country's wealthiest would continue to pay premium prices for premium seats for the entire season. Her efforts to provide both elite and 'broader spectrum' options were widely criticized: the personalities involved in the opera world proved too provocative, antagonistic and volatile for her financial model to be viable.

It is interesting that, in telling this story, I find that personalities involved with opera in the early twentieth century included many women who are frequently omitted from cultural narratives. Although her tenure predates my case studies, the Marchioness of Ripon, Lady de Grey (1859-1917) was important in terms of patronage of opera, a significant member of the syndicate that ran opera at Covent Garden in the early years of the twentieth century, a close friend of the Prince of Wales and credited with introducing Nellie Melba to the London stage. Thomas Beecham was aided significantly by his partner, Maud Cunard (1872-1948), who later titled herself Emerald Cunard: as Beecham's main promoter, she was responsible for raising funds for many of his enterprises but does not feature in the majority of Beecham texts.

Indeed, much of this thesis follows the work of various women in opera management. There was clearly historical precedent for this kind of female activity (for example Cosima Wagner at Bayreuth) and there were female managers active in other parts of the world: for example, Emma Carelli in Rome, Mary Garden in Chicago and Anita Colombo at La Scala, Milan.[42] Tracy Davis devotes a chapter to the growth in the Victorian era of female workers in the administration of theatres in London, noting that the theatre was one of the few sectors of the economy where women could work as executives: notable among this group of women were Elizabeth Vestris and Marie Wilton, both successful theatre managers in the nineteenth century.[43] In terms of patrons of opera in the UK, however, there were very few precedents for Elizabeth Courtauld's involvement, although, as mentioned above, Lady de Grey's actions as a female advocate of opera were important.[44] Lady de Grey's aristocratic patronage was, however, archaic both in terms of business model and in motivation. Like Courtauld, her financial risk was not large in comparison to the wealth of her husband, but her

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[42] Michael Turnbull, *Mary Garden* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997); Susan Rutherford, 'The Prima Donna as Opera Impresario: Emma Carelli and the Theatro Costanzi', *in The Arts of the Prima Donna* Cowgill and Poriss, 272-89; and Rutherford, *Verdi, Opera, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 205.

[43] Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 273-305.

[44] There was a heritage of female theatre managers in London; see Tracy C. Davis, 'Female Managers, Lessees and Proprietors of the British Stage (to 1914)', *Nineteenth-Century Theatre,* 28, 2 (Winter 2000), 115–44; and Bratton, *The Making of the West End Stage,* 8. Elizabeth Vestris managed Covent Garden from 1839 to 1842 although her fame is mostly related to spoken theatre productions; see Bratton, *The Making of the West End Stage*, 10.

motive was to ensure London's Society Seasons were suitably adorned by opera and that she herself was at the centre of it. Unlike de Grey, Courtauld had no ambition to provide opera exclusively for London's wealthiest. Her project ran in parallel with the much more famous activities of her husband to collect art and promote an art history school. The Courtaulds, a Puritan couple, were somewhat embarrassed by their affluence, but unlike other wealthy Victorian industrialists who had made social or welfare endowments, they determined that they would direct their money to social improvement via cultural benefactions.[45] Victorian cultural history contains many precedents of industrialists who collected art, but it would be inaccurate to conclude that the Courtaulds were aspiring aristocrats: as models of a new middle-class, they wanted, rather, to find their own cultured identity.[46] Their philanthropic endeavours to acquire cultural capital and demonstrate their aesthetic discrimination were a firm rejection of conspicuous consumption, in line with their religious beliefs, and also a passionate effort to widen the public for art and music.[47]

My second study, which encompasses Chapters Three and Four, focusses on Philip Snowden (1864-1937), the first Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Reith (1879-1971), in charge of the BBC, and the BBC's efforts to support opera. The state subsidy these men conceived and its public reception provoked them further to amalgamate opera interests in the UK. A major contributor to the scheme, although frequently excluded from accounts of it, was Ethel Snowden (1881-1951), a Christian Socialist, pacifist, member of the Fabian Society and a governor of the BBC who was

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[45] Samuel Courtauld typically collected exclusively British works although was also famous for collecting art from the continent. There is now an established pattern of female involvement in the art market, but that tradition started only after the Second World War; see Judy K. Van Wagner, *Women Shaping Art: Profiles of Power* (New York: Praeger, 1984). There were similar art collectors from the wealthy middle classes in the USA who collected a wide variety of paintings – I am thinking here of Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919) and Andrew William Mellon (1855–1937): see Kenneth Warren, *Triumphant Capitalism: Henry Clay Frick and the Industrial Transformation of America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); and David Cannadine, *Mellon: An American Life* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2006).

[46] For more on this subject, see Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–17, and F.M.L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 117–19.

[47] This view is expounded further in Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class,* 11. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 15.

married to Philip Snowden. This was an initiative that attempted to shift the funding of opera into the public sphere; inevitably, then, it became politically charged. Moreover, the opera scheme came to signify Snowden's un-Socialist attachment to pomp in times of economic hardship: his socialist credentials came under increasing scrutiny as national financial hardship increased, the opera scheme came to represent a betrayal of his socialist roots. The BBC case study considers a model of state funding that failed primarily because the end product was publicly perceived as too elite to warrant government support. Reith acted with the Snowdens to find a funding model for opera, diverting money from the revenue of wireless licence fees that had previously been paid directly to the Exchequer – effectively a public source of funding. My analysis suggests that Ethel Snowden was unfairly portrayed as being an unfashionably strong influence on her husband rather than, as I see it, effective in her own Socialist cause for opera. In order to justify the project, which attracted increasing criticism as economic Depression hit the nation, Reith worked with the team at Covent Garden to amalgamate opera interests and enlist the services of Thomas Beecham. But while working with other opera groups was an obvious solution, it was an immensely complicated manoeuvre and, although it came very close to fruition, the subsidy was suspended before the benefits of amalgamation could be realized.

My third study, which takes up Chapter Five, considers the efforts of John Christie (1882-1962). Following his successful opera venture at Glyndebourne, Christie's efforts to set up a nationwide body to protect and promote the interests of the nation's musicians was a resounding failure. The Glyndebourne case study examines a financial model of privately-funded opera, an enterprise that was, and remains, successful: but Christie's attempts to extend this model to amalgamate nationwide music interests was another matter entirely. The case serves however, to identify a tipping point: a moment in which arts funding could have taken a different turn and followed the American model of private philanthropy. Christie was very clear from the start that he would only offer elite opera at Glyndebourne. As far as language was concerned, world-class opera could only be produced with the world's best singers and conductors: something that was only possible where opera is staged in the language in which it was written. Christie succeeded primarily because he matched

private funding with elite opera, thus proving that a US style of philanthropy worked with elite opera. His financial model, refined further after the Second World War, proved to be extremely sound and was subsequently replicated by other opera bodies.

My conclusion, in Chapter Six, looks briefly at the formation of the Arts Council and considers the subsequent funding of opera in the context of the development of cultural economics. Many of the UK's most distinguished economists have considered cultural economics particularly in relation to opera: it is interesting to consider the efforts of my champions in the light of their philosophies and findings.

Chapter One

Operatic Context and Legacies

There is a general assumption that opera has never been commercially viable, particularly in the UK. For example, Nicholas Payne asserts that opera has never made money – and that the important power lay with those who underwrote the loss.[1] This assumption is false: opera continued in existence in the UK because, for the main part, impresarios, supported by wealthy patrons, could make a living from the art form. Losses were of course made and impresarios were well known to grumble in those years; but we hear less from them when times were good. In broad terms, opera in this country was run as a (potentially) profitable enterprise from the mid eighteenth century through to the end of the nineteenth century: the financial model that prevailed was one based on wealthy subscribers, who paid for a season's use of a box. Rebuilding of theatres after fires (a frequent occurrence) required substantial new funding, and such funding was frequently given in the form of ownership of/subscription to boxes over extended periods.[2]

Until the early years of the nineteenth century, theatre including opera could be seen as an oligopoly maintained by the license restrictions of the royal patent, which ensured that there was limited supply, thus keeping prices artificially high.[3] Opera was cited by Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* as an exception to the rule that free trade should prevail.[4] During the nineteenth century, a boom in the entertainment industry enabled opera to maintain its high prices against the lighter output offered by lesser theatres, by this means maintaining profitability. The heightened emotions of the opera world often seemed to make sober management difficult, as many of the texts reviewed in this section reveal; my case studies show

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[1] Nicholas Payne, 'Trends and Innovations in Opera', in *The Business of Opera*, eds. Belina-Johnson and Scott, 22.
[2] Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London: 1780-1880* (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007), 84.
[3] Tracy Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21.
[4] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (1776: rpt. New York: Modern Library, 1937), 748.

that this continued to be the case during the twentieth century. There is an abundance of academic texts that use a wide cross section of archival material, including business archives, to analyse opera in London during the late eighteenth century: although remote historically from my case studies, these studies draw heavily on the heritage of Ehrlich and Rosselli and are extremely useful as they illustrate the value of a multidisciplinary study of opera.[5]

In their two volume investigation into eighteenth-century opera, Curtis Price, Judith Milhous, Robert D. Hume and Gabriella Dideriksen emphasise the importance of finances, management and ownership structures. They refute the idea that opera never made a financial return, claiming that operatic insolvency was unusual; they conclude that there was as much as £10,000 a season to be made from subscriptions. Their analysis reveals how the financial aspect of opera in London was different from that in mainland Europe: opera had been run initially by two of the country's wealthier peers as agents of the monarch in return for a low annual subsidy. This changed around the time of their study, and from then on, opera was run by individuals as a commercial venture; this was in contrast to mainland Europe, where opera at this time tended to be funded on a mixed economy, split between aristocratic privilege and impresarial risk. The London system proved that a court style opera house could be financially successful, also because the style of architecture in a London opera house contained a sufficiently large number of private boxes, which would be presold at artificially high prices to underwrite the project. This method also ensured that boxes could only be bought by the very wealthiest individuals, who were at that point synonymous with the court. Thus the most notable difference between the interior of an opera theatre and any other was that the former contained a preponderance of private boxes, while the latter only had large public areas. There was no importance

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[5] Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in London in the Late Eighteenth-Century: Vol. 1 The King's Theatre, Haymarket 1778-1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), and Judith Milhous, Gabriella Dideriksen and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in the Late Eighteenth-Century London Vol. II: The Pantheon Opera and its Aftermath 1789-1795* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). There are also earlier studies of this period: Daniel Nalbach, *The King's Theatre, 1704-1867: London's First Italian Opera House* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1972); Frederick C. Petty, *Italian Opera in London, 1760-1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972); and Theodore Fenner, *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994).

attached to the pit area as it attracted little revenue, being used exclusively by the box owners; revenue from the gallery area was insignificant.[6]

Precise information about subscription revenue from a slightly later date can be found in Jennifer Hall-Witt's analysis of opera and society, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London: 1780-1880*.[7] Hall-Witt considers how opera functioned in society, particularly female society, offering an opportunity to delineate the various strata within the elite: the architecture of the opera house showed the aristocracy and gentry according to rank in a vertical display of status. Her analysis suggests that the architecture of the theatre and changes to the interior during her period were designed for this social purpose: from my perspective, and perhaps from the perspective of opera managers of the time, the design was fundamentally driven by the finances (her analysis notes that box subscription prices at Her Majesty's Theatre fluctuated between 1780 to 1867 from 150 guineas a season to 300 guineas).[8] Her study, which also considers activities at Covent Garden after the changes brought about by the lifting of patent restrictions in 1843, also discusses the change in the pit area as more comfortable seating was introduced: the non-revenue producing benches were converted into stalls and the numbered upholstered seats were presold. This reflected the change in audience demographic; more of the revenue was derived from these stalls seats, designed to be sold to the new middle classes.[9]

There are a considerable number of other academic texts that consider nineteenth-century opera on a similarly broad socio-economic basis. Foremost among these is Susan Rutherford's *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930*.[10] Rutherford's

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[6] Milhous, Dideriksen and Hume, *Italian Opera: Vol. II,* 10-17.
[7] Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts.*
[8] Joseph Donahue, 'The Theatre from 1800-1895', in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Vol. 2: 1660 to 1895,* ed. Joseph Donohue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 219-71: 227.
[9] Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 149, 184.
[10] Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also *Music and British Culture, 1785-1914: Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich,* eds. Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); William Weber, 'Redefining the Status of Opera: London and Leipzig, 1800-1848', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 36, 3 (Winter, 2006), 507-32; Daniel Snowman, *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009); Philippe Agid and Jean-Claude Tarondeau, *The Management of Opera: An International Comparative Study* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Roberta Montemorra Marvin, *Fashions and Legacies of Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Belina-Johnson and Scott, *The Business of Opera: The Art of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century,*

analysis of opera's 'golden age' covers various details of what a singer could earn although her analysis does not consider the overall economics of opera: her emphasis is on the politics of gender and she reassesses the role of female singers in a sociological, cultural and political context. Tracy Davies's analysis of the economics of the theatre during the long nineteenth century is also particularly useful for my purposes: she describes how non-royal-patent theatres became much more profitable during the burgeoning of the music hall business; many new theatres were built and the entertainment industry was born.[11] Davies categorizes the entrepreneurs and impresarios of this time: the generic term 'manager', useful in discussing previous operatic endeavours, was no longer appropriate as it did not distinguish between those who took financial risk and those who merely took a salary.[12] She also describes the development of the interior architecture of the patent theatres before 1843, when private boxes were introduced at Covent Garden and Drury Lane (which were not producing opera at that time); this facilitated their subsequent seasons of opera. Her study considers the finances of the various reconstructions during the nineteenth century at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, along with the financial structures employed. Her conclusion supports the theory that the majority of unsuccessful managements were hampered by the number of boxes presold in order to finance rebuilding costs (and therefore not contributing to operating costs), not because the ventures themselves were inherently unprofitable.[13]

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eds. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and *The Idea of Art Music in a Commercial World, 1800-1930,* eds. Christina Bashford and Roberta Montemorra Marvin (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016).

[11] The standard texts on theatre historiography in England are: *Nineteenth-Century British Theatre,* eds. Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson (Oxford: Routledge, 1971); Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Vol. 2: 1660 to 1895,* ed. Joseph Donohue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Bruce McConachie, 'Theatre and the State, 1600-1900', in Phillip B. Zarilli, Bruce McConachie, Gary Jay Williams and Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 199-234. For more on drama in other theatres see Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[12] The impresario would rent space in a theatre while a theatre entrepreneur would shoulder the larger risk associated with the lease of the theatre and the building costs; Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage*, 166-67.

[13] Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage*, 206 and 259-64.

During the early nineteenth century, theatre managers such as Alfred Bunn, E.T. Smith, John Ebers, Pierre François Laporte and Benjamin Lumley began to develop skills that helped them take on the financial challenges of opera. They were succeeded by three particularly important operatic managers of the second half of the century: Frederick Gye (1810-78), James Henry Mapleson (1830-1901) and Augustus Henry Glossop Harris (1852-96). For these three, the critical business factor remained that the annual subscriptions from boxes, generated early in the year, could be used to engage the star singers and effectively underwrite the risk of the season. The seasonal subscription price of boxes and stalls was something that was not advertised, kept secret for the exclusive club of subscribers.[14] Gabriella Dideriksen considers economic policies employed by Gye during the years he ran opera at Covent Garden, 1847-78: Gye was an experienced entrepreneur, responsible for many canny decisions. He made losses in the early years but by the mid 1860s was regularly making an annual profit of £3,000, commanding a subscription list that exceeded £30,000 annually.[15] A breakdown of the box capacity of Covent Garden after the rebuild of the theatre in 1858 and of the annual subscriptions derived is provided in Tables 1.1 and 1.2. This is relevant because the seating capacity remained broadly the same from this point and these numbers form the basis for ticket revenue comparisons that follow. Precise information of this sort is not readily available in secondary sources; Table 1.2 reveals that, by applying these ticket prices to the box numbers, Gye could have generated £26,250 if he had sold all of the boxes on subscription.

While Davis's study focuses on theatres, Paul Rodmell's *Opera in the British Isles 1875–1918* offers details of opera in the UK during the period following that

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[14] The price of a season subscription was only ever mentioned in the private invitations issued to previous subscribers, and was not advertised in the press; Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts,* 286-87.
[15] 'Losses during the first three years were the heaviest: circa £24,000 in 1847, £34,756 in 1848 and £25,455 in 1849. While Gye was subsequently able to curb such ruinous deficits, he still rarely made any significant profits'; Gabriella Dideriksen, 'Repertory and Rivalry: Opera and the Second Covent Garden Theatre, 1830-56' (Ph.D. dissertation, King's College London, 1997), 83. A later study by Didericksen and Ringel contradicts this, revealing many subsequent seasons in which profits were made: Gabriella Dideriksen and Matthew Ringel, 'Frederick Gye and "The Dreadful Business of Opera Management"', *19th-Century Music*, 19, 1 (Summer, 1995), 3-30; 6, 9. See also Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 162, and Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage*, 261.

AREA OF HOUSE		CAPACITY	
Boxes	Pit Tier	136	4 in each of 34 boxes
	Grand Tier	132	4 in each of 33 boxes
	Her Majesty's Box	8	
	Duke of Bedford's Box	6	
	Upper Tier	144	4 in each of 36 boxes
	Gallery Tier	64	4 in each of 16 boxes
Pit	Stalls Reserved	294	
	Stalls Unreserved	193	
Amphitheatre	Reserved	320	
	Not Reserved	600	
TOTAL CAPACITY OF HOUSE		1897	

Table 1.1: Capacity of Covent Garden Theatre, 1858.[16]

AREA OF HOUSE	NUMBER OF BOXES	COST OF SUBSCRIPTION GUINEAS	TAKINGS IN GUINEAS
Pit tier	34	220	7,480
Grand Tier	33	240	7,920
Upper Tier	36	200	7,200
Gallery Tier	16	150	2,400
TOTAL			25,000 Guineas
Equivalent to			£26,250

Table 1.2: Subscription Revenue, 1858.[17]

[16] Details taken from 'Covent Garden Theatre', *Civil Engineer and Architects Journal*, 21 (June 1858), 188–89 and 'Chronicle for May', *Annual Register of 1858, Volume 100,* 86.
[17] Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 286 and box numbers from Table 1.1

considered by Hall-Witt *et al*: his analysis provides much valuable information.[18] The dates defining his study were selected for three reasons; first, because it was in this year that the Carl Rosa opera company first staged a London season, thus marking the emergence of a more substantial English opera tradition. It was in this year also that Mapleson attempted to open a Grand National Opera House; a grand scheme involving the floatation of a public company, which subsequently failed because of unrealistic costs and problems to do with the site being located on the riverbank.[19] Paul Rodmell's study covers what Herman Klein referred to as 'the golden age of opera', a term that neatly described the late Victorian and early Edwardian years' lavish seasons of opera.[20] While Rodmell cautions against Klein's nostalgic view of the past, he also points out that the generally held view that no one made profits is incorrect: his opening summary is that commercially opera was not as 'forlorn' during this period as has previously been assumed.[21] Rodmell considers the work of entrepreneurs such as Mapleson and Harris in great detail: Mapleson boasted annual takings of £200,000, running seasons of opera at Drury Lane and Her Majesty's as well as the summer season at Covent Garden and a musicians' agency; Harris dominated London's opera scene in the last decade of the nineteenth century.[22] The depiction by Aubrey Beardsley, a prominent illustrator, offers an indication of how central Harris was to London's theatre scene at that time: he is depicted with Oscar Wilde as Bacchus (see Illustration 1.1).

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[18] Paul Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles: 1875–1918* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013). This period is also considered in Nigel Burton, 'Opera: 1865-1914', in *Music in Britain: The Romantic Age 1800-1914*, ed. Nicholas Temperley (London: Athlone Press, 1981), 330-57.

[19] Rodmell's other reason for selecting this year is that it consolidated the presence of Wagner in opera repertory; Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles,* 3.

[20] Herman Klein, *The Golden Age of Opera* (London: Routledge, 1933).

[21] Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles,* 5.

[22] 'I may mention, however, that for many years during our operatic tours in the United Kingdom and in the United States, our average annual travelling with a large company of principal singers, choristers, dancers, and orchestral players amounted to some 23,000 miles, or nearly the length of the earth's circumference. This naturally necessitated a great deal of preparation and forethought. The average annual takings were during this period over 200,000.' He does not state whether he means sterling or dollars; J.H. Mapleson, *The Mapleson Memoirs: 1848-1888* (London: Remington & Co., 1888), 39 and 292. See also Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage*, 265-67. Harris also is famous for introducing the masked balls in 1892 for which he charged as much as ten guineas for a box: these were famously portrayed by Aubrey Beardsley in Illustration 1.1. For more on this see E.D. Parker, *Opera Under Augustus Harris* (London: Saxon, 1900) and F.G.W, 'Opera under Sir Augustus Harris', *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 127, 1721 (1 August 1896), 522.

Illustration 1.1: Augustus Harris as portrayed by Aubrey Beardsley: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/beardsley-design-for-the-frontispiece-to-john-davidsons-plays-n04172>.

The Twentieth Century

Opera in English assumed a greater role in the operatic landscape in the twentieth century. Rodmell's study amply investigates the growing importance of opera performed in English from 1875.[23] Various English opera companies rented the Covent Garden theatre; companies such as Moody Manners and Carl Rosa regularly performed seasons of opera in English in London as well as on tour.[24] These companies had enjoyed success with a repertoire bolstered by the economic viability of popular English opera: lighter operas such as Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*, Benedict's *The Lily of Killarney* and Wallace's *Maritana* (three works collectively referred to as *The English Ring)* were regularly performed and produced profits that could support new work by British composers, performed alongside foreign operas in translation.[25] Indeed such companies did much to promote opera in English to wider audiences than ever before.

Historiographies of opera in England after 1900 tend to be dominated by opera in English, most notably focussing on Lilian Baylis. Having produced drama after she obtained a licence in 1912, she worked to establish opera in English at the Old Vic where she produced short seasons of opera in English. Her efforts were to provide cheap opera for working-class audiences with ticket prices from 2d to 2s. Baylis' opera and that produced by the other English opera groups was very different from opera at Covent Garden because it was produced on such a small budget. These two types of opera in London, international and English, concerned more than just language: the contrast could also be expressed in terms of motivation and business model, as well as to the standards, the nationality of performers, seat price, length of season, dress code, audience demographics and location. There was much criticism levelled against all English opera groups: without a repertoire of English opera that could hold its own in the regular operatic canon, or good quality English translations, or good standards of diction, there was a tendency to compensate by offering an over-large but ill-

[23] The subject is also discussed by Steven Martin, 'The British "Operatic Machine": Investigations into the Institutional History of English Opera, c. 1875–1939' (Ph.D. dissertation, Bristol University, 2010), 103-44.
[24] Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles*, 131-83.
[25] White, *The Rise of English Opera* and *A History of English Opera*, and Cecil Forsyth, *Music and Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 124–51.

rehearsed repertoire, meaning that all variants of the English opera model were perpetually in a financially precarious state.[26] While English opera companies performed year round at 'popular prices' (approximately half that charged for the Grand Opera Season), their model of opera at 'popular' prices did not generate sufficient revenue to be profitable.[27] By 1925, Lilian Baylis had to rely heavily on subsidy from the Carnegie and Pilgrim Trusts and none of the other English opera companies was able to continue without substantial losses: in turn all of the touring companies folded with the Carl Rosa company seeking voluntary liquidation sometime prior to 1930.

My focus in this study is primarily on opera other than in English because it remains an area that has not been the subject of academic study. Harold Rosenthal and Rodmell both document what happened at Covent Garden after Harris's death in 1896: opera at Covent Garden was run as a collaborative effort by the Grand Opera Syndicate (GOS).[28] The takeover by a syndicate was significant as it revealed a change in the economics of opera: the function of the syndicate was to raise as many advance subscriptions as before, but with an acknowledgement that there were likely to be losses, which would be jointly underwritten by syndicate members. Opera was no longer seen as a vehicle by which to make a profit, as it had been in the previous century: rather, the members of the GOS had an expectation of sharing the losses. Opera was still predominantly funded by subscriptions for boxes by the aristocracy, often referred to at this time as the 'upper

[26] Since early in century, it was customary to turn the lights low during performances; this meant that audiences were in the dark both physically and in terms of comprehension, not aided by the small libretti to follow events in translation. The dark performances had generated a new form of opera guides, which were designed to familiarize audiences with the synopsis in advance of the performance, for example, the Wagnerian story books produced by Oliver Huckel, and those illustrated by Arthur Rackham and Willy Pogany: Oliver Huckel, *Wagner's Rheingold as Retold by Oliver Huckel* (New York: Cromwell, 1907) and Willy Pogany, *Tannhäuser: A Dramatic Poem by Richard Wagner, Freely Translated In Poetic Narrative Form by J.W. Rolleston* (London: Harrap, 1911).

[27] The term 'popular price' was regularly used in connection with opera in English: it indicated prices on a par with those charged at spoken drama and variety theatres: advertisements would offer 'popular opera at popular prices', a description that seems to have meant that a seat in the stalls would be priced between 10s 6d (half a guinea) and 12s, a well-established theatrical price point.

[28] The financial structure of the GOS is described by Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage*, 175, Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles,* 75-91, and Harold Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* (London: Putnam, 1958), 277-81.

Illustration 1.2: H.V. Higgins Esq., C.V.O., Chairman of the GOS, taken from Richard Northcott, *Records of the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, 1888-1921* (London: Press Printers, 1921).

ten', meaning the top 10,000 members of society; a term frequently used in connection with New York society.[29] Opera's place in the extravagant London society season had, however, new and increased importance, which in turn reinforced its financial security. The GOS confidentially invited high-net-worth individuals to pay the large subscriptions for boxes and stalls seats; such patrons were drawn by the lure of social cachet. The GOS was frequently criticized because opera appeared to be more important socially than musically.

The GOS was a loosely-formed private group with strong ties to royalty; under the chairmanship of H.V. Higgins (1855–1928) they were the leaseholders at Covent Garden and presented opera from 1896.[30] A photograph of Higgins shows him to be an imposing character, reportedly 6'8" tall (see Illustration 1.2).[31] The most notable member of the syndicate other than Higgins was Lady de Grey, a prominent member of society (and mentioned earlier). Despite not having a managerial role, her patronage and guiding force was felt strongly because of her aristocratic credentials and royal connections: operatic patronage by the royal family was central to success.[32] The GOS at Covent Garden began to experiment with opera in English: in 1908 and 1909, they staged Wagner's *Ring* in English to great acclaim. Conducted by Hans Richter with the support of Percy Pitt (Covent Garden's Musical Director and assistant to Richter) the seasons were heralded as an important development.[33] The combination of the popularity of Wagner and the fact that the enterprise had been promoted by Cosima Wagner suggested that this might prove to be the foundation of

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[29] For more on this see Katherine K. Preston, *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 16, and Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles,* 43, 75.
[30] For more details on GOS see Herman Klein, *Thirty Years of Musical Life in London* (London: William Heinemann,1903), 429 and Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera*, 277-81.
[31] Higgins' obituary in *The Times* (22 November 1928) reports his height.
[32] Rodmell describes her as 'the unofficial voice of the subscribers'; Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles,* 76. See also Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 277; Lucas, *Thomas Beecham,* 77 and E. F. Benson, *As We Were: A Victorian Peepshow* (London: Longmans, Green, 1930), 179-89. Lady de Grey is traditionally credited with the 'discovery' of Nellie Melba; Klein, *Thirty Years,* 266-70, and John Rosselli, 'De Grey (Constance) Gladys, Countess (Marchioness of Ripon)', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. ed. Stanley Sadie. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 25 Oct. 2013. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O004534>.
[33] Richard Northcott, *Records of the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, 1888-1921* (London: Press Printers, 1921), 58.

permanent English Opera.[34] Ticket prices for the season were much lower than for the summer season of international opera: the GOS under Higgins did not support this enterprise and thought it unviable. Table 1.3 draws on the seating capacity from Table 1.1, which has been adjusted for relevant changes to seating arrangements, to indicate what a full house could have generated for one of the performances of under Richter.[35] In a letter to Pitt, Higgins provided useful information about the relative costs and revenues from opera in English and German: the cost of opera in English, he estimated, was £550/600 a night but he was very pessimistic about box office receipts, suggesting they might be as low as £300.[36] The figures in Table 1.3 make Higgins' estimate seem excessively low, but he remained convinced that there was very little call for opera in English. Richter was angry that the GOS had spoilt all chances of an English opera school and never conducted opera in the UK again.

Neither Richter's seasons of opera in English nor opera produced by the smaller touring companies changed the balance of power between opera in English and the international seasons: the latter, staged by the GOS at Covent Garden, were still perceived as more prestigious. The GOS's supremacy was, however, threatened when, during the years from 1910 to 1919, Thomas Beecham (1879-1961) and his father Joseph Beecham burst onto the opera scene. Powered by significant cash reserves generated by previous generations' inventions of Beechams powders, they organized seasons of opera that offered a wider and more challenging repertoire than ever before: opera in English as well as in other languages was presented at a variety of theatres in seasons that had an important effect on London's opera society and fashions. The Beechams announced their plans and posed a question to the public; 'does there, or does there not, exist in England a public ready to take intelligent and continuous interest in music drama *per se* if it had the chance?'[37] Joseph Beecham had an ambitious plan to build a new opera house; Lucas reports that Beecham was initially

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[34] Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles*, 91.

[35] Subsequent changes to the layout from Table 1.1 have been taken from illustrations accompanying the annual lists of subscribers published; see for example 'The Opera Season: List of Box Holders at Covent Garden', *Observer*: 12 April 1908, 18 April 1909, 23 April 1911 and 13 April 1913.

[36] Higgins to Pitt, 16 February, 1909, reproduced in Lewis Foreman, *From Parry to Britten: British Music in Letters 1900–1945* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1987), 38-39.

[37] 'Opera in London', *Observer*, 20 March 1910.

		SEATS	TICKET PRICES			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit tier	34	136	8	8		285	12	
Grand Tier	35	140	8	8		294		
Upper Tier	11	44	4	4		46	4	
Upper Tier	11	44	3	3		34	13	
Gallery Tier	14	56	2	12	6	36	15	
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	486	486		30		729		
Balcony Stalls	116	116		15		86	5	
Amphitheatre	61	61		10	6	32		6
Amphitheatre	211	211		7	6	79	2	
Amphitheatre	64	64		5		16		
Gallery Tier	600	600		2	6	75		
TOTAL		1,958				£1,714	11s	6d

Table 1.3: *Der Ring des Nibelungen,* Richter, Covent Garden, Grand Opera.

prepared to spend as much as £300,000 to challenge the GOS's monopoly, a figure he subsequently increased to £500,000.[38] The Beechams were responsible for producing many new British operas mostly because the GOS owned exclusive rights to most of the standard operatic canon. The Beechams' repertoire included Vaughan Williams, Holbrooke, Bax, Smyth and Delius: they were also responsible for the revival of Mozart's operas, bringing back into vogue an almost completely neglected repertoire. Most notable, however, were Thomas's premieres of Strauss, which were risky in business terms since their subject matter was problematic in terms of censorship by the Lord Chamberlain's office; also important were Beecham's seasons of Russian

[38] Lucas, *Thomas Beecham,* 48 and 62, *Musical Standard,* 10 July 1909, *Morning Post,* 7 July 1909 and *Daily Mail*, 23 May 1910. At the end of Thomas's last season in 1920, the *Observer* reported that he had spent £300,000 on opera in the previous eleven years: 'Sir Thomas Beecham: No Further Part in London Opera', *Observer*, 26 September 1920.

opera produced in conjunction with Sergey Diaghilev.[39] The Beechams' approach to opera was populist and challenged the GOS because they succeeded in ensuring that their audiences were not drawn solely from De Grey's social elite.[40]

As mentioned earlier, several cultural commentators have suggested that Thomas Beecham was the most likely person to find a financial model to ensure the success of opera: because he came to be regarded as the driving force in opera in the UK, and because he was such a champion of British composers, this does not, perhaps, appear an unreasonable claim. But if it is correct it is surely for a different reason: despite being an artistic champion Beecham was bankrolled to an unprecedented degree by his father. Artistically he succeeded, but because he failed to establish an appropriate financial model, the scheme as a whole failed. There was a second failure from a financial point of view, one not discussed in secondary sources. Joseph had invested in several London theatres, such as the Palladium, the Golders Green Hippodrome and the Aldwych theatre.[41] In 1914, on the same day he was created a baron, he announced that he had agreed with the Duke of Bedford to purchase the entire Covent Garden estate for £2m, at that time the largest land deal on record.[42]

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[39] Beecham premiered *Salome, Elektra, Feuersnot, Ariadne, Arabella* and *Rosenkavalier*; Capell, 'Sir Thomas Beecham', 283. These are discussed in detail in Lucas, *Thomas Beecham,* 53-70 and Rosenthal, *Two Centuries,* 344-49. The seasons ran from 19 February to 19 March at Covent Garden, and again with the *Salome* premiere from 3 October to 31 December, and at Haymarket from 12 May to 30 June in a season described as 'opera comique' and sung in English. Rosenthal reports that the visit to London of Diaghilev's opera company (Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1913), with their performances of *Boris Godunov*, *Khovanshchina* and *The Maid of Pskov* with Chaliapin and the Mariinski chorus, 'made an impact on London such as had not been experienced since the first performances in England of the *Ring* and *Tristan* in the 1880s'; Rosenthal, *Two Centuries,* 378. Despite the opera/ballet mix, it is still the ballets for which Diaghilev is remembered. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/d/diaghilev-london-walk/> [accessed 18 October 2017].

[40] Beecham had set out to produce opera both in English and in the vernacular at various price points at different theatres and seasons and had experimented with both location and descriptions, describing some seasons as 'Grand Opera in English' with others at lesser theatres as 'Popular Opera at Popular Prices'. '[With] the promiscuous polyglot huddling-on of one opera after another … Mr Beecham has … engaged foreigners to sing in their own languages to English audiences: he has even affronted his audience by permitting a return to the "barbarous manner" of Handel's time when bi-lingual performances were tolerated': White, *English Opera,* 144; Forsyth, *Music and Nationalism,* 146–47 and Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 396. Albert Coates, interviewed in the *Daily Telegraph* by Robin Legge, reported that Beecham's efforts had 'put English Opera on its feet – a monument that will stand'; reproduced in Foreman, *From Parry to Britten,* 104–16.

[41] Lucas, *Thomas Beecham,* 71 and 84.

[42] The details of Joseph's baronetcy are described by Lucas: Joseph paid Maud Cunard £10,000; she kept £4,000 and gave the rest to a relative of the Prime Minister (see Lucas, *Thomas Beecham*, 112). That the deal was the largest ever was stated in Joseph's obituary; *Manchester Guardian,* 24 October 1916.

The scheme was ambitious, involving a public flotation to raise the capital required, but the greater significance of the deal was that it would have given him ownership of the Covent Garden, Drury Lane, the Strand and Aldwych theatres. However, the contract, signed four days before war was declared, ended in disaster: property prices immediately plummeted causing Beecham's proposed funding scheme to fail.

Traditional Beecham biographies include the details of this transaction simply because it was a factor that caused Thomas financial problems: after his father's death in 1916, he was left to sort out the financial deficit and was declared bankrupt. This is true, but misses the bigger picture: Joseph had bought those four theatres along with the rest of the estate and it is reasonable to assume that he intended to keep the theatres and use them for his own operatic scheme, a deal that would have transformed the opera landscape. His ownership of those four London theatres (including two of the patent theatres), together with the other theatres in which he had an interest, would have given him as an impresario, a dominating portfolio. The completion of the deal was delayed until July 1918, after Sir Joseph's death, and – as already mentioned – was disastrous financially, but it still left Thomas owning the theatres. With his significant personal debts added to the debts caused by the property transaction, Thomas was left in a perilous financial situation. He moved the property into the Beecham Estates and Pills company, of which he was chairman, and tasked the company with selling assets piecemeal. However, an obvious question not addressed is: why did Beecham not take advantage of the situation and take the Covent Garden theatre out of the deals and use it for his own purposes? It is true that there were financial problems, but he had powerful backers; surely such a deal would have been possible. On the face of it, this was another wasted opportunity that played a significant role in the development of opera. In 1920 Beecham had publicly announced the end of the Beecham Opera Company and that he would take no further part in London opera.[43] His truculence meant that he missed an opportunity that could have given him ownership of the freehold of Covent Garden and supremacy of opera in London, even the UK. Instead he sold the company in 1924 to Philip Hill, the financier

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[43] 'Sir Thomas Beecham: No further part in London Opera', *Observer*, 26 September 1920.

at the helm of Beechams' Estates: even when Hill invited him to join the board of the venture, Beecham refused.

The Beechams planned to attract and establish an opera audience base by offering tickets at loss leading low prices. Their reduction in ticket prices displays, at best, an ignorance of commercial realities. Higgins had been anxious that English opera was not viable at GOS prices; at Beecham's further reduced prices, his venture was far from commercial and relied hugely on his father's largesse. Such low prices were unrealistic. Table 1.4 calculates how much a full house at Covent Garden under Beecham would have earned: even for his premiere of *Salome* in 1910 he would have grossed considerably less than Richter for one of his performances of the *Ring* in English. By 1913 Beecham had lowered his prices even further: Table 1.5 shows that for a night of Wagner Beecham would only have grossed £917, half what Richter might have made for a similar evening of opera.

Beecham's efforts to establish himself as the dominant opera force continued after 1914, as he conducted seasons of opera in English and in other languages at the Aldwych, Drury Lane and the Shaftesbury theatres; audience capacity was better than it might have been because the GOS had suspended opera at Covent Garden after the 1919 season. The Beechams' expansion of opera was not without competition: Oscar Hammerstein had moved to London in 1910 having been forced out of New York, and set about building an extravagant London Opera House intending it to present year-round opera.[44] His venture failed despite his large financial resources, even after he reduced his prices by 50% primarily because subscribers remained loyal to the other existing opera providers. While, financially speaking, it had failed, public support for opera in English increased after Beecham had given up opera in 1920, and his

[44] In 1911 Hammerstein opened his London Opera House (on the site of the Peacock Theatre) with a capacity of 2660. This was Hammerstein's tenth opera house (all the others had been in the US) following an agreement with the Metropolitan Opera House that he would not produce opera in America for ten years. Hammerstein was effectively stopped from competing against Covent Garden when Forsyth (then the GOS chairman) protested that the GOS owned exclusive UK performing rights to all of the most frequently performed operas. Hammerstein continued with introduction of various operas not on Forsyth's list but closed the following year after announcing losses of £45,000, Lucas, *Thomas Beecham,* 91; Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles*, 103-9; Oscar Andrew Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins: A Musical Theatre Family* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2010), 79 and Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 366-70.

		SEATS	TICKET PRICE			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit tier	34	136	8	8		285	12	
Grand Tier	35	140	8	8		294		
Upper Tier	11	44	4	4		46	4	
Upper Tier	11	44	3	3		34	13	
Gallery Tier	14	56	2	12	6	36	15	
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	304	304	1	1		319	4	
Orchestra Stalls	182	182	1	1		191	2	
Balcony Stalls	56	56	1	1		58	16	
Balcony Stalls	50	50		15		37	10	
Amphitheatre	61	61		10	6	32		
Amphitheatre	211	211		7	6	79	2	6
Amphitheatre	64	64		5		16		
Gallery Tier	600	600		2	6	75		
		1,958				£1,505	19s	6d

Table 1.4: *Salome,* Beecham, Covent Garden, 8 December 1910.[45]

withdrawal was seen as 'calamitous'. In the first decades of the century there had been a significant increase of confidence in British compositions, singers and instrumental performance.[46] Individuals such as Rutland Boughton and Ethel Smyth were confidently composing operas in a style heavily influenced by Wagner, and with some success in terms of public recognition, even though neither had operas regularly performed at Covent Garden.[47] A report in the *Times,* 2 July 1921, heralded the impetus to form a new opera company, noting that 'it is obviously beyond the capacity of any one individual to undertake the financial responsibility entailed in running so big and representative a company. Cooperative effort, therefore seems the only solution'. The BNOC was formed in 1921 and, because of its public listing, was accountable to a

[45] *The Times*, 7 December 1910.
[46] This idea is considered in more detail in Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling, *English Musical Renaissance, 1840–1940* (London: Routledge, 1993).
[47] Both Smyth and Boughton had operas performed by the BNOC at Covent Garden in 1922 and 1923, and Smyth's *The Wreckers* was performed twice under Beecham in 1910, but their works were never performed for the GOS. For details see Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 753 and 769–71 and White, *English Opera,* 134.

		SEATS	TICKET PRICES			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit tier	34	136	5	5		178	10	
Grand Tier	35	140	5	5		183	15	
Upper Tier	11	44	2			22		
Upper Tier	11	44	1			11		
Gallery Tier	14	56	1			14		
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	304	304		15		228		
Orchestra Stalls	182	182		10	6	95	11	
Balcony Stalls	56	56		15		42		
Balcony Stalls	50	50		10	6	26	5	
Amphitheatre	61	61		5		15	5	
Amphitheatre	211	211		3		31	13	
Amphitheatre	64	64		3		9	12	
Gallery Tier	600	600		2		60		
TOTAL		1,958				£917	11s	

Table 1.5: *Tristan und Isolde,* Beecham, Covent Garden, 30 January 1913.[48]

wide group of stakeholders. They employed only British singers and were the first company to broadcast opera, excerpts from *The Magic Flute* were broadcast from Covent Garden in 1923.[49] However, the fact that English opera audiences expected low prices remained a problem.

Table 1.6 shows that the BNOC's prices were approximately the same as Beecham's: a full house would not have generated as much as £1,000. There were mixed opinions on the BNOC and its future: reviews from even the most encouraging

[48] *The Times*, 29 January 1913.

[49] 'Evidently the opera going public, while retaining its former devotees, is increasing in numbers largely, no doubt, by reason of the democratic basis on which the company is organized'; taken from *Illustrated London News,* 'The Birth of National Opera at Covent Garden', 6 May, 1922. The BNOC was active from 1921 to 1929, having been formed at a public meeting in the Queen's Hall in December 1921. The company had the performing rights to 48 operas: see Daniel J. Chamier, *Percy Pitt of Covent Garden and the BBC* (London: Arnold, 1938), 192–212 and Harold Rosenthal, 'British National Opera Company', *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04014> [accessed 21 October 2013].

		SEATS	TICKET PRICES			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit tier	6	24	4	10		27	12	
Grand Tier	35	140	4	10		157	10	
Upper Tier	11	44	2	8		26	8	
Upper Tier	11	44	2	8		26	8	
Gallery Tier	0	0						
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	304	304		15		228		
Orchestra Stalls	182	182		12		109	4	
Stalls Circle	74	74		12		44	8	
Stalls Circle	128	128		10	6	67	4	
Balcony Stalls	56	56		10	6	28	8	
Balcony Stalls	50	50		7	6	18	15	
Amphitheatre	111	111		7	6	41	12	6
Amphitheatre	211	211		6	9	71	4	
Amphitheatre	64	64		5	9	18	8	
Gallery Tier	600	600		3		90		
TOTAL		2,032				£955	9s	9d

Table 1.6: *The Mastersingers*, Covent Garden, British National Opera Company, 29 June 1923.[50]

critics were obliged to turn a blind eye to poor singing and orchestral performance, and tended to praise the performers for their efforts rather than their excellence.[51] Ernest Newman's acerbic Sunday Times reviews of performance standards of the BNOC make amusing reading. For example, on 3 February 1924 he reports on a performance of The Magic Flute:

> The orchestra playing was mostly so bad that out of charity I refrain from discussing it in detail … an occasional failure by singer and orchestra to be in the same place and in the same bar at the same time is easily understood – but when the failures are more plentiful than the successes

[50] By now there were less Pit Tier boxes and no Gallery Tier Boxes.
[51] *The Times,* 19 January 1924.

> – as they have been in many a scene this season – one can be pardoned for wondering what the explanation can be.[52]

A clear example of the division in public opinion is provided by an article in *Vogue*, which sums up the situation both in terms of national pride and social consequences:

> Half the people one meets think that the British National Opera Company is bad because it is English: the other half think that it is good for the same reason. Both opinions are equally ridiculous. The value of an opera company has nothing to do with the birth certificates of its members.[53]

Wider Context

The years after the First World War saw a decline in the season as aristocratic families ran into hard times, many having to give up their London homes for economic reasons; these socio-economic changes, as power and wealth shifted away from cultural elites, had a marked effect on opera. The London Season was famous and inextricably linked to international opera. It ran from May until August and encompassed all the great society events; the season, which partially coincided with the sitting of parliament, brought wealthy aristocratic families to London.[54] The season traditionally began with the opening of the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy and the opening night at Covent Garden; it went on to cover various events such as Ascot, Wimbledon, Cowes, Henley, the Chelsea Flower Show, and ended with Goodwood after which everyone left town for the shooting season. It was not only the decline of the aristocracy that affected London Seasons after the end of the First World War: while the events of the season continued as before, society was in a state of flux as the younger generation, scarred by the events of the War, rebelled against such conventions. The early interwar years in London are traditionally characterised by hedonism: bright young things enjoying wild parties and bohemian life styles. The new generation was much more interested in fancy dress balls and the delights of the 'smart bohemia', events

[52] *Sunday Times,* 3 February 1924.
[53] *Vogue*, Early February 1924, 58.
[54] Katharine Ellis, 'The Structures of Musical Life', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 345-46.

that were now open not only to the baronets' daughter but also to the avant-garde artist.[55]

Jacques Barzun analyses this as a tipping point in the history of the arts, one in which the patronage legacies of the past fed into a new regime and in which the wealthy no longer held sway over the arts.[56] Between 1914 and 1925, the number of people with incomes net of tax above £10,000 fell by two thirds, from around 4,000 to 1,300, owing to a variety of causes including price rises, increasing income tax, death duties and other 'fiscal assaults' on inherited wealth.[57] The decline of the wealthy during the early years of the twentieth century together with the adjustments and adaptations to the new social landscape are well described by Andrea Geddes Poole in *Stewards of the Nation's Art: Contested Cultural Authority, 1890-1939.* David Cannadine argues that such shifts had the effect of 'neutering' the aristocrats, reducing their role in society to that of mere figureheads.[58] For my purposes it is above all significant that the country's wealthiest people, who had in the past been the most important patrons of the arts, now had significantly less money for opera.

In terms of opera, the target audience for opera was the middle classes whose growing affluence of was important: they were seeking leisure activities to further their cultural and social aspirations.[59] Standard texts about this period describe the socio-economic and political landscape, commenting on the industrial growth and patriotism of a nation after the Great War.[60] The list of changes during this time

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[55] D.J. Taylor**,** *Bright Young People: The Lost Generation of London's Jazz Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 37.
[56] Barzun, *The Culture We Deserve*, 32.
[57] Taylor**,** *Bright Young People,* 37. See also *The Oxford Companion to British Politics,* ed. John. Ramsden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Fergusson, *Empire;* Martin Daunton, *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1851-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and David Michael Palliser and P.F. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900-1990* (London: Allen Lane, 1996).
[58] Andrea Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art: Contested Cultural Authority, 1890-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 8.
[59] The change in social class structures is examined in detail in standard texts such as David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), and Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society.* Cannadine considers the dilution of society and the idea that the old guard of British aristocracy could no longer afford financially to keep out the new plutocrats from the 'world metropolis', who were demanding admission to high society; Perkin's approach reflects on the growth of the unions and the working classes.
[60] Martin Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain since 1870* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) and *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London:

include women's suffrage, the first Labour government, the introduction of the welfare state and the burgeoning metropolis: changes that brought a sense of urgency concerning the need improve the nation through better government and education.[61] The emerging age of mass politics and growing democracy gave power to new men of money: wealthy businessmen were now able to buy substantial property and receive peerages for their endeavours in commerce and industry as well as for philanthropy.[62] For those who were able to accumulate money and aspire to become part of the same world as the aristocrats, a process of 'gentrification' was required in order to reach the upper echelons of society: it was not sufficient merely to acquire appropriate property, it was also necessary to find a way to assert a role of cultural authority in society through philanthropy.[63] Understanding culture and being a valued member of a cultural institution was a way that the newly wealthy could feel legitimate within high society. By 1924 there was a discernible pattern of aristocrats, struggling under their weakened financial position, working together with newly wealthy philanthropists to preserve the nation's art, stewarding the culture of the country.

During the interwar years, Britain also became more mechanised: motor cars, aeroplanes, gramophones, radio and cinema all became available during these years, making the world louder and faster-paced. Technology had its effect on opera; it and live theatre more generally were in decline because of the new technologies. However, there were compensations brought about by the expanding democratization and

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Vintage, 2009); Cathy Ross, *Twenties London: A City in the Jazz Age* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003); Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* ([1940]: London: Folio Society, 2009); and Adrian Tinniswood, *The Long Weekend: Life in the English Country House, 1918-1939* (New York: Basic Books, 2016). Similar changes in America are reviewed in Lewis Erenberg, 'Impresarios of Nightlife', in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World,* ed. William R. Taylor (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), 158.

[61] The topic of democratic and sociological boundaries is discussed in more detail in Alan Wolfe, 'Democracy versus Sociology: Boundaries and Their Political Consequences', in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, eds. Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 309-25. Sarah Wilkinson, in her analysis of reshuffling of the definition of the State as the welfare state was being formed and the rebalancing of wealth, comments that 'the discredit of the State is a sign that it has done its work well'; Sarah Wilkinson, 'The Concept of the State 1880-1939', in *A Concise Companion to Modernism,* ed. David Bradshaw (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2008), 179-99.

[62] F.M.L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art.* For more on the use of the word 'democracy', see Ross, *Twenties London,* 18-19.

[63] Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture* and Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art,* 9.

dissemination of opera through new media: technologies that offered lucrative commercial opportunities to those in charge of opera.[64] The phonograph companies produced excerpts of opera on gramophone which were available cheaply, and opera was broadcast on the radio, bringing high culture into the home. Technological developments also improved communication around the world which in turn meant that institutions and structures were copied around the world.[65]

Opera in London, 1924

By 1924, the economics of opera had reached a tipping point in which many factors had contributed towards inevitable change. The survival of opera was at risk. The mini case study that follows illustrates this point. Old-style funding models were no longer appropriate for the modern technological age. Other commercial products can easily be reproduced in volume without detrimental effect on the quality of the end-product; but this theory applied to cultural artefacts often has the consequence of inferior quality.[66] This explains why opera, so extravagant, and with such strong courtly ties, was also the most stubbornly resistant to expansion and remarketing to a wider demography. English opera, as represented in 1924 by the BNOC, had become popular as the natural democratic rival of old-style international opera. English opera had been offered by the well-funded Beechams and Hammerstein at increasingly low prices so that the public were accustomed to the lower prices. In reality, though, those prices were unsustainable. This section examines events in 1924, six years after the end of the War, when the nation was determined to display its strength and optimism, a sentiment that extended into the world of opera. It demonstrates opera representing the state of the nation, seen as critical for the UK's national status in the world-wide

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[64] See also Genevieve Abravanel, *Americanizing Britain: The Rise of Modernism in the Age of the Entertainment Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[65] Ellis, 'The Structures of Musical Life', 343-70.
[66] 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments,* trans. Edmund Jephcott ([1947]: Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), and William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music and Dance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1966).

cultural hierarchy. But it also illustrates that the business model in which opera losses were shared by a syndicate of wealthy patrons was at an end.

The British Empire Exhibition of 1924 was one of the defining events of 1920's London, an extravagant demonstration of the strength and prestige of the British Empire and of its future prospects. London in 1924 was the capital of the world's greatest manufacturing country and anxious to be looking at its best to visitors from the 58 nations of the Empire, and from other countries around the world.[67] Royalty and political leaders from around the world attended the event, which was available to a much wider socio-economic group than ever before, attracting some 27 million visitors. For the upper echelons of society there was a determination that this London summer season needed to be at as high a standard as possible.[68] But the wider accessibility and low entrance price of the exhibition meant that a much larger demographic group began to question the decisions of London society, and to take their share of pride in the event.[69]

Newspaper articles from 1924 that concerned the invitation to an Austrian opera company to perform a season of opera in London at Covent Garden offer a rich vein of evidence concerning the state of opera in the UK as well as some insight into the mood of the years prior to the General Strike. A debate that provoked much public comment centred on the cultural sovereignty of opera. It offers a clear demonstration of the nation's confusion over the display of cultural supremacy vs. national pride and

[67] Despite its magnitude, the 1924 Exhibition does not feature strongly in standard historical texts: in popular culture it is probably known best for providing the backdrop to the opening scene of the film *The King's Speech* (2010), in which the severity of the Prince Albert's speech impediment is first revealed. Niall Fergusson considers the Exhibition in terms of the demise of the Empire; the Exhibition made a loss of over £1.5m and in his view heralded the end of the success of the Empire and the beginning of the Depression; see Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 318 and 325.

[68] In some ways this had parallels to 2012, when London presented the 'Cultural Olympiad', a proud nation putting on a display for the rest of the world. However, in 1924 the society summer season, and to some extent the capital's culture, were controlled by a very small section of the country's wealthiest people. For more ideas on music, empire and national pride, see Anna Nalini Gwynne, *India in the English Musical Imagination, 1890–1940* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2003); Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); and Constant Lambert, *Music Ho!* (London: Penguin, 1933), 100–10.

[69] This ownership of the Wembley event by the man in the street was a concept strengthened by the connection of the location with football: 1923 was the first Football Association Cup Final to be held at Wembley Stadium.

the desire to show the Empire's finest when cultural judges (or at least those holding the purse strings) deemed the Empire's home grown talent no match by continental standards. A turf war ensued over the occupation of the undisputed national headquarters of opera, the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden; it was a war that produced one of the first instances of an organized labour movement seeking to engage with the operatic world.[70]

Contemporary commentators spoke of a 'glut' of opera in London in 1924: there were five operatic options available to Londoners, a significant expansion in comparison to previous years. The wide choice was seen as a result of the changes outlined in my Introduction and appeared to have great potential, being fuelled by a hope for the future in technological terms. Here is how the *Saturday Review* described it:

> Glut of Opera
> Theoretically, the three several organizations now in full fig might be considered as providing opera to suit all tastes and all purses, like the restaurants at Wembley. There is the "Lucullus", with its twenty-five-shilling fare in Bow Street; there is the Corner- House *à la mode* … in the Haymarket; and close to Goodge Street Station there is the old fashioned bun-shop with just that air of staleness about the wares that is imparted by their exhibition upon pyramidical trays under domes of glass … I, for one, would rather sit down to "Rigoletto" or "Traviata" or even the glutinous sweetmeats of Signor Puccini, which at least in their native form, eminently "good for the voice" than to have to swallow worthy attempts at novelties done *à l'anglaise* in understaffed and inadequate kitchens.[71]

These references are to Covent Garden, the British National Opera Company (BNOC) and Carl Rosa respectively, all operatic ventures available that summer, while the British Empire Exhibition was held at Wembley. The opera section of the *Sunday Times* advertising contained listings of four opera companies in the summer season: Royal Opera Covent Garden, the BNOC at His Majesty's Theatre, the Royal Carl Rosa Season at the New Scala Theatre and Rupert D'Oyly Carte's Season of Gilbert and Sullivan

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[70] This was not the first example of an organized labour movement in the arts sector taking a stand; in previous year the union had successfully obtained from the Ministry of Labour a restriction on performances by 'alien bands'.
[71] Dyneley Hussey, 'Glut of Opera', *Saturday Review,* 21 June 1924.

Operas at The Princes Theatre.[72] Rutland Boughton's *Immortal Hour* had been playing six nights a week with two matinées at the Regent, King's Cross since the start of the year (the final performance was mid-May 1924). The theme of operatic gluts was taken up by Horace Shipp writing in the *Sackbut* on 1 July 1924: a 'rare glut of opera … 30 operas weekly … this wealth, after long seasons of dearth, leaving London breathless'.[73]

The events of 1924 serve to demonstrate that fears about the financial viability and poor performance of English opera groups were deepening. Market diversification was accompanied by a widespread belief that music in general, and opera in particular, was not financially viable: costs could not be cut sufficiently without debasing the end product; the dilution of the market had had a negative impact on the ability to cover costs. Philip Page, in an article entitled 'Snobbery and Grand Opera', was just one commentator: 'Hundreds of thousands of pounds are lost over grand opera in this country, and hundreds of millions of words are written on what is wrong with opera or how it could be put right or even why it can never be put right.'[74] Sir Thomas Beecham, whose previous involvement with opera meant that he was seen by many as the country's spokesman on such matters, was of the same opinion, although he thought the problem extended further: 'really good opera could not be given except at a loss' and 'music and all art have become impossible in England'.[75] The unprofitability of opera was resulting in poor performances, which in turn created the impression that somehow opera was not possible in the UK.[76]

The Grand Opera Syndicate (GOS) had not staged any opera at Covent Garden since 1920; it had been content to rent the theatre to groups producing opera in

[72] *Sunday Times,* 8 June 1924.
[73] Horace Shipp, *Sackbut,* 1 July 1924.
[74] *Sunday Express*, 17 May 1925.
[75] For Beecham's comments, see *Vogue,* February 1924 and Ernest Newman, 'The World of Music', *The Sunday Times*, 13 January 1924. Another contemporary commentator noted: 'it is impossible to run a first-rate opera company on ordinary commercial lines … it has never paid in any country of the world; and if opera were left subject to the ordinary economic law it would today be a luxury for millionaires as in the past it has been the hobby of kings and princes'; 'Opera Trusts and Syndicates', *New Statesman,* 4 April 1925.
[76] Herman Klein considered opera in post-war London to be barely worth mentioning: for him the 'golden age' ended in 1914; Herman Klein, *The Golden Age of Opera* (London: George Routledge, 1933), 264.

English. Both the vacuum left by the GOS and the changes described above meant that, by 1924, the most prominent opera company was the British National Opera Company (BNOC), a group whose achievement had assured its unofficial adoption as the nation's opera company. By 1924, 27 years after the GOS was formed, the GOS decided to ask the Vienna Staatsoper to perform for the season at Covent Garden: this seemed the simplest method of providing a high quality schedule for visiting dignitaries.[77] The invitation, representing as it did the polar opposite to the very British BNOC, so incensed musicians and artists of the BNOC that they enlisted the Musicians' Union for help: the Union publicly called on the Ministry of Labour to prevent their members being barred from performing in what they saw as their opera house. The mood of defensive patriotism in the post-war years gave rise to such acts of protectionism in many sectors of the economy. It was in this sense well-nigh inevitable that musicians from abroad were less than welcome in the UK: the Ministry of Labour was frequently called upon to draw up rules that involved restrictions on foreign labour.[78]

The Musicians' Union's objection to the Austrian opera company effectively represented an endorsement for English opera as embodied by the BNOC. It was performing a huge repertoire at many venues, performing eight different operas in a week in January 1924, with a repertoire that included a *Ring* cycle, and employed most of the leading British and British-based singers and conductors of that time, including John Barbirolli, Adrian Boult, Hamilton Harty, Malcolm Sargent and, on occasion, Beecham.[79] The objection was supported by many notable individuals:

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[77] The GOS had resorted to renting the venue for a wide variety of events, including boxing and cinema. White reports that in 1924 the syndicate was 'comatose': Eric Walter White, *English Opera* (London: John Lehmann, 1951), 193. The lack of opera is discussed in Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London: Vintage, 2009), 343. The news that the old syndicate intended to invite the Austrian company was first mentioned in the press in December 1924: following a statement made by Harry Higgins, it was reported in *The Times* on 13 and 28 December 1923, with news of the protest by the Musicians' Union appearing on 2 January 1924. The dispute is covered in a variety of other sources, including the *Musical Times*, 65, 972 (February 1924), 135–36; Harold Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* (London: Putnam, 1958), 422–24; and Frances Donaldson, *The Royal Opera House in the Twentieth Century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 19–22.

[78] The history of the agents Ibbs and Tillett offers many examples of this type of problem; see Christopher Fifield, *Ibbs and Tillett: The Rise and Fall of a Musical Empire* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 112–29. This argument over protectionism vs. the free market was familiar to the British public: the disputes caused by the Corn Laws of the previous century would have been known to many.

[79] One of the unique factors of the BNOC was the size of the repertoire: in the five-week Spring season of 1924 they performed 23 operas in total, two or three performances of each. For details see Appendix

Rutland Boughton and George Bernard Shaw were significant, along with the two men at the helm of the key musical establishments responsible for the operatic training of native singers, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Principal of the Royal Academy of Music, and Sir Hugh Allen, Principal of the Royal College of Music.[80] Edward Dent was also wholeheartedly in support of the BNOC, well known as he was for his work with Lilian Baylis on translations of operas into English. He was more cautious in his critique of standards, acknowledging the British characteristic of muddling through, and the widely held perception of amateurism on this side of the channel compared to the professionalism of Continental opera.[81]

The majority of music critics and commentators, however, were in support of the GOS's plan. Higgins was nearly apoplectic in his reply to the Musicians' Union: he ridiculed the BNOC for their claim to be sole legitimate champions of British opera when the mainstay of their repertoire was the performance of translated foreign works. He also challenged the suggestion that they should have the right to take precedence in 'his' theatre over opera in its original language. Strangely, Ethel Smyth, who is customarily seen as an anti-establishment figure, came out in support of the Syndicate, as did Arnold Bennett, at that time writing for the *Evening Standard.*[82] The GOS reverted to old-style pricing and generated much larger takings than had been made by the BNOC. Table 1.7 demonstrates the significant increase in potential income from a performance during this season.

II, Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 768–72. For an example, see the listings section of *The Times,* 5 January 1924.

[80] A leader in *The Times* criticized Mackenzie and Allen for considering the Royal Opera their own institution, 'existing for direct patronage of the throne'. As the article points out, the use of the word Royal in connection with the opera house was attached by tradition, and not by any legal constitution; *The Times,* 23 February 1924, 'The Opera Dispute: Development of Resources'. For Shaw comments, see: George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite* (London: Constable and Company, 4th Edition 1923), vi; 'Sir Edward Elgar', *Harper's Bazaar,* April 1920, and a letter to the *Daily News*, 9 June 1922, of a concert 'which places British music once more definitely in the first European rank after two centuries of leather and prunella', reprinted in *Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism of Bernard Shaw Vol. 3: 1893–1950,* ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Bodley Head, 1981), 721-29.

[81] Edward J. Dent, 'English Opera', *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 52nd Sess. (1925-26), 71.

[82] 'Translations of opera into English made "beauty ugly"'; *Evening Standard,* 1 June 1924.

		SEATS	TICKET PRICE			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit tier	6	24	9	9		56	14	
Grand Tier	35	140	9	9		330	15	
Upper Tier	11	44	4	4		46	4	
Upper Tier	11	44	3	3		46	4	
Gallery Tier	0	0						
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	304	304	1	5		380		
Orchestra Stalls	182	182	1	5		227	10	
Stalls Circle	74	74	1	26		83	5	
Stalls Circle	128	128	1			128		
Balcony Stalls	56	56		18	6	51	16	
Balcony Stalls	50	50		18	6	46	5	
Amphitheatre	111	111		12		66	12	
Amphitheatre	211	211		8	6	89	13	6
Amphitheatre	64	64		5	9	18	8	
Gallery Tier	600	600		3		90		
TOTAL		2,032				£1,661	6s	6d

Table 1.7: *La traviata,* Covent Garden, Grand Opera Syndicate, 3 June 1924.[83]

As a result of the furore, Higgins and the GOS put on an eight-week summer season of international grand opera at Covent Garden (in the original language), starring Lauritz Melchior and many other non-native singers under the baton of Bruno Walter.[84] The Austrians did not come, apparently because of scheduling problems rather than the actions of the BNOC.[85] For such a landmark year, Wagner's *Ring* was

[83] *The Times*, 2 June 1924.
[84] Interestingly for my purposes, prices for this season were almost double that charged by the BNOC – boxes for the GOS 1924 season were 9 guineas a night, compared to £4 10s for the BNOC performances, and orchestra stalls prices were £1 5s compared to 15s. Not everyone praised the efforts of the GOS: Rutland Boughton criticized it as 'snob show in a jewel box', a comment that was rounded on by Ernest Newman, writing in the *Daily Graphic* on 14 May 1924: 'I cannot see why it should be an offence to want to hear a first rate opera and be willing to pay a proper price for it'.
[85] The official line was that because of another engagement, they would only be able to spare time for a six-week season in London; Higgins decided that the finances required to pay them and their travel costs would not be offset by so short a season.

felt to be an essential ingredient and in the event the critics were full of compliments, crowning Walter the rightful successor to Richter and declaring themselves happy that international opera was victorious. Delighted supporters of the old 'London season' found their names reported in the press with descriptions of their dress as in seasons before the War.[86] The supporters of English opera were happy that the Austrian opera company did not visit London, and the BNOC performed its own season in a different London theatre. But their success in blocking the foreign opera company was a hollow victory: it served to relegate English opera to a second tier, abruptly halting several years of confident development and leading to the bankruptcy of the BNOC shortly after.

The gap in the opera market-place caused by the failure of the GOS to produce international opera had been filled with 'popular priced' English opera, by Beecham and the BNOC in turn. My analysis of the history of the economics of opera, and the changes in society during the early interwar years, have shown how opera had developed in tune with the national sentiment: the BNOC, a democratic opera company producing English opera was a perfect match for the new ideals of modernism, democracy and technology and post-war feelings.[87] Many people thought that this was the moment when the paths of democracy and that of elite culture (i.e. opera) would cross and an English opera tradition would emerge triumphant: confidence in British composers and performers was at its greatest and the thrust of democracy equally strong. The result is surprising, since logic would suggest that a season of English opera would have better reflected the country's nationalistic fervour in that year and would have represented a more compelling argument that the Empire could rival other European opera-writing countries.[88]

At the start of 1924, the opera company in residence at Covent Garden was the proudly democratic BNOC. The involvement in the 1924 dispute of organized labour

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[86] The subscribers were advertised before the season: *Daily Express,* 15 April 1924 and 5 May 1924. For lists of attendees, see *Morning Post,* 3 May 1924, and 'Derby Night Audience', 5 June 1924; *Daily Chronicle,* 6 May 1924.

[87] Reports in the press about the BNOC bear out this fact. 'Evidently the opera public, while retaining its former devotees, is increasing in numbers, largely, no doubt, by reason of the democratic basis on which the company is organized'; *Illustrated London News,* 6 May 1922, 657.

[88] 'A Musical Comedy', *The Times,* 12 February 1924.

and a government department both demonstrate a growing perception that opera should no longer be in the stewardship of the landed gentry, but should be in much wider ownership and governed in a manner similar to other bodies in public life. When it came to the qualitative measure, however, the wider cross-section of the public was not in a position to make knowledgeable decisions. By the end of that year the development of English opera was reversed: opera at Covent Garden returned to an old style of social exclusion. Thus, while opera was, in one sense, well on the way to becoming the property of many, from the point of view of standards it was still in the domain of the few (see Illustration 1.3).

The GOS had presented its final season: 1924 thus marked the end of an era in which opera was in the hands of a Syndicate with strong courtly ties. The organization had run seasons motivated partially by profit but also, as stewards of the London opera world, for social status and political influence. It was not a coincidence that the 1924 Exhibition featured a large stand displaying the products of Courtauld and Co., a company that was, in a time of economic troubles for others, making a substantial fortune from its near monopoly in the UK and US in the development, production and supply of artificial fibres and fabrics.[89] In 1925, Elizabeth Courtauld took full artistic, managerial and financial control at Covent Garden and ran three summer seasons of opera. She was neither an aristocrat nor socially ambitions; her aim was to find philanthropic uses for the profits from her husband's fabulously successful commercial enterprise, in social/cultural ventures that accorded with her religious sentiments.[90] Unhindered in her business decisions, free from social constraints, liberally able to make choices concerning repertoire and language and to display connoisseurship, her actions considerably weakened opera's previous strong link with aristocracy and royalty.

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[89] Details taken from postcard of the Courtauld stand at the Exhibition: 'Tuck's Postcard, Messrs Courtauld Exhibit, British Empire Exhibition, 1924. All these fabrics are made wholly or partially of Artificial Silk'.

[90] A contemporary recollection reflected that Courtauld was not interested in the 'social side of opera': 'so long as the boxes and stalls were filled, she was quite content. "Do tell me who all these people are", she asked me one evening when I was seeing the opera from her box': quoted by Percy Colson, *Those Uneasy Years: 1914–1939: A Medley* (London: Sampson Low and Marston, 1946), 97.

Illustration 1.3: ‘First Nighters’, circa 1925: audience at the first night of the season, the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, photo by General Photographic Agency/Getty Images.

Chapter Two

The Courtauld Opera Seasons 1925–1927:

'The Ingratitude of Democracy'

Introduction

1925 was an important year in the economics of opera. It marked the end of an era when members of the upper echelons of society were prepared to fund opera simply because of the elevated status it bestowed on them. From now onwards, individuals were increasingly minded to cover the losses of opera. In other words, patrons no longer tended to support opera merely because it was fashionable; instead the nation began to assume responsibility for maintaining it as part of the cultural legacy to counter widespread anxiety about the preservation of national culture.

Chapter One presented an analysis of the transition of opera from the time when it was a profitable activity to the point at which a syndicate agreed to share the losses. The Grand Opera Syndicate (GOS) gave its last opera season in 1924: the losses in that season were more than the Syndicate was prepared to underwrite. As a result, in early 1925, Elizabeth Courtauld (1874-1931) took control of opera at Covent Garden, undertaking to support the project financially and working to find a new economic model. Courtauld provided 'pump priming' finance and she wasn't interested in commercial profit, she intended to control the losses and find a way for opera to survive. She was, in the process, trying to establish whether there was a national appetite for opera as an historic legacy. It was a high profile role and an audacious endeavour for Courtauld: she had no strong connections with opera or Covent Garden, nor any management experience. Although there are instances of female managers in theatre history, it was still unusual for a woman to assume any position of cultural authority at this time. Courtauld was eventually to be responsible for two musical projects: opera at Covent Garden and, later, a subscription concert series. Her efforts in these two musical ventures are largely forgotten because they were not considered successful.

Courtauld was approached by the GOS in 1924 for help with funding, which she declined; but she recognised an opportunity.[1] She set up the London Opera Syndicate (LOS), assumed the role of chairman and, assisted by Colonel Eustace Blois as her managing director, ran three seasons of opera at Covent Garden.[2] This was not a syndicate like the GOS: it had only two members, herself and Samuel Courtauld. It seems that she used the title of 'syndicate' out of convenience as at no point did any other individual contribute to the venture. Her efforts to see if opera was viable in London were remarkable for many reasons, not least because she personally shouldered an unquantified financial burden.[3] From her financial statements in the press, and in a *Vogue* article in which she described her venture, it is clear that she was embarking on this scheme in a completely different way from all other entrepreneurs/impresarios that preceded her at Covent Garden.[4] Courtauld described herself as facilitator, testing the waters, gauging the amount of financial support required to continue London's international opera tradition: her motivation was a belief that the continued existence of opera was a force for good in society, a civilizing force.[5]

As recounted earlier in this thesis, in the preceding years, the Beechams (Thomas and his father, Sir Joseph), Oscar Hammerstein and the British National Opera

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[1] 'After negotiations the [1924] scheme was dropped … it then occurred to them that they themselves could undertake and manage opera in London'; *Daily Mail,* 20 June 1927.
[2] Blois had been Samuel Courtauld's private secretary.
[3] 'The object of the London Opera Syndicate has been not to give detached seasons, but to test the strength of the public demand for international grand opera, and see if it is sufficiently strong to make it a commercial proposition'; 'Grand Opera in England: The Financial Position', *The Times*, 7 December 1926. Blois was not a wealthy man and worked for a salary at Covent Garden. It was becoming normal in theatrical business structures to employ financial executives with expertise; see Peter A. Davis, 'The Syndicate/ Shubert War', in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World,* ed. William R. Taylor (New York: Russell Sage, 1991), 147–57.
[4] *The Sunday Times,* 3 July 1927, reported that: '"The object of the London Opera Syndicate," it said in its prospectus for the season just ended, "has been not to give detached seasons but to test the strength of the public's demand for International Grand Opera, and to see if it is sufficiently strong to make it a commercial proposition"'. Virtually all other business structures in the entertainment business had been solely profit motivated; see Tracy Davis, *Economics of the British Stage: 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 241. The *Vogue* article appears as an appendix to this chapter, see p. 96.
[5] The idea of running an opera season in order to judge whether the art form was viable was not an original one; Joseph Beecham had said something similar in 1909 when he had indicated that he would put up an endowment of £300,000 for a National English Opera House. The project is mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis; see also Lucas, *Beecham,* 55.

Company (BNOC), with their seasons of opera in English, had driven down ticket prices and, in the process, sustained notable losses: the amounts were well known and had helped to create a public perception that opera was not viable. Above all, the presentation of English opera seasons by Beecham and Hammerstein and by those who preceded them at their aggressively low prices had made English opera un-commercial. English opera companies had felt compelled to offer opera at 'popular prices' because such companies had an ethos of offering opera for all: providing opera at a price that was affordable to the majority of the population. In addition, these companies had been selling tickets on a per-night basis, not by means of the old subscription system in which a box or a stalls seat was purchased for the entire season. This innovation had effectively broken the subscription 'habit', with its strong associations with the high society season. Hammerstein had announced on the final night of his opera venture that he had made losses of £45,000; £25,000 in one season alone.[6] John Lucas reports that Thomas Beecham had made losses of £50,000 in one season and £30,000 in another: the amount the Beechams spent on opera had, what is more, been frequently discussed in the press.[7] The BNOC, a company with public ownership, was obliged to publish its results and the amounts of its losses were also the subject of press comment.[8] The losses on Courtauld's opera seasons, on the other hand, were never discussed in the press: the only mention of the amount is in a secondary source, one that estimates the cost of Courtauld's three year-long opera

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Harold Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* (London: Putnam, 1958), 367, and the *Era*, 20 July 1912.

[6] Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera*, 367, and the *Era*, 20 July 1912.

[7] John Lucas, *Thomas Beecham: An Obsession with Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), 67.

[8] Ernest Newman, then a prominent commentator on opera, wrote: 'The present state of affairs may be set forth briefly for the benefit of those who have not been in a position to glean the facts for themselves. During the four years of its existence the company [BNOC] has lost an average of rather over £10,000 a year. Last year the Carnegie UK Trust made a grant of about £4,000 to cover the losses "on certain operas approved by them" says Mr Bowman "which we could only have given very infrequently without its help." The Carnegie Trust has apparently now withdrawn its help – just when, as the Chairman of the BNOC points out, revisits to the cities in which the scheme was put into practice would enable them to gauge its success; "without this guarantee we have had to give up one or two of the best productions, notably *Pelléas et Mélisande*, because financially we dare not risk giving them." For the past year the loss has been £8,800 as compared with £19,000 in the previous year. We are given to understand that the company is now virtually at the end of its resources, and that unless substantial financial help is forthcoming *immediately* it will be impossible to embark upon the Spring season, which should commence in Liverpool in February'; Ernest Newman, 'Death – or Transfiguration?', *Sunday Times,* 3 January 1926.

project at £50,000. I have not been able to substantiate this amount, but the figures analysed in this chapter suggest it is broadly accurate.

One of the most significant changes Courtauld made was to publish financial details of the project; in this sense she acted with an unprecedented and modern degree of financial transparency. As will be discussed later, Courtauld was a private person, so the publication of the figures relating to her project was very much out of character. But this outward-facing stance was in part because she did not see such operatic adventures as her project. It was, as far as she was concerned, a national project: she wanted to share the decision making and dilemmas with a broad spectrum of interested parties. As a result, she issued a series of statements that revealed many key financial performance indicators: statements that form a valuable resource for the purposes of my analysis. These communications also demonstrate the extent of Courtauld's desire to succeed; she used them as publicity for her scheme and as a spur to the consciences of wealthy subscribers.[9] Her plan was to be open about her intentions to make opera commercially successful; and she expected, in return, to be supported in the venture. As we shall see, this was not the case. Despite her initial willingness to be open about her efforts, the combination of her private nature and her anxiety about revealing the extent of her support later resulted in her becoming increasingly reticent about financial matters.

Courtauld's work is not well documented: most published accounts refer to her second musical project, the subscription concert series she ran from 1929 to 1931; her work with opera is, as mentioned earlier, almost entirely forgotten. Her only published article concerning the opera project is in the May 1929 British edition of *Vogue*; this vehicle is revealing as it marks her efforts as essentially gendered, rather than worthy in their own right or comparable to those of her predecessors.[10] The *Vogue* article also

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[9] They were published in *The Times,* 8 July and 31 October 1925, 7 December 1926, 8 January and 23 February 1927.

[10] *Vogue*, May 1929, 48. Courtauld's views on her second project may found in a letter to *The Sackbut,* May 1931, 279: 'The object of the Concert Club is to stimulate interest in music, and to obtain a wide and stable audience drawn from lovers of music for whom the usual prices have been too high to enable them to subscribe regularly to concerts. Employees connected with the big business establishments, students, teachers and other professional and social organizations of a similar character, are eligible for membership'. In her subsequent subscription concert series there is more evidence of her ideals, found in notes to the programmes: 'We believe in the high value of good music and our object is to serve it by

offers some perspective on her efforts and on the way she viewed the dilemmas of opera. She was clear that the preservation of the institution of opera was paramount and that it was essential that London should provide opera of the highest standard. Her intention was to open elite opera to wider audiences. In her opinion, these audiences were different from those before the war: more intelligent and earnest about music, less interested in what was fashionable. She considered that if she captured the support of this wider demographic then the project could cover its costs. In additional, she was not prepared to offer opera in English: she considered that the repertoire of what she termed 'grand opera' was international and that there were no English operas of the same standard. In terms of performers, Courtauld criticized the lack of English opera-training schools and was adamant that, because the repertoire was essentially international, her anti-protectionist policies were correct. She considered that critical acceptance of the lesser performance standards of the companies such as the British National Opera Company (BNOC) meant that English opera could never be financially viable.

There is no biography of Courtauld and the dearth of available information about her makes any study of her philanthropy a challenge. Nor is there a biography of her husband Samuel (1876-1947): a strange fact given that he was such an important contributor to English culture. However, there is at least information available concerning his personality, religious beliefs and his contribution to the UK's artistic legacy. Such sources offer clues about the couple ('Lil-Sam', as one contemporary referred to them) and thus an opportunity to consider her actions.[11] In this chapter, I will need briefly to examine Samuel's philanthropy, for the simple reason that it sheds light on his wife's vision. Indeed, when looked at comparatively, there is a tantalising

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helping the standard of music in popular taste in this country. There are people in every class who love music disinterestedly for its own sake and these are the people whose taste is the best. We want to build up regular audiences from them, and to create a tradition which will spread from them and will demand to be satisfied with *nothing but the best'*; see copy of 1931 Courtauld-Sargent programme held at the British Library, 7900.d.31 <http://admin.concertprogrammes.org.uk/html/search/verb/GetRecord/4446> [accessed 24 September 2018].

[11] Elizabeth was known as 'Lil'; Lydia Lopokova (the future wife of John Maynard Keynes) used the phrase; Polly Hill and Richard Keynes, *Lydia and Maynard: The Letters of Lydia Lopokova and John Maynard Keynes* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989), 110 and 132.

symmetry in their dual projects, one that encourages contemplation of their respective cultural dilemmas. The couple shared philanthropic ideals and worked together to widen the cultural stewardship of art and music: through their efforts, both art forms progressed along the route from aristocratic patronage to a more modern model of arts funding.

Samuel Courtauld became extremely rich during the 1920s and as wealthy industrialists he and Elizabeth found themselves almost uniquely placed, their money weighing uneasily in their pockets. They decided to donate a large proportion of their considerable wealth to the arts, he to fine art and she to opera and music. A close reading of their actions is required in order to appreciate the levels of confidence with which they entered their respective philanthropic fields. The couple's vision – of spending their time and money on this pair of projects – was hazardous in terms other than finance: their respective ventures were heavily dependent on their ability as aesthetic discriminators, a measure that has always been open to criticism. The outcome of their efforts, however, was vastly different. Samuel's legacy as the founder of the first institution to promote the academic study of art in England, and in demonstrating to an insular British art world that the country should find space in its national art galleries for the contemporary works of non-native artists, is relatively well recognised; there is remarkably little perceived legacy resulting from Elizabeth's work (see Illustration 2.1).

The Courtaulds' wealth gave them access to positions of power and influence, but they were neither part of London's aristocratic society nor part of bohemia.[12] A photograph of the couple taken by Lady Ottoline Morrell shows them looking somewhat ill at ease at her home (see Illustration 2.2). They were satisfied with their place in society but were aspirational in terms of using their wealth to improve society

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[12] Despite the fact that Samuel was a friend of John Maynard Keynes as early as 1920, the Courtaulds were not part of the bohemian set, even though many of the Bloomsbury set turned to them for money. Lopokova thought Elizabeth was a snob, whilst Virginia Woolf described her as being 'ruined by the bourgeois institution of marriage': Judith MacKrell, *Bloomsbury Ballerina: Lydia Lopokova, Imperial Dancer and Mrs John Maynard Keynes* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008), 236. See also Miranda Seymour, *Ottoline Morrell: Life on the Grand Scale* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992). Morrell appears to remember Samuel and not Elizabeth, mentioning that she first met Virginia Woolf at a party at 'his' house in Portman Square in 1928; a strange omission since she photographed the couple, see Illustration 2.2.

Illustration 2.1: Portrait of Samuel Courtauld IV by Roy de Maistre (insert SC aged 17), taken from Stephen L. Courtauld, *The Huguenot Family of Courtauld* (London: Privately Printed, 1957), 145.

Illustration 2.2: Kyrle Leng, Elizabeth Courtauld, Samuel Courtauld, Igor Vinogradoff and Hon. Robert Gathorne-Hardy at Garsington: photographed by Lady Ottoline Morrell, 1926, National Portrait Gallery, Ax142488.

and develop their own cultural gravitas. Both of her published articles make clear that Elizabeth was targeting audiences from the middle classes: for modern historians the Courtaulds have come to epitomise the upper middle classes of their era.[13] Their efforts were not always understood: they were considered newcomers in money terms, heavily criticized and perceived as nouveaux riches industrialists anxious to buy their way up the social ladder.[14] This was largely incorrect. They were a religious couple without social aspirations; their religion, Unitarianism, was the main motivator in their philanthropy.[15] Andrea Geddes Poole interprets Samuel's comments on art as stemming directly from his faith, a central tenet of which was an aversion to materialism and excess wealth.[16] Anthony Blunt also placed importance on Samuel's religious faith, describing in some detail his efforts in 'widening the spiritual horizon'.[17]

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[13] Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell, *The Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl* (London: Cassell, 2002), 92 and 103.

[14] They were the subject of amusement in a Frederick Ashton ballet entitled *A Tragedy of Fashion* (subtitled *The Scarlet Scissors*, 1926), music by Eugene Goossens, in which they were represented as the 'Viscount and Viscountess Viscosa' in the salon of 'Monsieur Duchic'; Julie Kavanagh, *Secret Muses: The Life of Frederick Ashton* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 77. Vera Bowen (a friend of Keynes) considered Samuel's philanthropy 'an occult scheme of social advancement' and aimed at self-aggrandisement, even a peerage; Andrea Geddes Poole, *Stewards of the Nation's Art: Contested Cultural Authority 1890–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 202. Stanley Baldwin offered Samuel a peerage in 1937, which he turned down; Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 143. This subject is also mentioned in John House, *Impressionism for England: Samuel Courtauld as Patron and Collector* (London: Courtauld Institute, 1994), 28.

[15] Details of the Huguenot roots of the Courtauld family may be found in three volumes, written by Samuel's brother Stephen Courtauld (1883–1967); Stephen Courtauld, *The Huguenot Family of Courtauld* (London: Privately Printed, 1957).

[16] Geddes Poole, *Stewards,* 203. Geddes Poole also quotes a letter Samuel wrote to 'RAB' Butler 'Unitarians … are second to none in holding the prestige of material things to be our greatest danger'; Courtauld/Butler papers, Trinity College, Cambridge RAB D33 5(1) RAB D32 (53); 20 April 1942. For more on Butler, see below.

[17] See Anthony Blunt, 'Samuel Courtauld as Collector and Benefactor', in Douglas Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection: A Catalogue and Introduction* (London: Athlone Press, 1954), 4. Ten of Samuel's lectures given between 1941 and 1947, with an introduction by Samuel's friend, the journalist and critic Charles Morgan, were published in 1947. Morgan offers recollections of Samuel's ideas about how art has the ability to free the human spirit, to renew the imaginative life; 'his quest for a humane spirit and of the divine mystery … governed all his thought on art, on human relationships, and on death.' When asked about his ultimate aim, Samuel replied 'to make it possible for every human being to receive all the culture he was capable of absorbing, and thereby to develop the best that was in him. In a talk given to an engineer's club on 12 June 1942 Samuel said 'I don't believe that the civilizing influence of art is more powerful than that of religion, but perhaps it is even more widespread … the defence of culture is the soundest plank in any political programme which sets out to combat the cry for equality of wealth'; Samuel Courtauld, *Ideals and Industry: War Time Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), vii–xiv, 61 and 74. This book is considered in an essay by Andrew Stephenson, 'An Anatomy of Taste: Samuel Courtauld and Debates about Art Patronage and Modernism in Britain in the Inter-War Years', in House, *Impressionism for England,* 35–46.

Their Huguenot background and their religion also marked them as outsiders. Blunt describes how Unitarianism kept them apart from their neighbours, imbuing them with 'independence and seriousness [and] a Puritanism that influenced and moulded [them]'. An indication of how Elizabeth's 'devotion' to music stemmed from her sense of public duty and Unitarian faith can be found on the memorial plaque that Samuel placed in their home after her death (see Illustration 2.3).[18] The lack of information about Courtauld's opera project makes it all the more important to substantiate the extent of her musical benevolence and executive role. There are two parts to this verification. First, asking whether it her own money she was using. Secondly, asking whether was she responsible for executive decisions at Covent Garden. As far as the first part goes, it was, of course, Samuel's earnings that facilitated the projects; but, by 1925, women were legally able to own property in their own right.[19] Courtauld's death certificate shows her personal estate at that time as £172,776, a substantial amount. Various descriptions of from eminent musicians support the conclusion that the finances came from her: a newspaper report described her as 'our lady Maecenas'; Constant Lambert described her as one of the music world's great patrons.[20]

For the second part of the authentication, it is important to establish that Courtauld was in charge of the business decisions. She herself states that her involvement in opera was considerably more than just providing finance: in the *Vogue* article cited above she states that she *ran* opera at Covent Garden. It is also clear from her obituaries that contemporaries viewed her involvement as managerial: the *Musical Times* reported that 'the seasons of grand opera at Covent Garden in 1925–27 which

[18] The dedicatory tablet in the entrance hall of Home House offers further proof of the couple's motivation: Christopher Hussey and Arthur Oswald, *Home House, No. 20 Portman Square: An Architectural and Historical Description* (London: Home House Trustees, 1934), 1, Plates 21 and 32. See also Margaret Whinney, *Home House: No. 20 Portman Square* (London: Country Life Books, 1969).
[19] The relevant legislation was the Married Women's Property Act, 1882. For more on this see Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 53–65.
[20] Another description of her by Malcolm Sargent can be found in Richard Aldous, *Tunes of Glory: The Life of Malcolm Sargent* (London: Hutchinson, 2001), 58. For newspaper reference as 'our Lady Maecenas', see *Morning Post*, 20 April 1925: 'Music and Musicians: The Promise of the Coming Season'; for Lambert quote, see *Sunday Referee,* 24 January 1932.

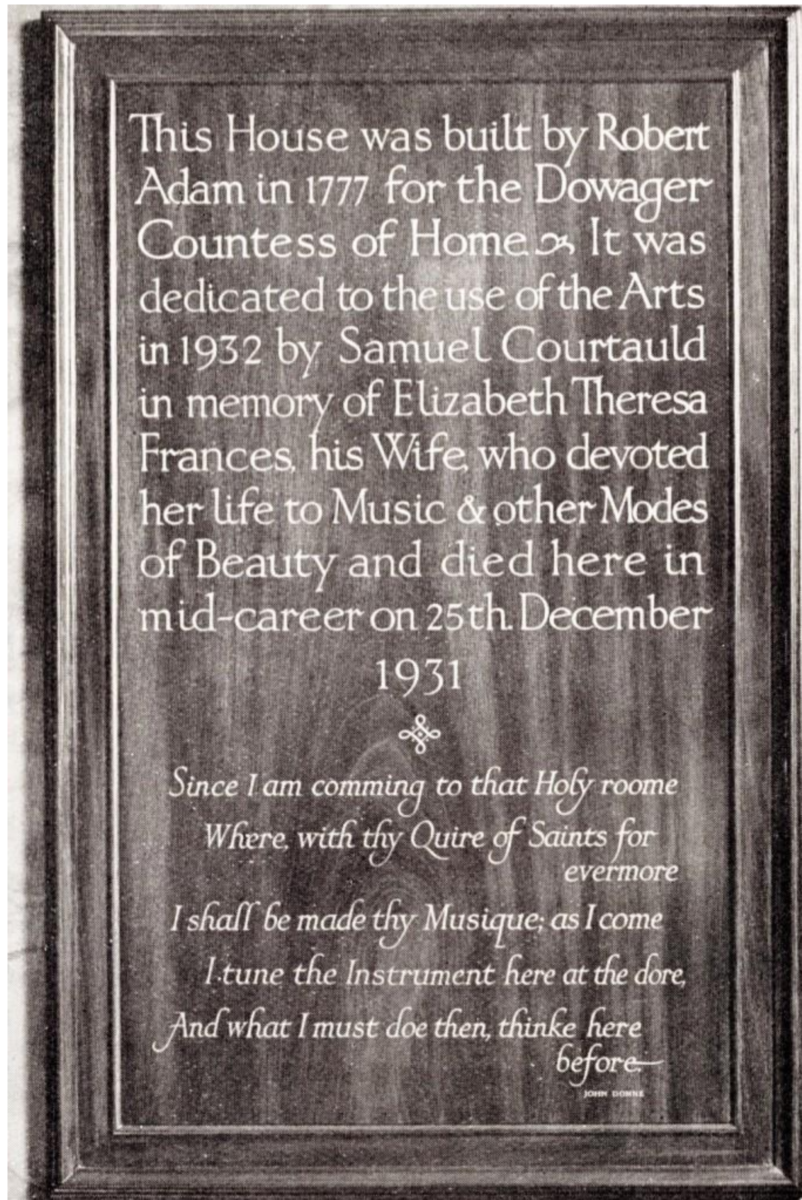

Illustration 2.3: Plaque installed at Portman Square in memory of Elizabeth Courtauld by Samuel Courtauld: Christopher Hussey and Arthur Oswald, *Home House, No. 20 Portman Square: An Architectural and Historical Description* (London: Home House Trustees, 1934), 27.

she initiated and largely organized and managed are now considered to have been the most brilliant since the war'.[21] In an earlier article, the *Saturday Review* shared this view; 'the palm for enterprise goes to a new entrant in the field of concert giving. Mrs Samuel Courtauld has already done good service to music in London, for she was chief partner in the syndicate which took over the burden of grand opera at Covent Garden at a critical moment five years ago'.[22] There are several other primary sources that support this conclusion; they are reviewed in more detail in the biographical section that follows.

There are, however, two sources that contradict what seems otherwise to be a justifiable conclusion. A book published to celebrate Samuel Courtauld's centenary contains an introduction by his niece, Jeanne Courtauld, that credits the opera venture to Samuel and his brother Stephen.[23] According to Jeanne, the brothers 'helped to re-establish the international season at Covent Garden … their support continued until the Second World War and helped to make the London opera season one of the finest in the world'.[24] The second source is an article in the *Sunday Express,* 26 April 1925, which also suggests that the venture was run by Samuel and his brother: 'Two men save opera … it is because two Englishmen, who insist on remaining anonymous are risking between £20,000 and £30,000 in order to remove a national reproach, that Covent Garden will stage opera this season'. My research demonstrates that the weight of evidence supports the conclusion that Elizabeth Courtauld deserves to be

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[21] *Musical Times*, 73, 1068 (1 February 1932), 1751. The obituary in the *Observer* also credits her with 'preponderant charge of the opera … [and successfully directing] … artistic development at Covent Garden', *Observer,* 27 December 1931.
[22] *Saturday Review,* 5 October 1929.
[23] Jeanne Courtauld and Alan Bowness, *Samuel Courtauld's Collection of French 19th Century Paintings and Drawings: A Centenary Exhibition to Commemorate the Birth of Samuel Courtauld* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976), no page numbers.
[24] Jeanne worked for 30 years with the Courtauld Institute; The Right Hon. Sir Adam Butler, 'Miss Jeanne Courtauld', *The Courtauld Institute of Art News Issue,* 16, (Autumn 2003). She acknowledges that the death of Elizabeth in 1931 was 'the great tragedy of his [Samuel's] life' but describes Elizabeth as being 'a person of very strong character', perhaps a clue to a personal dislike; Courtauld and Bowness, *Samuel Courtauld's Collection.* However, Alan Bowness, writing a few pages later in the same book, recollects that Elizabeth played a significant part in Samuel's art purchases: 'in all their artistic enterprises … [he] greatly valued his wife's taste and judgement, and we should always remember that the collection is the creation of Samuel and Elizabeth Courtauld working in the closest of harmony together.'

credited. Samuel's niece, in her earnest emphasis of her uncle's role in the country's cultural history, was guilty of attempting to write her aunt out of the history books.

This chapter opens with some biographical details about the Courtaulds, examining their art and opera funding projects. The second section concerns the business decisions made by Elizabeth at Covent Garden and a financial analysis of the results of her efforts, together with a view of how they were perceived by others. Her decisions are considered in the framework of the five dilemmas outlined in Chapter One.

The Courtaulds

Elizabeth Courtauld was born Elizabeth Theresa Frances Kelsey on 3 December 1874; she died on 25 December 1931 at 20 Portman Square, London. She married Samuel Courtauld in 1901; they lived initially in Essex, subsequently moving to London.[25] They had one child, Sydney Elizabeth Courtauld (1902–54).[26] By all accounts Elizabeth was indefatigable and intrepid: she was variously described as 'genuine' and 'vivid', 'without social ambition', knowing 'how to give as well as take blows' and 'desiring no personal kudos'. She is remembered by RAB Butler as 'a formidable Irishwoman'.[27] Her obituaries in *The Times* and the *Observer* offer a summary of her musical legacy, and also some clues as to her motivation for her projects:

> A Great Music-Lover … a genuine enthusiast for music, who brought intelligence and sound judgement to bear on schemes for furthering it, and who bestowed her friendship and encouragement on many musical artists. She gave not only her money but also her time and personal work to the musical projects in which she was interested. For three years beginning in 1925 she was primarily responsible for the summer seasons of opera given at Covent Garden by the London Opera Syndicate who leased the house from the Grand Opera Syndicate.

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[25] Taken from her birth certificate. The 1911 census shows them living with their eight-year-old daughter Sydney in the 14-room house in Halstead, Essex with a cook, parlour maid, housemaid and a children's maid.

[26] Sydney was to marry Richard Austin Butler ('RAB') on 20 April 1926. Butler was made Conservative MP for Saffron-Walden in the 1929 General Election, and went on to become a junior minister in the National Government under Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain; he subsequently served under Winston Churchill, who appointed him Minister of Education in 1941. The couple had four children.

[27] Lord Butler, *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), 19.

> Her own genuineness was unmistakeable and it is to be hoped that what she initiated will not be allowed to flag, although it suffers an irreparable loss by the withdrawal of her inspiring personality. Mrs Courtauld always believed in time she would be able to show that by careful organization such a scheme as hers could be made self-supporting with all that this meant both for the professional and the amateur musician.
> Yet she desired no personal kudos. It was enough for her that multitudes of music lovers were able to enjoy the masterpieces of music, and she was never so pleased as when she could read you a letter from some member of the club testifying to the writer's delight in one or other of the concerts.[28]

> A notable and significant figure has passed from the scene of art and music in this country, and the musical life of London in particular has lost a vitalising force. As regards the larger public of those who attend Covent Garden and the Queen's Hall, the first intimation of Mrs Courtauld's activities in the field of music came when she took preponderant charge of the opera after the war. But this was the outcome of a more privately known enthusiasm for music which had been increasing since, in early years she went through an intensive study of the pianoforte. With the wider experience she gained during the years in which she successfully directed the artistic development of Covent Garden, there came a deeper knowledge of the art itself as well as a remarkably keen insight into the musical needs of the Metropolis.[29]

Courtauld was also important as a musical hostess: an article in the American edition of *Vogue* on 11 May 1929 summarized the parties held by the best musical hostesses of the time, in New York, Paris, Venice and London, and concluded that the best were at Courtauld's Portman Square home.[30] The photograph of her sitting room in Portman Square shows a sparsely furnished but authentic Adam interior – with Monet's *Argenteuil* over the fireplace (see Illustration 2.4). As hostess and patron, Courtauld introduced musicians to society and helped many find commissions and engagements. As a result, many biographies of the musicians who benefited from her altruism contain references to her. However, they vary widely in detail. Both biographies of Malcolm Sargent attribute considerable significance to Courtauld's support. Richard Aldous describes her contribution as an executive at Covent

[28] *The Times*, 28 December 1931.
[29] *Observer,* 27 December 1931.
[30] Courtauld's soirées are compared favourably to those held by the Princess de Polignac, Elsa Maxwell and others: 'Musical Hostesses as Seen by Him', *Vogue* (New York), 73, 10 (11 May 1929), 81, 172.

Illustration 2.4: The Music Room, Elizabeth Courtauld's Drawing Room, Portman Square – with Monet's *Argenteuil* over the fireplace: Christopher Hussey and Arthur Oswald, *Home House, No. 20 Portman Square: An Architectural and Historical Description* (London: Home House Trustees, 1934), 97.

Garden and as one of the most significant artistic benefactors: he estimates that she spent more than £50,000 on her opera project.[31] By contrast there is little information about her in the biography of Artur Schnabel, a musician who benefited considerably from her patronage.[32] Courtauld was also important in the career of Bruno Walter, appointing him to work with her at Covent Garden; however, in accounts of his life she receives little or no credit.[33] She is mentioned in the recollections of Igor Stravinsky in relation to the London premiere of his *Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra* (1929), and by William Walton.[34] Anthony Blunt, who worked closely with Samuel in the formation of the Courtauld Institute, offers a fuller description of her: he credits her with being 'largely responsible for the continued existence of the Covent Garden Opera in the years 1925–27'.[35] Charles Morgan, a journalist and critic friend of Samuel's, confirms this view, as does Harold Rosenthal, archivist at Covent Garden from 1953 to 1986, who is also quite clear that it was Elizabeth and not Samuel who ran events at the Opera House.[36]

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[31] The two biographies are Charles Reid, *Malcolm Sargent: A Biography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), 184 and Aldous, *Tunes of Glory,* 58. Reid recollects that public opinion attributed the success of Sargent to Elizabeth. Aldous comments that Courtauld was 'among the most significant artistic benefactors England has known … [a] handsome grey haired woman … something of a tyrant perhaps: but her keenness on music and the money she has expended on it have gone a long way towards earning her the right to be'. Aldous relates how she was fully responsible for the repertoire of the concert series that she worked on with Sargent, including the engagement of artists and publicity.

[32] 'At this time the Courtaulds were particularly interested in music, since Mrs Courtauld had undertaken to revive and finance opera at Covent Garden, which had suffered a sad decadence as a result of the First World War.… Lil was a charming and warm hearted woman who, though 'reared' in society, preferred the company of artists and intellectuals, and whose love of music was as ardent as her husband's love of painting and poetry'; Cesar Saerchinger, *Artur Schnabel: A Biography* (London: Cassell, 1957), 187.

[33] At first glance the omission of any reference to the Courtaulds in the Walter biography is perplexing: his early career successes in London were attributable to her: see Eric Ryding and Rebecca Pechefsky, *Bruno Walter: A World Elsewhere* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001). However, the letter from Walter expressing his anger at the way he was replaced by Beecham in 1933 goes some way to explain the exclusion: Bruno Walter File, ROHC, letter to Blois, 11 April, 1932 (not numbered).

[34] Somewhat ungrateful after her death in 1931, Walton was relieved of repaying money Courtauld had lent him; see Stephen Lloyd, *William Walton: Muse of Fire* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), 129. Stravinsky refers to her being 'animated by the best intentions ... who had by her energy, infused life into a musical undertaking which might well have become still more important under her influence': Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky: A Creative Spring: Russia and France, 1882–1934* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), 505. See also Igor Stravinsky, *Igor Stravinsky: An Autobiography* (New York: Calder and Boyars, 1936), 167.

[35] Blunt, 'Samuel Courtauld as Collector and Benefactor', in Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection*, 4.

[36] Charles Morgan's introduction to Samuel Courtauld, *Ideals and Industry,* xvii; Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 432–52.

Samuel Courtauld's philanthropic legacy is more easily discernible: he left a tangible cultural heritage, represented by the Courtauld Institute and the collection of French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art displayed in the Courtauld Gallery.[37] During Samuel's leadership of Courtaulds Ltd., from 1921 to 1946, he successfully adapted production methods and technology to keep pace with changes in demands in the textile sector.[38] Samuel's collection of art displayed a confident but maverick streak, somewhat at odds with his personal reticence, which was to have a significant effect on public opinion.[39] In terms of philanthropic gifts, he is credited with making three significant donations to the nation. The first, in 1923, was a bequest to the Tate Gallery of a £50,000 fund for the purchase of the works of French artists from the end of the nineteenth century. The endowment brought him notoriety not only because of its size: it also provided a critical focus for debates challenging the longstanding protectionist view that modern foreign painting did not deserve representation in London's national collections. After Elizabeth died in 1931, Samuel donated their Robert Adam home, Home House, to what was to become the Courtauld Institute, and

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[37] The Courtauld Institute, founded by Samuel, Lord Lee of Fareham and Sir Robert Witt in 1932, is now part of the University of London. The Institute and the Courtauld Gallery are now based at Somerset House (after Elizabeth's death they were situated in the couple's home in Portland Square): the Gallery is the home to the art collection left by Samuel on his death, along with other works of art, primarily from the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist schools. A full list of the works may be found in the catalogue produced by the Courtauld Institute on his death: see Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection.* Still more details are in Stephenson 'An Anatomy of Taste', in House, *Impressionism for England,* 35–46.

[38] For details on the Courtauld's company and family, see D.C. Coleman, *Courtaulds: An Economic and Social History, Vol. II: Rayon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), S.L. Courtauld, *The Family of Courtauld* (London: Curwen Press, 1967) and C.H. Ward-Jackson, *A History of Courtaulds: An Account of the Origin and Rise of the Industrial Enterprise of Courtaulds Limited and of its Associate the American Viscose Corporation* (London: Curwen Press, 1941). The development of Rayon, also known as artificial silk, is considered in terms of the 1924 Exhibition in Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918–1939* ([1940]: London: Folio Society, 2009), 152–3.

[39] Samuel is remembered by Sargent as a 'quiet and courteous man whose artistic aspirations were signalled by the black beret habitually worn since youthful Paris visits' and by Schnabel as a 'shy and introspective person'; Aldous, *Tunes of Glory,* 58, and Searchinger, *Artur Schnabel,* 187. E.V. Thaw, writing in *The New Criterion* in April 1995, 74–76, commented that 'the admission of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art into British collections, both public and private, was a very slow process. Despite the steady drum-beating by Roger Fry and Clive Bell of the influential Bloomsbury set, great French paintings from Manet to Matisse were simply not going to England in the way that they were to Russia, to America, to Germany and even to tiny Denmark'; E.V. Thaw, 'Courtauld the Collector', *The New Criterion,* 13 (April 1995). See also David Boyd-Hancock, *Nash, Nevinson, Spenser, Gertler, Carrington Bomberg: A Crisis of Brilliance, 1908–1922* (London: Scala Arts, 2013), 16; Cooper, *Courtauld Collection,* 9–76; *Impressionists in England: The Critical Reception,* ed. Kate Flint (London: Routledge, 1984); Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 378.

on his own death in 1947 he bequeathed most of his personal art collection to the Institute. By itself, the initial gift to the Tate was by far the largest to national art for many years; when added to his subsequent bequests, his contribution to the nation's art was extraordinary.[40] When Samuel died, his trustees held an exhibition of his collection and subsequently published a complete catalogue of Courtauld's collection.[41] Anthony Blunt, who was the first curator of the Courtauld Collection and had worked closely with Samuel, wrote a biographical note that offers some interesting personal details.[42] He credits Samuel not only as a great benefactor, but also as the man who 'probably did more than any other Englishman of his generation to encourage the enjoyment of the arts in this country'; Douglas Cooper credits the collection as being a 'cardinal event in the history of English taste'.[43]

Courtauld's Opera Scheme

The heading for this chapter, 'The Ingratitude of Democracy', is taken from a comment in the *Evening Standard,* published at the end of Courtauld's time at Covent Garden. The quotation warrants close inspection: concealed beneath an apparent chastisement of London opera audiences are indications of the challenges faced when undertaking such cultural work. Courtauld was attempting to re-establish regular international opera seasons after a break of eleven years during which there had been seismic changes to all aspects of life.[44] That period had also seen a huge growth in English opera, from Beecham and the BNOC, with their lower prices and the expectations that

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[40] It was as a result of this substantial gift that Samuel went on to serve on the board of the National Gallery (1931-46) and the Tate (1927-38). Samuel specified works by Manet, Renoir, Degas, Cézanne, Monet, Van Gogh and Gauguin; see Geddes Poole, *Stewards,* 202–3. A collection of contemporary writings on his donation can be found in Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'Modern Foreign Paintings and the National Art Collections: An Anthology of British Texts, 1905–1932', in House, *Impressionism for England,* 225–52.

[41] The catalogue lists all the works in his personal collection together with items purchased with his donation to the Tate in 1923. A glance at this collection makes it clear how significant these gifts were; see Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection,* plates following p. 205.

[42] Whatever public judgments may subsequently have been made about Blunt, he was a man who worked closely with Samuel Courtauld and his views remain valuable.

[43] Blunt, 'Samuel Courtauld as Collector and Benefactor', Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection*, 1, 11.

[44] Although there had been international opera at Covent Garden during that time, it had been with Beecham at the helm and not the GOS. Their previous season had been in 1914; see Rosenthal, *Two Centuries*, 761.

were fostered as a result. Courtauld's vision was that international opera could be restored and that, with her temporary funding, it could become financially viable through widening the ownership of opera, with a commensurate widening of audiences. The article confirms contemporary perceptions that opera was now the responsibility of a new, middle-class audience. These were not the subscribers from the upper echelons, but a new audience, many of whom were coming to opera for the first time. Although Courtauld was prepared to pay for this act of restoration, she was not prepared for the degree of criticism that she received. What she regarded as ingratitude was the main factor that caused her to remove herself from the project. As the *Evening Standard* put it:

> The way of would be benefactors to the music lovers of this great city is hardly rose strewn as is often supposed … the present syndicate responsible for Grand Opera at Covent Garden would be justified, if they were touchy people and took criticism too seriously, in flinging their benefactions back in the public's face. Gratitude has never been a virtue of democracy and with the spread of the democratic idea, ingratitude, not to say impertinence becomes increasingly in vogue …. To begin with, some persons seem to forget the obvious fact that private individuals who take a theatre and pay the expenses of running it are entitled to produce exactly and precisely what they choose. There is no analogy here with a State or municipality aided theatre in which every citizen is, via the rates and taxes, indirectly interested. When, moreover, as in the case of opera at Covent Garden, the mere enterprise in itself shows public spirit, those responsible might reasonably presume a certain amount of universal gratitude.[45]

In terms of the five central dilemmas outlined in Chapter One, Courtauld was insistent that the fifth dilemma was the most important: the preservation of the opera heritage was at the heart of her enterprise, and she saw that her funds could re-establish what would otherwise be lost to the nation. In the statements that followed, she repeated the same theme: was there sufficient public demand for international opera? In terms of funding, she was clear that she was going to use her own funds to finance the project as, at this point, there was no option of finding state funding.

Courtauld was also looking at where to position her new venture between the two contrasting business models represented by international and English opera.

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[45] *Evening Standard,* 12 January 1927.

While she chose to continue in the GOS tradition of staging international opera, she could easily have taken the opposite course and followed in the footsteps of the BNOC.[46] After all, the idea that the national opera house should be staging opera in English translation was still strong after the Second World War: so much so that the first performances at Covent Garden funded by the new Arts Council were also in English. In 1925, singers trained in England were simply not considered as good as those schooled on the Continent. Courtauld's quest for foreign authenticity and world-class standards led her to employ the very best international singers and world-class conductors: Bruno Walter and Robert Heger were her primary conductors in the first year, with Vincenzo Bellezza as conductor for the Italian season. She adopted a policy of employing the world's most famous and expensive stars: this was seen as an effort to emulate the pre-war artistic glories of international grand seasons that were nostalgically recalled.[47] In adopting this policy Courtauld demonstrated the same anti-protectionist opinion as her husband; but in her case it led to heavy criticism: not only was she adopting an antiquated strategy but also one contrary to the protectionist fervour of the time.[48] Having made the decision to produce international opera there were many other factors that followed: the high cost of employing foreign stars (who would not have been prepared to sing in English) dictated the seat prices.

[46] Beecham's English Opera, Carl Rosa and the BNOC were the most frequent opera companies at Covent Garden during this time; see Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 766–71.

[47] 'Descriptions of the scene last Monday emphasize, in an almost parrot like scream of desperate regret for an irrevocable past, its similarity to corresponding occasions in the good old days before the war'; Dyneley Hussey, *Saturday Review,* 23 May 1925.

[48] 'The best musical thought in England today frankly deplores the star system. At the "Old Vic" there are no stars. At this year's season of the British National Opera at Covent Garden likewise there were no stars'; Neil Forbes Grant, 'The Curbing of Personality', *Atlantic Monthly,* December 1923, 762. By 1927 Courtauld was forced to reconsider her employment policy after criticisms in the press about her employing only one English 'star'. In response, she made an announcement revealing the nationality of the singers and her employment policy: 'Six out of the eight Valkyries are English and so are two of the three Rhine Maidens'; *The Times,* 28 April 1927. While Courtauld was forced to demonstrate that she employed UK singers, her husband was more open in his anti-protectionist stance. In the days following his wife's death at the end of 1931, Samuel wrote a passionate attack on protectionism as applied to the arts: 'It is intolerable that in a so called civilized country music, or ideas in any form should be classed with material imports and subjected to restrictions impeding their untrammelled flow. England makes herself a laughing stock by such measures, which could not be bettered if they were expressly designed to advertise that "inferiority complex" of which Sir John McEwen spoke at the meeting of the Incorporated Society of Musicians last night'; *The Times,* 4 January 1932.

In terms of repertoire, Courtauld kept the same format used by the GOS. The season was split into two: the more fashionable German season, followed by an Italian/French season.[49] This suited her in employment terms: the appropriate nationalities could be hired for each half of the season. But for subsequent seasons she discontinued the practice, staging a mixture of German, French and Italian opera throughout the season. Courtauld also chose to break with tradition and publish the complete programme for the entire season in advance, something the GOS had not done; but she was not able to alter practices sufficiently to be able to confirm that the performance for which a ticket was purchased would be that of the opera advertised.[50]

Courtauld's ticket prices were identical to the previous year: Table 2.1 shows how much a full house would have generated in her first year, an identical amount to that taken in 1924.[51] She decided to market the premium tickets to subscribers and issued a prospectus for her first season; this was the method used by the GOS and previous impresarios, one in which the advance box and stalls subscriptions effectively covered the cost of the expensive soloists, who had to be booked in advance. The premium prices (for the most part received upfront and in full) for the boxes, the orchestra stalls, stalls circle and balcony stalls could generate as much as 84% of total seat revenues. This figure has been calculated using the data from Table 2.1: total revenue from boxes, stalls and balcony stalls; £1,397 13s represents 84% of the total revenue of £1,661 6s. Thus 51% of the seats (1,046) generated the vast proportion of the revenue.

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[49] In terms of the box office, Wagner was 'now more popular than Shakespeare', 'Music, the Man in the White Spats', *Spectator,* 27 June 1925, 1043. See also *Sackbut,* June 1926, 314, 'Thus far, Wagner stands not only to gratify our need for pleasurable stimulus, but as mentor and guide; as old Everyman would have it "in our most need to go by our side"'.

[50] One surprising anachronistic legacy that remained commonplace was that of changing the opera performed on a particular night at short notice. When the booking opened on 4 May 1925, the classified advertisement in *The Times* found it necessary to announce: 'Owing to many enquiries, the Management have decided to publish the complete German programme, and whilst making every endeavour to avoid changes, sell tickets at the entire risk of the purchasers, and under no circumstances can they be cancelled or changed. The same rule will apply to the Italian Season in due course.'

[51] Prices for this season were around double that charged by the BNOC: boxes were 9 guineas a night, compared to £4 10s for the BNOC performances; orchestral stalls were £1 5s compared to 15s.

		SEATS	TICKET PRICES			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit Tier	6	24	9	9		56	14	
Grand Tier	35	140	9	9		330	15	
Upper Tier	11	44	4	4		46	4	
Upper Tier	11	44	4	4		46	4	
Gallery Tier	0							
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	304	304	1	5		380		
Orchestra Stalls	182	182	1	5		227	10	
Stalls Circle	74	74	1	2	6	83	5	
Stalls Circle	128	128	1			128		
Balcony Stalls	56	56		18	6	51	16	
Balcony Stalls	50	50		18	6	46	5	
Amphitheatre	111	111		12		66	12	
Amphitheatre	211	211		8	6	89	13	
Amphitheatre	64	64		5	9	18	8	
Gallery Tier	600	600		3		90		
TOTAL	2,032					£1,661	6s	

Table 2.1: *Lohengrin*, Covent Garden, Courtauld, 25 May 1925.[52]

An essential element of the maintenance of these premium prices was the exclusivity and privacy associated with the subscription system. The anachronistic practices of the time helped this exclusivity: the subscription price was never published; it was only available on application through a season prospectus from the box office. During the 1925 season, individual seat prices were not advertised in the press, despite this being normal practice for other theatres and opera companies.[53] Courtauld was happy to keep many of the other traditions intact. For example, the programmes marked which part of the house you were sitting in: pink for the cheaper parts; cream, and thicker paper, for the boxes and stalls (and at 6d rather than 3d). The newspapers still reported lists of subscribers together with a description of their

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[52] Ticket price information taken from the programme for 25 May 1925 (author's collection).

[53] The Carl Rosa Opera Company were holding a season of Grand Opera in English at the same time in London; see listings in *The Times*, 16 June 1925.

dresses and tiaras, also noting who was in the royal box.[54] Despite its antiquity, this model had the advantage of stability of funding, offering as it did both an early measure of the season's support and upfront cash.[55]

The price structure had two parts: the premium seats represented only half those in the house, with the other half available very cheaply. By keeping the wide range of prices, Courtauld was able to maintain very low priced tickets, the premium seats effectively subsidising them. While this system had worked in the past, the interior of the theatre had changed; there were now only six pit-tier boxes and 22 upper-tier boxes (this made a total of 63 boxes, including 35 grand-tier boxes) when there had previously been 121. As a result, the proportion of total revenue that could be generated by subscription sales of boxes was significantly lower. The situation was further complicated by the system of agency ticket sales; the lack of central control, with tickets held at various locations around London, meant that it was almost impossible to fill the house. Right from the outset Courtauld was faced with a situation in which the cheap, amphitheatre seats sold easily, while the expensive subscriptions did not; this in turn generated complaints about the inflexible and exclusive subscription system and the out-dated design of the opera house.[56]

The two models of opera, English and international, also had different dress codes. English opera did not require formal dress; in 1910 Beecham had included a notice, 'evening dress is not compulsory in any part of the house'.[57] However, the international model continued to require evening dress, which meant that many otherwise keen opera goers were excluded because they did not own the correct outfit.[58] The tickets for Courtauld's 1926 season had a dress instruction written directly

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[54] For an example of this practice, see the Court and Social column, *The Times*, 9 June 1926.
[55] Paul Rodmell, *Opera in the British Isles, 1875–1918* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), 79.
[56] W.J. Turner, 'The Coming Opera Season', *New Statesman,* 13 March 1926, 677.
[57] *The Times,* 14 May 1910. London audiences were becoming accustomed to this idea: *Illustrated London News* (6 May 1922) printed a picture of 'A Bolshevist "Gala Night" in Moscow: a Cap and Shirt Sleeves Audience at the Opera House'.
[58] 'At this time of year many people with a taste for music, and many more with a taste for the fashion, go to Covent Garden Opera…. Not the London polo grounds in June – nor Ascot itself – concentrate the pomp and the grace of the London season to so fine a pictorial and social effect as do the grand sweep of the tiers, the pink and dull gold of the decoration, the glowing parterre and the glittering boxes of Covent Garden'; 'Opera and the Audience', *The Times,* 11 June 1925.

on them, 'evening dress a requirement'.[59] A report in *Vogue* in 1924 decried the fact that chocolates were for sale in the stalls at Covent Garden, claiming that it discouraged the wearing of the 'best' clothes.[60] Courtauld also determined that there should be no Saturday performances or matinées, a strange decision given that other opera ventures had both. In previous seasons, weekend performances had been advertised at cheaper prices: it had long been customary for the wealthy to spend their weekends out of town. Her decision seems foolhardy, since such times would have presented an opportunity for the less wealthy to attend, and this was the audience she was trying to target.

The first press statement was published in July 1925, at the end of the first season, before the results had been analysed: it offered a commentary on the results and promised more detail to follow.[61] The statement was issued in Blois's name. He was clear from the outset that the LOS was fully aware that international opera could not be self-supporting; it was trying to ascertain the support needed for the project and assess the likely costs. Somewhat surprisingly, the statement opens with a confirmation that the LOS was not making any profits: indeed, it were anxious to dispel rumours of profits and stated that there was a 'steady substantial loss' through the season. The organization was not, however, discouraged and was proud to announce an increase in bookings on 1924, a positive sign that there was support for the national opera house. Blois described this as a 'fairly widespread and reviving demand for international opera' and was confident about the future and the re-establishment of international seasons on a 'more or less permanent basis'. The statement contained a few details: the house was full to capacity on only four nights, and only four productions had covered their costs.

As well as making it clear that he was not making profits, Blois was anxious also to offer some answers to criticism about production standards and repertoire. The LOS

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[59] For the 1926 season the programmes included a notice: 'It is obligatory that Evening Dress be worn in the Boxes, Orchestra Stalls and Circle Seats'. 'Sitting in the stalls [were men] in shabby tweed coats', grumbled Melba in 1919; Dame Nellie Melba, *Melodies and Memories* (London: Butterworth, 1925), 303. Dress requirements are also reported in the *Graphic*, 14 May 1927.
[60] 'Special Notice Opera at Covent Garden: Notes on Some Productions of the British National Opera Company's Present Season', *Vogue,* May 1924.
[61] 'Future of Grand Opera: Results of Covent Garden Season', *The Times*, 8 July 1925.

was clear that it was focussed on musical standards and thus had no money for new costumes or scenery in the first year. The company was apologetic about its concentration on the standard repertoire, but said it was unable to be more adventurous because it had made a late start in planning the season, and also because it wanted to restrict losses. Blois describes how the more adventurous productions had been the most unprofitable. Popular operas had been included as insurance against large losses, and the results showed that they had served their purpose. For this reason, the LOS wanted to provide an analysis of the level of loss on each opera, so that the public could see why popular operas needed to be included if losses were to be managed. Blois promised that the next statement would include this analysis.

The second statement, dated October 1925, offered an increased level of detail, but stopped short of a profit and loss statement, which would have been standard practice for other companies.[62] Instead the statement provided evidence of the proportion of seats sold in each area of the house and demonstrated trends in popularity. Blois showed improved statistics for German and Italian opera (Italian bookings increased by 80%, and German by 30%), the relative expense of new productions and the ranking of operas in terms of popularity, cost and profitability. The statement also provided an analysis of costs: 30% for soloists, 21%, for the orchestra, 14%, for the chorus and corps de ballet and 35% overhead. The ranking of operas demonstrated how performances of the 'cheapest' opera, *Rigoletto,* provided the second highest profit, and how the six least profitable operas (all German) averaged losses five times that of the five top profit generators (predominantly Italian). This advantage of Italian opera over German was further broken down to show how the orchestra for German opera cost 75% more and the chorus 40% more.

There was a growing understanding that some operas, described as 'more ambitious … musically speaking', would always be performed at a loss: *Elektra* and (perhaps more surprising) *Andrea Chenier* were identified as the 'problematic' operas in the 1925 season and were excluded from the calculations altogether because of their extreme unprofitability. For my purposes the most important details are that: on

[62] 'Covent Garden Opera: Another Season Next Spring', *The Times*, 31 October 1925.

average, bookings were 78% (this ranged from 58% of the boxes to 96% of the amphitheatre and gallery); that an overall booking of 94% would have covered expenses; and that an improvement of 10% in overall bookings would have halved the loss. The equations are tantalising, inviting calculation of the amount the season would have cost Courtauld; but such sums are based on a number of assumptions. The takings of the season are easily estimated and are included in Table 2.2.

There were 40 nights of opera that year, so the total takings would have been a maximum of £1,661 6s 6d x 40 = £66,453. One of the most significant facts included in the second statement was the small take-up of subscribers; only 35% of boxes were subscribed and only 5% of stalls seats. Blois revealed that if 93% of the boxes had been sold under advance subscription (and other sales unaltered), costs would have been covered. *The Times* published a response to Courtauld's statement on 2 November 1925. It welcomed the frank analysis, the transparency being a welcome change to previous messages of blame for poor subscriptions and attendance. But the article expressed despair at the inability of the English to resolve its opera problem when other houses around the world appeared so successful. Its conclusion was that the prospect of establishing international opera on a sound financial footing was remote: the only way of continuing was to find some sort of 'bounty' (either from public or private funds), as was the case in America and much of Europe.

A shorter statement appeared in December 1926, and a final one in January 1927. These pieces contain less financial analysis (although they offer hope of reducing losses) and develop two arguments that are repeated: a challenge to the public conscience to support the venture (a theme that was dangerously close to the unpopular blame strategy of the past); and a suggestion that increasing box subscriptions was the only solution. The *Weekly Dispatch* on 9 January 1927 commented:

> It may be revealed that last year's deficit in the Covent Garden opera season was reduced to a figure that will not too seriously distress the wealthy people behind it. Mrs Samuel Courtauld is a moving spirit – and as the loss of 1925 was about twice that of 1926, this speaks well for the artistic attractions of the performance. Of course it would be more pleasant to make the accounts balance and more subscribers are asked for. One can have a box for every night of the season for £336.

	TICKET REVENUE					OCCUPANCY SEASON’S REVENUE		
	Total £	s	d	£	S	%	£	s
BOXES								
Pit Tier	56	14						
Grand Tier	330	15						
Upper Tier	46	4						
Upper Tier	46	4						
Gallery Tier								
Total Box Revenue				479	17	58%	278	6
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	330							
Orchestra Stalls	227	10						
Stalls Circle	83	5						
Stalls Circle	128							
Total Stalls Revenue				818	15	76%	622	5
Balcony Stalls	51	16						
Balcony Stalls	46	5						
Total Balcony Stalls				98	1	92%	90	4
Amphitheatre	66	12						
Amphitheatre	89	13						
Amphitheatre	18	8						
Gallery Tier	90							
Total Amphitheatre and Gallery				264	13	96%	254	16
TOTAL							£1,244	16s
OVER 40 NIGHTS OF THE SEASON							£49,792	

Table 2.2: 1925 Season Takings calculated from LOS Press Statement, October 1925

Courtauld became increasingly insistent that if she reinstated the 28 pit-tier boxes (which had been done away with before the War) and obtained subscriptions for them, then she could balance her books. Her conclusion, that the only way forward was through the archaic box subscription system, represented a failure to move with the times or to live up to the promise of the early statements. They met with unfavourable comments in the press. The *Sunday Herald* on 9 January 1927:

> If the Courtauld family who are at the back of the London Opera Syndicate grew tired of losing money it is more than likely that other wealthy people

> will crop up in their place…. I do not doubt the purity of the Courtauld's motives, still less their genuine love of music, but one can have just as much fun running a couple of opera seasons, even if they lose money, as in buying a Gainsborough which may be more expensive.

There were two events that served to make Courtauld's project more challenging. The first was a high profile campaign to form a new National Opera Trust solely in support of English opera. Its primary objective was to save the failing BNOC, thus in many ways in direct competition with Courtauld's international opera.[63] The launch took place in March 1925, just as Courtauld was working towards her first season, and received much press coverage in its efforts to raise £500,000.[64] The manifesto, published as a full page advertisement in *The Times* on 11 December 1925, drew on the same moral ethos as Courtauld, suggesting that support for opera could represent 'a great civilizing, regenerative and stabilising force' in society.[65] However, the scheme was unsuccessful and stuttered to a halt within a year; a very small amount was collected.

The second event was more significant: the 1926 season opened in the midst of the National Strike.[66] On 12 June 1926, the *Illustrated London News* reported that:

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[63] The title of the proposed group indicated that it intended to set up a body similar in nature to the National Trust. This was not a new idea. There had been many previous schemes for English National Opera groups: that proposed by Sullivan and D'Oyly Carte at the new Royal English Opera House in 1891; a 1898 petition presented to the London County Council; Galloway's scheme from 1902 (which resulted in a parliamentary white paper on the subject with information gathered from around the world on various funding schemes for opera, see 'National Opera', 7 April 1903); Stanford's scheme of 1908; and Beecham's various schemes including plans for building of a 'national opera house'; see Eric Walter White, *The Rise of English Opera* (London: John Lehmann, 1951).

[64] 'The opera-going public still clings to the intermittent privilege of hearing opera performed in the language in which it was written and sung by artists of European reputation'; *The Times*, 28 March 1925.

[65] 'What I should like to know is the name of the master mind that produced the circular recently issued by the National Opera Trust … the enthusiasm of the writer of it has led him somewhat astray on one or two points. Writing for an English audience he has naturally thought "education" one of the safest cards to play – as if any intelligent person who loves opera for its own sake cares whether it is "educative" or not! What such a person wants from music is beauty; "education" can be left to take care of itself. The vision of the author of the circular, however sweeps far beyond mere education of the secondary school type. He sees music a great civilizing, regenerative and stabilising force. It has not escaped his eagle eye that lately "from the nature of man's being, emotional intensity has developed with equal or greater rapidity" than it ought to have done, and the "developments" being "without Guidance" have provoked or stirred up (the born stylist will be recognized in the alternative verb) in many the dangerous spirit of restlessness and discontent that is paralysing us today'; Ernest Newman, 'The Opera Problem Again', *Sunday Times*, 20 December 1925.

[66] See also Horace Shipp, who wrote that the 'seismographic' effect of the strike on Londoners had no effect on the audiences who, even with no obvious means of getting home, all appeared to have 'a devouring passion' for the music; *Sackbut*, June 1926.

> The present season of Grand Opera has been, so far, extraordinarily successful, and must be judged on the whole to be the best artistically as it has been the best financially since 1914…. This year the opening night on May 10th took place in the middle of the general strike, and more un-favourable circumstances could hardly have been imagined. Nevertheless, Covent Garden was practically full.

The 1926 season also had competition: Diaghilev was presenting his Russian ballet season at Her Majesty's Theatre at the same time. Neither of these events seem to have affected ticket sales to any great degree. Courtauld had made adjustments to her price model, varying the prices for different performances and publishing the variations in the press. The most successful nights of the 1925 season had featured Maria Jeritza singing *Tosca*: public demand had made it clear that certain evenings could achieve a near full house at higher prices. Despite the huge nightly rate that Fyodor Chaliapin commanded (reported to be as much as £750), Courtauld calculated that it was financially savvy to hire him for three nights.[67] Revenue from one night starring Chaliapin is included as Table 2.3. She also staged Melba's farewell on 8 June 1926, a Royal Gala performance that coincided with the first court of the season. Prices for Chaliapin were a third higher than usual, twelve guineas for a box instead of nine, and two guineas instead of £1/5/– for a stalls seat; at these prices a full house would have grossed some £2,740, and prices were raised even further for the Melba farewell, where a full house would have grossed more than £3,390.[68] These figures are reproduced in Table 2.4. Although the figures are, at best, estimates (not all prices were listed as some must have already sold out, and some subscriptions would have been presold at normal prices), they do reveal that these nights could have grossed £1,100 and £1,400 more than regular occasions.

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[67] The decision to hire Chaliapin must have been taken relatively late, as there is no mention of him in *The Times* 'Box Office Arrangements' 29 April 1926, and the season started on 11 May. He made his Covent Garden debut on 25 May and then appeared on 28 and 31 May; *The Times,* 27 May 1926.

[68] The Melba farewell was staged on 8 June 1926, and the prices (apart from box prices, which were presumably sold out) are listed in *The Times*, 31 May and 1 June 1926. The farewell was attended by the King and Queen, thus warranting full coverage in the court pages of *The Times* the next day, including details of what was worn and who was in attendance. 'The queen wore a mauve brocade dress, richly embroidered with diamante': *The Times,* 9 June 1926. While Courtauld is mentioned, it is only within the list of other attendees 'in her usual box'.

		SEATS	TICKET PRICES			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit Tier	6	24	12	12		75	12	
Grand Tier	35	140	12	12		441		
Upper Tier	11	44	12	12		138	12	
Upper Tier	11	44	12	12		138	12	
Gallery Tier	0	0						
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	304	304	2	2		638	8	
Orchestra Stalls	182	182	2	2		382	4	
Stalls Circle	74	74	1	15		129	10	
Stalls Circle	128	128	1	10		192		
Balcony Stalls	56	56	1	5		70		
Balcony Stalls	50	50	1	5		62	10	
Amphitheatre	111	111		20		111		
Amphitheatre	211	211		15		158	5	
Amphitheatre	64	64	10	6		33	12	
Gallery Tier	600	600	5	9		172	10	
TOTAL		2,032				£2,743	15s	

Table 2.3: *Il barbiere*, Covent Garden, Courtauld, 8 May 1926.[69]

Conclusion

From 1925, Courtauld was successful in encouraging attendance from a wide demographic, increasing the popularity of opera among the middle classes. Her publication of the financial results was welcome because it informed public discussion: other changes that she made also indicate her efforts to widen the audience base. But her brand of altruism was ultimately unsuccessful because she failed to make more radical changes to the financial model; she was not versatile enough on the length of season, on dress codes, touring, matinées or ticket pricing; she failed to make changes that fully reflected the new landscape in ownership and custody of opera; and she

[69] Prices taken from a programme for 8 May 1926 (author's collection).

		SEATS	TICKET PRICES			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit Tier	6	24	12	12		75	12	
Grand Tier	35	140	12	12		441		
Upper Tier	11	44	12	12		138	12	
Upper Tier	11	44	12	12		138	12	
Gallery Tier	0							
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	304	304	3	3		957	12	
Orchestra Stalls	182	182	3	3		573	6	
Stalls Circle	74	74	2	12		194	5	
Stalls Circle	128	128	2	7		300	15	
Balcony Stalls	56	56	1	11	6	88	12	
Balcony Stalls	50	50	1	11	6	78	13	
Amphitheatre	111	111		12		66		
Amphitheatre	211	211		8	6	89		
Amphitheatre	64	64		7	6	24		
Gallery Tier	600	600		7	6	225		
TOTAL	2,032					£3,391	19	

Table 2.4: Melba's Farewell Gala, Covent Garden, 8 June 1926.[70]

gravitated back towards the anachronistic pricing models of the past, causing her to be over-reliant on the subscription system.[71] Her published statistics for 1925 – occupancy was on average 78% while 94% would have been required in order to cover costs – are indicative of the fundamental flaw in her pricing model. The key performance indicators employed in Annual Reviews today at Covent Garden are to balance the books, to fill the house and to find new audiences: in terms of these measures she achieved a moderate degree of success despite the tribulations of the era.

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[70] Prices taken from *The Times*: 29 May, 31 May, and 1 June 1926.

[71] '[Opera's] supporters being prepared to pay fabulous sums or endure untold discomforts to obtain it, a logically minded person like myself is puzzled by the fact that only for two months in the year in London are they gratified. The law of supply and demand stands on its head and waves its legs waggishly'; Horace Shipp, *English Review*, June 1927, 756.

Courtauld's evangelist endeavours for the dissemination of opera, which stemmed from her religious values, were thwarted because in her chosen field of endeavour, financial and cultural value was not easily separated. In early 1928, she distanced herself from her operatic venture and, as mentioned earlier, spent the last three years of her life establishing a series of cheaply-priced subscription concerts, the Courtauld-Sargent series.[72] Her change in direction could be attributed to many factors: the press criticism; the level of personal loss sustained; the energy and work required to keep the venture going; perhaps also a more general disillusionment with the world of opera. By comparison, her new social venture of instrumental concerts could operate at a much lower cost, allowing her to focus on the introduction of new audiences to serious music without the complications that opera involved. In short, her concert series offered better opportunities to pursue altruistic projects and find new audiences from groups such as teachers, shop workers and organized labour movements. Her husband continued the concert series in her memory after her premature death from cancer in 1931.

Hers was above all a Romantic endeavour, but the vision of sharing opera with the masses was flawed: her solutions to the basic financial questions matched her philosophy but not the economic climate and democratic values of the time. She was, however, the first of a series of individuals who tried to preserve opera as part of the country's national heritage. And in this endeavour she was successful – there was indeed public support for that part of her vision. There was also support for her efforts to place the financial results of the enterprise in the public domain. My analysis suggests, however, that her business plan was unsound for several reasons. First, she wanted to provide elite opera to the 'common listener' and fundamentally this was not possible. In part, it was hindered by the very architecture of the opera house, but also its very ethos was unrealistic. Secondly, while she eschewed opera in English, she

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[72] Aldous describes how Courtauld's second project was in part inspired by Schnabel, who had told her of a worker's concert society in Germany, and partly by the ideas of Virginia Woolf in relation to 'the Common Reader': see Aldous, *Tunes of Glory,* 58; Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925).

failed to appreciate that some of the elements of the business models that English opera seasons had adopted were relevant to her.

Despite all this, Courtauld's achievements were considerable. She succeeded in re-establishing international opera at Covent Garden, and proved that there was a public desire to preserve the institution. But there many more changes needed to be made to the financial model before a workable solution could be found – changes that the next Covent Garden management team were able to bring about. And so, while Courtauld was welcomed as a Maecenas, her operatic seasons are not remembered and in some ways her efforts were a retrograde step: by restricting her efforts to a model so close to the old GOS system she limited the potential for new audience members. Lord Wittenham, the only surviving member of the GOS, whose regular commentary in the press on opera offered clarity on the position, commented on the operatic landscape at the end of the 1927 season, 'as regards the future, the barometer stands at change'.

Appendix to Chapter Two:

'The Opera Season at Covent Garden', *Vogue,* May 1929, 48.
By Mrs Samuel Courtauld[73]

I have a certain nervousness in putting on paper my ideas about the much discussed "opera in England." It is now a topic of daily conversation. One can hardly take up a paper without seeing an allusion to the subject. A propaganda leaflet on the same theme by an eminent conductor will drop out of concert programmes. I ask myself "from what point of view can I contribute anything interesting to this apparently absorbing topic"? It can only be from that of "a man in the street" but one who has heard opera in all the principal cities of Europe and America since childhood and who in addition has had the experience of running it for three years at Covent Garden.

Let us consider the recent history of opera in London. The activities of the Grand Opera Syndicate which had given seasons of opera for many years before the war, were suspended in 1914. In 1919 to 1923 Sir Thomas Beecham (once in conjunction with the Grand Opera Syndicate) gave operatic performances in English for periods lasting from eight to ten weeks, and in 1922 and 1923 the B.N.O.C. tried seasons of a similar length also without financial success. In 1924, the international opera season for the first time since the war was revived by the Grand Opera Syndicate under the chairmanship of the late Mr Harry Higgins. Herr Walter with many of the best singers of Germany then gave us three cycles of "the Ring" and other operas, and this was then followed by an Italian season; but the opera going habit had been broken and the receipts were unsatisfactory. At the end of that season, Mr Higgins decided to retire for good from opera management. In February 1925, the London Opera Syndicate was formed of which I was chairman, and for three years it gave international seasons to audiences ever increasing and at last overflowing. In 1928 the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate took the matter in hand with, I believe equally satisfactory results. Now with this recapitulation of facts which many already know may seem superfluous but I want to

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[73] I have not sought to amend the journalistic vernacular employed by Courtauld in this article.

compare post-war and pre-war audiences. I am not going to take the point of view much voiced by some publications that pre-war opera audiences were more fashionable. I think that this might be debated today, though it does not seem important to me; but I have heard no one state that post-war audiences are less intelligent, and I suggest with great confidence having seen a good deal of both that the average of earnest and sincere music lovers in the post-war audience is higher and the spirit fresher and keener. Keener because not many members of the full houses go because it is "the thing to do" fresher because until 1924 the men and girls from eighteen to twenty-six owing to the war conditions and restriction of foreign travel even when peace was declared had never the opportunity of hearing opera in "the grand style" as did their fathers and mothers. To many of them the post-war performance of "the Ring" in 1924 must have come as a musical revelation and operas which were hackneyed to pre-war opera goers were full of charm and freshness to a large number of the new audiences. But successive seasons must take the edge off that freshness and in an era when the younger intelligentsia take an acute interest in all modern movements not only in music but also in literature and art those in the operatic saddle can only expect to retain and increase this interest by the high quality of the performances and the production of new opera.

But this costs money. Past experience however shows that this country has never lacked people willing to give large sums in support of opera; in consequence the commercial side has seldom been the first consideration and we must hope that those who give it us now and in the future will make operatic experiments even though these turn out to be brilliant failures from the commercial point of view.

Now this brings us to the question of whether the standard of opera may be improved in this country by permanency that is to say by a company giving performances from six to ten months in London as in the principal European capitals. I will not discuss the six months' season in America as their singers are not all home products but collected from every part of the world in the same way as we have done for our most successful operatic seasons.

Many people talk as if every performance given in Vienna Berlin Milan or any other continental city is of necessity superior to any given in London but do they

consider the conditions under which they have listened to those performances? Usually on holiday in spring or summer after some charming days on the open air, and in quite different a mood from that induced by a tiring day in business or the "cold mutton" cares of the daily round. I have been told of a magnificent performance of "Falstaff" on a great continental occasion and have been able to point out that the cast and conductor were the same as those heard at Covent Garden earlier in the year *including the women* who had been severely criticised by the very person now expressing enjoyment of their performance.

Some talk of ensemble with a capital E. Do they remember that each large continental opera house has three or four conductors? If they stay in the town for long enough they find that the cast for the same opera varies very considerably for each performance and there is frequently a change of conductor. They will also find that from time to time guests are brought in from foreign opera houses to sing the principal *rôles.* Compare this ensemble with that of London. Bruno Walter and Heger are entering on their sixth season. Their orchestra has been composed of practically the same men during this whole period no deputies have been permitted for rehearsals. The chorus has been built up on the same lines and the roles sung by the same singers year after year, including many of our native artists. Vincenzo Bellezza is starting his fourth Italian season with the same orchestra and with artists many of whom have frequently sung under his baton both in America and Europe. I may also point out that most of the German singers come from the conductors' own opera house. Is then our ensemble really C3 when compared with all the other capitals? I am not satisfied with operatic conditions in this country but I assert from personal experience that it is possible any time in any of the principal Continental cities to hear as bad a performance as a bad one at Covent Garden.

Consider a little whether the enthusiasm that supported these international seasons before the war under Nikisch, Richter and others and which now fills Covent Garden would be quite so fervent over a long period which would of necessity include many bad and mediocre performances.

Consider great operatic works; where do we look for these? In Germany, Italy France and Russia. Can we point to one English opera in our continental repertoire? Is

it to be our ambition to make our native singers compete year in and year out with those who sing in their own tradition the operas of their own country?
We have certain British artists who are sought for by foreign opera houses and who sing international seasons *but our grand opera repertoire is perforce international until it is increased by the composers of this country.* Its best performances will be given by foreigners and London has always been accustomed to the best and does not tolerate gladly anything else. Musical London is very exacting: it will say “this is an excellent performance, considering….” Once or twice but to a succession of such performances it does not give out continued support.

English singers as a body can never excel in opera without a large repertoire of first class original English works with which they can create a tradition of their own. My feeling is, rightly or wrongly that English singers as a whole cannot give the best performances of foreign operas and for this reason those who want the best must look to such seasons as Covent Garden has given them or else go abroad for them.
Whatever may be the development of English opera in the future I hope that amid a good deal of loose talk it will not be forgotten that for a good many decades we have had an Opera House where some of the best performances in the world have been given and which has bestowed a coveted cachet on all artists singing there; and that we shall not only remember with gratitude the efforts of Herr Bruno Walter to revive its past glories but also that he and his colleagues have set a standard which we shall be fortunate to maintain.

Chapter Three

BBC Opera 1927-1930:

A Bankrupt State Subsidizing a Bankrupt Trade

Introduction

This case study investigates another dimension of the world of opera: how a group of individuals tried to resolve UK opera's financial instability through a shift towards state funding/ownership. During the severe economic crisis and political unrest of the late 1920s and early 1930s, opera received a subsidy from the Socialist government: the subsidy was significant in many ways and deserves close scrutiny. My case study is spread over two chapters: the first considers the three years leading up to the grant of the subsidy in 1930; the second reviews events during the time the subsidy was in place and why it came to an abrupt end in 1933. Both investigate the personalities and motivations of the individuals involved in the creation of the grant and offer a wider context during this time of significant change in the world of opera.

My previous chapters have shown how there was a widespread belief that opera could no longer survive the harsh market realities of exclusively private ownership. From one perspective, it seemed inevitable that there would be an attempt to negotiate the shift from private to state support, emulating European models. Such suggestions were nothing new, but while British perceptions of opera as the plaything of the wealthy remained strong, public funding was problematic for any government, especially for the new Socialist regime. The situation was aggravated by the severity of contemporary economic problems.[1] Labour had become the primary opposition to the Conservative party, and although there had been a minority Labour government briefly in power earlier in the decade, the (also minority) Labour government of 1929 was the first with sufficient power to make important social changes. The fact that the Socialist

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[1] *The Great Depression of the 1930s,* ed. Nicholas Crafts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929–33* (London: Macmillan, 1967); Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); and Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

government selected opera as a worthy cause for reform was certainly curious, and attracted much criticism. However, the individuals who form the subject of this chapter were able to find a method that they thought would ensure the survival of opera and overcome the practical difficulties of the proposed funding structure.

These individuals had the foresight to see the benefits that resulted from shifts in power and wealth away from the upper echelons of society (the circumstances, in others words, that had contributed to bringing Labour to power) had made opera no longer viable under existing financial models; such shifts were indicative of the continuing increase in the cultural aspirations of the middle classes. This insight resulted in the belief that increased disposable wealth among the middle classes could be tapped to provide the solution to opera's perilous finances. The government were generating a healthy new income stream from money paid for a public service, the contributions to the BBC licence fee, a revenue stream that, in general perceptions, lay somewhere between state and public: not a tax, but still money in the public domain. The BBC therefore became looked on as both a source of funds that could provide the solution to the opera problem and as a medium (broadcasting) though which the wider dissemination of opera could be achieved, an ideal 'home' for opera.

This chapter considers the efforts of a group of individuals who came together to try to finance opera using BBC revenues, thus hoping to establish a new model that ensured the survival of UK opera. The group was interesting not least because the individuals came from a variety of backgrounds. Its major figures were Sir John Reith (1889-1971), Director-General of the BBC and Philip Snowden (1864-1937), Chancellor of the Exchequer in Ramsay MacDonald's government, acting together with his wife Ethel (1881-1951). Ethel Snowden's motivation to promote opera is fascinating: she had played a significant part politically as a Socialist and campaigner for women's suffrage, and was appointed one of the first Governors of the BBC in 1927. After Courtauld had departed from Covent Garden, her Managing Director, Eustace Blois (1877-1933), had remained in charge of operations and had been joined by Frederick Szarvasy (1875-1948). Szarvasy was a city financier with an interest in opera: he had set up the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate (CGOS) with plans to transform the funding of opera. With this in mind, Szarvasy had recruited Ethel Snowden to the board of the

CGOS: she was ideally suited because of her social aspirations to widen cultural enjoyment. As the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a governor of the BBC, she brought many opportunities to the table.[2]

The group also included Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961); already a significant figure in the world of opera because of his pre 1914 opera ventures, but now even more so because of the initial success of the Imperial League of Opera (ILO), founded in 1927. The ILO was the subject of much press coverage and contemporary discussion and its importance increased considerably between 1927 and 1930 because, although it had failed to produce any opera, it had accumulated considerable funds that, in turn, assumed a place of strategic importance in plans for the future of opera. Beecham's complex personality was, however, at odds with some of the others concerned, and he proved unwilling to accept their ideas or work within a team.[3]

The efforts to put funding in place had important side effects: funding of this type would also infer that opera policy should be subject to an element of government control. This was a new and important development. For the Socialist government of the time, it was important that any new government policy on opera would offer the art form to wider audiences than before and break the legacies of the past. It might have seemed logical therefore to offer the grant to Carl Rosa or to Lillian Baylis, both of whose objectives were more aligned to that policy. Certainly it was important that the grant benefited opera groups that were looking to perform to wider audiences: most obviously, opera in English, opera with more affordable ticket prices and opera in

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[2] Szarvasy also appointed Alfred Clarke, who represented the Gramophone Company, but whose contributions towards reform were not significant.

[3] In many ways the cultural reform project undertaken by this diverse group should be considered in relation to D.L. LeMahieu's study of prominent individuals. This involves a review of those who were noticeable in their critique of the arts: 'progressives' who were motivated to redefine cultural hierarchies and raise aesthetic standards. LeMahieu focuses on the changes in relationship between supply and demand in the commercial world of twentieth-century mass media, and the attempts by various entrepreneurs to capitalize on the possibilities of entertainment using new technologies. Public perceptions were that these innovations would inevitably lead to a lowering of cultural standards, but despite such hostility there emerged several 'progressives' who sought to use mass media in ways that raised aesthetic standards. LeMahieu includes Reith in his group, along with the typographer Stanley Morison, the filmmaker John Grierson and Frank Pick, the British transport administrator. Although LeMahieu's study does not extend to opera, the individuals share many similarities in terms of their transformative vision of the art world: see D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 138-77.

theatres outside London. To facilitate this, it became apparent that the grant needed to be paid to a group that comprised a variety of opera interests, not just to Covent Garden. Even though by now, as we shall see, Covent Garden was performing English opera and touring outside London, this was not perceived as having a wide enough remit, particularly when there were other worthy groups in existence.

The BBC's Opera Policy files, held in the BBC's Written Archive Centre (BBC WAC), contain details of early negotiations for a scheme by which the BBC would become involved in the production of opera in 1927.[4] Although those negotiations – between H.V. Higgins (the chairman of the old Grand Opera Syndicate [GOS], which had been producing opera at Covent Garden until 1924) and Lord Reith – failed, they were important in the trajectory towards public funding, since they involved some of the features subsequently adopted by John Maynard Keynes in the formation of the Arts Council.[5] The files reveal Higgins's increasingly irate correspondence with Reith and their inability to agree on the value of broadcast opera: Higgins' involvement with opera ceased after 1927.

Szarvasy, as chairman of the CGOS, brought new ideas of restructuring finance; many hoped that, in the same way as in other sectors of the economy, new modern financial solutions could be found for opera. His experience as a negotiator and in complex corporate dealings meant that, compared to the behaviour of others involved in opera, right up until the end, he carried out his duties with great dignity.[6] Together with Blois in 1928 and 1929 he looked at cost-cutting opportunities and various funding sources: broadcasting revenue, recording revenue, state funding and – as the ILO had successfully accumulated £56,000 – whether there was a way of working with Beecham to access that funding stream and reserves.

There is a singularity of this sector of the arts world observed by at least one commentator: otherwise cultured people, when becoming involved in the opera

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[4] BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

[5] Higgins is only ever referred to as 'H.V.'.

[6] An example of his steady-handed dealings is the occasion that Beecham had breached the terms of the merger agreement discussed later in this chapter: Szarvasy's careful handling of the situation meant that the agreement stayed on track; BBC WAC, R27/498, 19 January 1932.

world, tend towards the actions of the mythical *prima donna*.[7] While this might be a somewhat hackneyed observation, the files at the BBC WAC reveal several examples among the characters. Beecham, Higgins, Ethel Snowden and eventually Blois and Szarvasy all displayed varying degrees of extravagant behaviour in the many twists and turns of the negotiations towards the first state funding of opera; only Reith was able to offer a steadying hand to ease the project ahead.[8]

Of the five dilemmas mentioned in my introductory chapter, the first concerned the complexities of elite vs democratic opera. In this regard, the motivation of the champions here was to remove social and economic barriers and make opera more widely available. The second question related to funding, which for the first time involved a state contribution. The third question concerned the choice of international or English opera: in this, the team at Covent Garden under Szarvasy made strenuous efforts to accommodate supporters of opera in English, offering both international and English opera. In terms of the fourth dilemma, involving the integration of opera interests, there were for the first time during the course of payment of the subsidy, various efforts to amalgamate opera groups – but, by the end of the events discussed in these two chapters, the grant was withdrawn before the various opera producers could complete negotiations. In terms of the final question, that of whether opera should be preserved as a national legacy, these reformers gave precedence to widened availability over the notion of heritage. Their motivation was thus very different from that of Courtauld, who saw the preservation of the national legacy as paramount.

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[7] 'Grand opera is a curious business. As the season approaches almost everyone connected with it assumes some small part of the temperament of a *prima donna'*: Victor Cazalet, a Conservative MP and director of the London and Provincial Opera Society Ltd., in a letter to Frederick Olgilvie, Reith's successor, dated 12 December 1938; in BBC WAC, R34/508/7; also quoted in Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. 2, The Golden Age of Wireless* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 177.

[8] To continue this theme, one might conclude that the vexations of opera also caused a higher than average number of deaths: Paget Bowman, business director of the British National Opera Company and of the ILO, died on 22 February 1928; Henry Higgins on 21 November 1928; Elizabeth Courtauld on 25 December 1931; Lionel Powell, Beecham's business manager, on 21 January 1932 ('penniless and in debt'); Percy Pitt on 23 November 1932; and Eustace Blois on 16 May 1933.

Reith and the BBC as Patron of the Arts

During the early years of the BBC, John Reith worked confidently and successfully towards creating a broadcasting empire, developing and defining its singular status.[9] Much has been written about his paternalistic efforts to legitimise and justify the BBC, to obtain social and cultural respectability for broadcast technology and to find ways to use broadcasting to lift national cultural standards. Reith had already been responsible for a large number of BBC music ventures: ones that served to produce music in a cost-efficient manner and promote the BBC's pedagogic approach.[10] These schemes were a result of his assessment of the financial relationship between music and broadcasting and his conclusion that the most economical way for the BBC to broadcast music was to employ the musicians who produced it. In this way, the cost of the broadcasts equated broadly with the value to the licence fee payers. It was not surprising that Reith wanted to add opera to his stable of musical ventures: not only was opera seminal to the development of broadcasting, since it was Nellie Melba's performance on 15 June 1920 that had done so much to demonstrate the potential of the medium, but also opera played a prominent part in broadcasting schedules.[11] Opera was, however, as Reith was to discover, far more expensive than any of the other BBC projects: the cost of 'owning' the genre was far in excess of what he

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[9] The first two volumes of Asa Briggs's history of the BBC provide the most detailed information about Reith, but these should be read in conjunction with later reconsiderations of Reith's legacy; see Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol. 1: The Birth of Broadcasting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); *Vol. 2, The Golden Age of Wireless* (1965); but see also J.C.W. Reith, *Into the Wind* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949); John Reith, *Wearing Spurs* (London: Hutchinson, 1966); Andrew Boyle, *Only the Wind Will Listen: Reith of the BBC* (London: Hutchinson, 1972); *The Reith Diaries*, ed. Charles Stuart (London: Collins, 1975); James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility* (London: Fontana, 1981); Nicholas Kenyon, *The BBC Symphony Orchestra: The First Fifty Years, 1930-1980* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981); and Jenny Doctor, 'A New Dimension: the BBC Takes on the Proms, 1920-44', in *The Proms: A New History*, eds. Jenny Doctor, and David Wright (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 74-129.

[10] The adoption of the Proms in 1927 exemplifies the BBC's stated intent to 'inform, educate and entertain'; see Paul Kildea, 'The Proms: An Industrial Revolution', in *The Proms*, eds. Doctor and Wright, 15. Other music ventures at the BBC around this time included the BBC Symphony Orchestra (1930), the BBC Singers (1927), the BBC Theatre Orchestra (1931) and the BBC Military Band (1927).

[11] This broadcast was arranged by the newspaper magnate Lord Northcliffe; see 'Art and Science Joined Hands', *Daily Mail*, 16 June 1920. See also Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting, Vol. I,* 46-7. Opera had been broadcast even before the advent of radio; a contraption called the Electrophone enabled London opera lovers to hear opera on their telephones; see Daniel Snowman, *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic, 2009), 282.

deemed a broadcast was 'worth'. He was happy to pay approximately £100 per opera/opera-excerpt broadcast, but the cost of covering the losses of opera was substantially more.

By 1927, the BBC had established itself as a great modernist power: it had been reconstituted as a Corporation in a unique arrangement: the government had awarded it a broadcasting monopoly, supervised by the Treasury, the Post Master General (PMG) and by the public committees that reviewed progress.[12] The annual licence fee was ten shillings and by 1930 the BBC's 'Year Book' boasted 3,195,553 licence holders, which equated roughly to twelve million listeners, or a wireless in 'every second home in the country'.[13] In the absence of funding from the state for any sector of the arts, Reith managed to create powerful and effective patronage through broadcasting; he was thus able to behave in some ways like a modern version of a Renaissance patron, selecting fields of art that could be promoted through broadcasting. His vision was that broadcasting could be a powerful vehicle for change: 'It seemed that broadcasting might be the integrating element; that rightly understood and applied, a national broadcasting service might apply the integrator for democracy.'[14] What is more, outside broadcasts of opera were easier than other outside broadcasts because there was infrastructure in place to relay opera from Covent Garden direct to Bush House via cables laid at the time of the earliest broadcasts. Even so, staged opera was heavily associated with poor fidelity of reproduction because transmission technology was still in its infancy.[15] Up to this point, Reith had been proceeding with a project to produce the BBC's own studio opera, employing a semi-permanent troupe of musicians; this had broadcast quality advantages in terms of the singers being able to sing directly into

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[12] These were the Crawford Committee, 1926, and the Ullswater Committee, 1935.
[13] As reported in 'The BBC Year Book', *The Times*, 28 November 1930.
[14] Quote from Reith, *Into the Wind*, 136. See also Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting, Vol. 2*, 62-63, and Kenneth Dyson, 'The Debate about the Future of Broadcasting', in *Broadcasting and the New Media Policies in Western Europe*, ed. Kenneth Dyson, Peter Humphreys and Ralph Negrine (London: Routledge, 2002), 71.
[15] Nicholas Morgan, 'The National Gramophonic Society' (Ph.D. dissertation, Sheffield University, 2013).

primitive microphones as well as choice of repertoire and timings. Typically, two excerpts of studio opera were broadcast each week.[16]

Reith's investigations into opera started in 1926 when he set up the BBC's Advisory Committee on Opera, chaired by Sir Hugh Allen, to establish the appropriate relationship between opera and the BBC.[17] The BBC had a good relationship with the British National Opera Company (BNOC) because they had collaborated to broadcast opera; the committee therefore had a special interest in deciding whether it could help the – by now – financially beleaguered BNOC. In addition, the BBC had a wide remit to broadcast opera in a format that would satisfy the demands of audiences of both English opera supporters and the more traditional enthusiast: they therefore needed to consider a wide spectrum of opera groups, including ventures such as Beecham's ILO. H.V. Higgins, the chairman of the Grand Opera Syndicate (GOS), who had run opera at Covent Garden until 1924, was invited to join the committee at the start of 1927.[18] He was well qualified to advise the BBC but, as described in Chapter Two, by this stage Elizabeth Courtauld was running affairs at Covent Garden and it was not perhaps appropriate that she was not involved. Higgins's recommendation to the BBC was that they should buy a twenty-year lease on the Opera House for £17,000 p.a. and contribute a further £10,000 'subvention' annually towards the cost of opera seasons. He provided various financial details to substantiate the amount, citing the £17,000 losses of the BNOC in 1926, the losses of the Courtauld seasons (which he estimated at £13,000 in 1925 and £6,500 in 1926) and the amount of state subsidies paid to European opera houses.[19] It is interesting in retrospect to note that the cost of what seemed then an ambitious scheme, £27,000, was only marginally more that the subsidy paid in 1930 and considerably less than that paid in 1931 (see Chapter Four). In Higgins's view, the acquisition of the lease of the Opera House would form the basis of

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[16] Taken from a memo from Director of Programmes to Reith, 30 April 1931, BBC WAC, R27/375/1, 'Music General, Opera Policy, April 1930 to December 1938'. Indeed, studio opera continued well into 1931 because of contractual obligations.

[17] Allen was director of the Royal College of Music, 1918-1937. The committee is discussed in Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting, Vol. 2*, 178. See also BBC WAC, R6/75, Advisory Committee on Opera, Minutes: 13 December 1926, and Steven Martin, 'The British "Operatic Machine": Investigations into the Institutional History of English Opera, c. 1875–1939 (Ph.D. dissertation, Bristol University, 2010), 145.

[18] Higgins to Reith, 19 January and 15 March 1927, BBC WAC, 34/508/1.

[19] These figures are mentioned in a letter from Higgins to Reith, 15 March 1927, BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

a national centre for BBC opera that could be offered rent free to other opera companies as subsidy and could also stage other non-opera performances.

These were very large sums compared to the amount the BBC was currently paying for opera, but the scheme was not immediately dismissed. A memo to Reith dated 24 January 1927 summarised the options:

a.) To rent Covent Garden and accommodate outside companies either charging or for free.

b.) To form a syndicate and subsidize opera.

c.) To rent the theatre and create a national 'BBC Opera'.[20]

Negotiations for the creation of the new BBC Orchestra under Percy Pitt's musical directorship were well under way and Covent Garden could additionally be used as a venue for orchestral concerts.[21] Pitt was central to negotiations as he had experience of both Covent Garden and the BBC: he had been appointed music director of the BBC in 1927, where he remained until Adrian Boult succeeded him in 1930; but he had previously been music director at Covent Garden, and now continued in both roles. The files contain seven letters from Higgins to Reith, all addressed to 'Sir James Reith'. Reith had been knighted in 1927 and had a public profile; the repeated incorrect

[20] As the memo concluded, the second option would result in the BBC becoming 'morally bound to cover any losses they might incur over and above the subsidy. We should be working in the dark, with the possibility of a very large loss to find out of a very limited income'. This comment was insightful: as we shall see later, this was indeed what happened. The last option was considered too large and too uncertain an undertaking. These suggestions are contained in an internal BBC memo from Roger Eckersley (the BBC's Director of Entertainment) to Reith: 24 January 1927, BBC WAC, R34/508/1. Eckersley's memo summarized the conclusions reached at a BBC meeting held on 21 January, attended by T. Lochhead, the Chief Accountant, Percy Pitt and V.H. Goldsmith, the Assistant Controller. The discussion between these top BBC executives was coloured by anxiety about their ability to broadcast without restriction: musicians in London were operating under a market embargo on broadcasting imposed by William Boosey (Chappell & Co.'s manager), who refused to allow microphones in the Queens Hall, or to employ any performers who took engagements with the BBC. Reith struggled in this atmosphere of antagonism towards broadcasting until 1927, when the BBC took over the Proms. Boosey had given evidence to the Crawford Committee in 1926, suggesting that broadcasting would 'ruin the concert world': see Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting, Vol. 2*, 172. The BNOC were one of the few musical enterprises that was happy to broadcast: see Boosey's letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, 19 May 1923, and Doctor, 'A New Dimension', in *The Proms,* eds. Doctor and Wright, 80-82.

[21] Reith to Higgins, 10 March 1927, WAC 34/508/1. Pitt had been chorus master then conductor at Covent Garden and in 1908 he had co-operated with Hans Richter. He had also been a conductor for the Beecham Opera Company and the BNOC. Pitt was largely responsible for shaping the early BBC music policy: see Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting, Vol. 2*, 170. He had, though, recently resigned from the BBC to work for Beecham as musical director of the ILO. See also J. Daniel Chamier, *Percy Pitt of Covent Garden and the BBC* (London: Arnold, 1938).

nomenclature can only be a deliberate insult. Reith's insistence that the BBC could only offer a much smaller contribution served to anger Higgins, whose letter of 15 March 1927 was full of accusations.[22] Reith's intransigence was, perhaps in retrospect, unfortunate; but Higgins' final petulant repost demonstrated his old-world operatic arrogance and failure to appreciate that working with Reith was perhaps one of the only possible options.

Beecham and the ILO: 1927

Beecham's ILO launched in 1927: it employed what would now be termed crowd-funding, garnering the enthusiasm of the socio-economic middle ground of opera lovers.[23] This was seemingly a remarkably canny model and was in tune with the democratic sentiment of the time, although the funding model was of course all but identical to that of the BNOC. Beecham's so-called 'two-penny opera' scheme attracted highbrow London-society opera audiences, but was also successful in gathering subscriptions from a new audience that had first been introduced to opera by the BNOC via their radio broadcasts and provincial tours. The scheme involved an annual subscription of 10s, or 2d a week (it was, perhaps, not a coincidence that this was the same amount as the annual wireless licence fee): the prospectus included ambitious plans to build a new National Opera House, bail out the BNOC and form a nationwide English Opera Company with aspirations to expand through the Empire. The ILO drew on elements from a series of previously unsuccessful projects: the most

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[22] 'What you are now suggesting to me is that my Syndicate should run international opera for twelve weeks in the year and English opera for twenty weeks in the year, on the best possible lines and engaging for the international opera the best artists and conductors available in Europe, you having the right to broadcast our performances whenever you please, but only guaranteeing twenty broadcasts and paying £100 apiece for them, in other words, £2,500 per annum, and that only for three years! I understand that your object was to subsidise opera, (you even mentioned a contribution of £10,000 per annum) but I must point out to you that what you are asking is that my company, which at the present time cannot be run at a profit, should in fact subsidise an enormously rich and semi-official institution with the absolute certainty of making a heavy loss'; Higgins to Reith, 15 March 1927, BBC WAC, 34/508/1.

[23] The ILO is mentioned in many of the standard Beecham texts but not accorded much importance because it came to nothing. See John Lucas, *Thomas Beecham: An Obsession with Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 173-95; Alan Jefferson, *Sir Thomas Beecham: A Centenary Tribute* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1979), 160-66; Charles Reid, *Thomas Beecham: An Independent Biography* (London: Gollancz, 1962), 190-92; Neville Cardus, *Sir Thomas Beecham: A Memoir* (London: Collins, 1961); and Sir Thomas Beecham, *A Mingled Chime: Leaves from an Autobiography* (New York: Puttnams, 1943).

recent of which were Isidore De Lara's 1924 plan for a 'National Opera Scheme' and Charles Manners' 1926 scheme.[24] Beecham had timed his launch well: the BNOC was floundering and their ready-made support-base, with the aid of the gramophone and opera publications, was eager to support the new venture. Ernest Newman, a notable commentator and supporter writing in the *Sunday Times* on 11 December 1927, urged the British public to get behind the scheme and encouraged Beecham to get going with opera rather than wait for his ambitious cash targets to be reached.[25] Beecham set himself a deadline of 1 February 1928 for achieving his aims, becoming forceful in his demands that the public should get behind him.[26] His deadline was first extended, then ignored; the scheme struggled through uncertainty despite Beecham's efforts to revitalise it during 1928 and 1929 with a series of fund-raising concerts, a magazine and radio requests (see Illustration 3.1).[27]

His scheme gathered 44,000 subscribers and included large numbers of non-Londoners, raising a fund of £56,000 and an income stream that guaranteed funding for five years – sufficient for a permanent opera chorus and orchestra (see Illustration 3.2).[28] Beecham had an artistic reputation from his involvement in opera from before 1914, one that made him, for many, the voice of opera in Britain: Albert Coates

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[24] Other schemes, such as John Pegg's for the British Empire League of Grand Opera and de Lara's for an Imperial Opera House, are discussed in Van Norman Lucas, 'Is there an Operatic Future?', *Sackbut,* January 1928, 166-68. Charles Manners had proposed a scheme that advocated the creation of a limited company with shares of five shillings each, similar to the funding structures of the Salvation Army and the YMCA; see Charles Manners, 'The Financial Problem of National Opera by the People for the People', *Music & Letters*, 7/2 (1926), 93-105.

[25] Rutland Boughton saw the ILO rather differently – he accused them of forcing the BNOC out of business 'when its business prospects in the provinces were brightest': see 'The Opera Subsidy Scandal', *Sackbut,* January 1931, 151.

[26] 'Opera: Yes, or No: The quota required is 80,000 by February 1st 1928. This means that the number must not flag on any one of the 73 days of the allotted time, including Sundays and Christmas holidays', *The Times*, 19 November 1927. Beecham was, on occasion, less than careful in his press comment; arriving in New York in January 1928 he grumbled that the British public were lazy and slow in getting to grips with the operatic problem; see *Saturday Review,* 28 January 1928, 99.

[27] Beecham had asked for the funds to remain in the hands of the trustees until more had been collected; see *The Times*, 28 April 1928. A radio plea was broadcast on 17 May 1929; this was published in *The Times,* 17 May 1929. Beecham's ILO and the accompanying magazine, the *MILO*, is discussed in Alexandra Wilson, 'Gender Studies in Opera: From Characterisation to Reception', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 780.

[28] For details of these figures, see *The Times*, 29 November 1930.

described him as having 'put English opera on its feet – a monument that will stand'.[29] He was poised to succeed in his venture, but was thwarted by two problems: he had a reputation for financial ineptitude, a legacy of his previous business failures; and he was arrogant, delaying his scheme for three years, confident of reaching his self-imposed but unattainable funding targets. Frustrated subscribers started to withdraw their support.[30]

In all his ventures, Beecham was supported by his partner Maud (later Emerald) Cunard: Cunard is frequently omitted from Beecham narratives and her contribution to opera is largely forgotten. An American, she was not an heiress on the scale of other female philanthropists; but she was by no means poor. She had married Sir Bache Cunard in 1895 (heir to the Cunard shipping fortune) but they had an unhappy relationship: she met Beecham in 1909 and left Cunard in 1911 when she was 38 and Beecham 32. Masters describes how Maud 'mischievously enjoyed the very openness of their liaison'. Beecham appears to have been somewhat reluctant: he did not live with Cunard and she always referred to him as 'Sir Thomas', or 'Mr Beecham'.[31] Shortly after the death of Bach Cunard in 1925 she changed her name from Maud to Emerald. Although she spent 1910-39 in an open relationship with Beecham, they were never photographed together and she receives little credit in Beecham biographies; even less so in Beecham's own writings.[32] Beecham married again in 1943 without informing her, leaving his relationship with Emerald of more than 30 years: this goes some way towards explaining his reluctance to offer any credit to her for her patronage.

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[29] *Telegraph* interview with Robin Legge, 17 May 1919, quoted in Lewis Foreman, *From Parry to Britten: British Music in Letters 1900–1945* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1987), 104.

[30] For details of Beecham's financial problems, see Lucas, *Thomas Beecham*, 53-156, and T.A.B. Corley, *Beecham's: From Pills to Pharmaceuticals* (Lancaster: Crucible, 2011), 114-19. Cuthbert Reavely compared the ILO to 'a caterpillar that has been rather longer than we had hoped weaving its golden chrysalis; if the size and quality of that self-same chrysalis did not quite come up to our expectations, who shall say that the butterfly will not eventually emerge more brilliant for the added travail of her transformation?', 'Opera in England', *Sackbut* 10 (March 1930): 204.

[31] As revealed to Cecil Beaton; see Brian Masters, *Great Hostesses* (London: Constable, 1982), 121. See also Ruth Brandon, *The Dollar Princesses: Sagas of Upward Nobility, 1870-1914* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 131-48.

[32] Many credited her with obtaining the baronetcy for Beecham's father from Herbert Asquith in 1914 even though it appears she was paid by Joseph Beecham for it. Her relationship with Beecham was notoriously one-sided: he married another woman in 1939; see Sian Evans, *Queen Bees: Six Brilliant and Extraordinary Society Hostesses Between the Wars* (London: Two Roads, 2006), 54 and 78.

Illustration 3.1: Beecham opening subscriptions for his Imperial League for Opera Appeal, 15 November 1927: Thomas Beecham receives a bundle of letters responding to his Foundation of Imperial League of Opera 'Opera for All' appeal: photo by Edward G. Malindine/Topical Press Agency/Getty Images.

The Future of British Opera is in the Balance!

IT is the eventual aim of this organisation to build and endow an opera house in London and to assist in the building and endowing of opera houses in some of the leading provincial cities. But for such a large enterprise public opinion is not fully ripe. As yet it remains unconverted to a belief in the need for opera houses, nor is it wholly convinced that the artistic resources of this country are equal to the task of creating institutions which shall compare favourably with those that flourish in Continental capitals.

It is waste of time to criticise the general public for this attitude of mind. Owing to limited opportunity the bulk of the public has never heard Opera.

But although of moderate dimensions, there does exist a select public which patronises Opera in London and in the provinces, and there is no actual insufficiency of first-rate artists of British origin on the modern operatic stage.

Many of these artists, however, are rarely heard in England. They sing regularly in the United States, France, Italy, Germany, Austria and, indeed, almost everywhere except on a stage in London, the heart of the British Empire.

The plain reason why they are not here is that there is no home to house them. Such a home has long been overdue, and it is the immediate purpose of the Imperial League of Opera to bring it into existence.

But it can hold its own with the great operatic establishments of the world only on the condition that, like them, it shall not be self-supporting.

Abroad opera is subsidized, generally by the State.

It is admittedly inopportune to approach the Government. Moreover, Opera should be the concern of those who want it, and not of those who do not want it.

Who are they who indicate unmistakably that they do want it?

Clearly that substantial minority of amateurs which attends faithfully the infrequent performances given in London and in the Provinces. After careful investigation the business advisers of the League have estimated that this minority numbers in London and the six leading provincial cities alone, approximately 150,000 persons

To found and maintain an organisation of the front rank that shall give seasons of five or six months opera in London and shorter seasons in these six provincial cities would involve an annual expenditure of £50,000 per annum. To this figure let there be added the safety margin of a further £10,000 and we have the total annual sum of £60,000 per annum. This is the amount which the organisers of the League are now seeking to raise.

Divided among 150,000 persons £60,000 works out at less than 10s. per head or about 2d. per week. The burden is not exacting.

Now a single year of trial would be useless. In such a short period of time the new institution would scarcely be able to begin its work. The first thing to do is to procure the return of many of those British artists who are working and residing in other countries. Naturally they will require contracts which will give them the same guarantee of a permanency as they can obtain elsewhere.

Nothing less than five years is worth considering in a scheme of this sort.

Accordingly everyone who is interested in music generally and in Opera particularly is invited to become a member of this League and to subscribe 10s. per annum for five years in the way set out in the enclosed letter to the trustees.

In return for his (or her) subscription of 10s. per annum the subscriber will have—

A. Opera Seasons where the best talent of the British Empire will be gathered together under one roof, and where the productions will be of an artistic unity impossible of achievement in an enterprise run on profit-making lines.

B. A permanent orchestra chosen from the finest players in the country, which, in addition to playing in the opera performances, will give regular Symphony Concerts and other Concerts of a popular kind under celebrated conductors.

C. Prior and reduced rates of subscription to the opera and concert seasons as compared with the rates offered to the general public.

D. Prices of admission to all parts of the theatres where the seasons are given which, except for Festivals or special performances, shall be similar to ordinary theatre prices.

Sir Thomas Beecham will be solely responsible for the productions and for the selection of the artists. He will have the assistance of an advisory board of experts including—

Sir Landon Ronald - Chairman of the Advisory Board and Musical Adviser.
Frederic Austin, Esq. Technical Adviser.

The Funds received from the subscribers will be held and administered by four trustees—

Lord Islington, P.C., G.C.M.G., G.B.E., D.S.O.
Sir Victor Warrender, Bart, M.P.
Sir Vincent Caillard, D.L., J.P.
Sir Eric Hambro, K.B.E. (Chairman of Hambro's Bank Ltd.)

In no single year will the trustees authorise an expenditure of more than 5/6ths of the available annual income.

Illustration 3.2: An appeal for the ILO from 1927, taken from marketing material distributed by Beecham's team (author's collection).

Cunard's activities in patronizing, raising funds and supporting Beecham's musical ventures were, however, noteworthy, even though the manner of her patronage was not new: Reid reports that she was Beecham's 'uniting and ingenious henchman'; Cardus describes her as being 'beneficent' behind the scenes and describes her contribution to opera as 'brilliant but evanescent'.[33] Cunard was one of London's prominent society hostesses: she entertained from a series of prominent London addresses extravagantly decorated in the style of the Ballets Russes, a venture with which she and Beecham had been closely associated. She organized opera fundraising balls for Beecham's opera seasons; his Aeolus concerts series, another fund raising venture, was staged in her home.[34] Her salon was attended by many of the cultural elite and was described by, among others, Harold Acton, Evelyn Waugh and Osbert Sitwell.[35] It is interesting that one of the few academic texts on the subject of Beecham's ILO concludes that it and the accompanying magazine, the *Member of the Imperial League of Opera* (MILO), was a heavily gendered project, a male enterprise, when so much of the activity (promotion and funding) was by Cunard.[36]

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[33] Reid was not wholly supportive of Cunard: he suggested that her prose in the publicity for the ILO was the cause of its failure. He quoted at length from an article Cunard wrote to promote the ILO but provided no clues as to why he reached such a critical conclusion – her article appears to be good promotional material. In his later reference he was much more flattering: 'she whipped in subscribers as efficiently as before. Her catering reforms were radical. In the foyer she installed [at Covent Garden] the longest theatre buffet in London'; Reid, *Thomas Beecham*, 191 and 207. See also Cardus, *Sir Thomas Beecham*, 123.

[34] Evans, *Queen Bees*, 111. Cunard's Aeolus concerts were regularly listed in *The Times*, in the Court Circular section. She was compared to other hostesses of the time such as Margaret Greville, Sibyl Colefax and Edith Londonderry during the Ballets Russes season in 1919; see Daphne Fielding, *Emerald and Nancy: Lady Cunard and Her Daughter* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1968), 65-72, and Evans, *Queen Bees*, 111. She was friends with the Prince of Wales: he became a frequent visitor to her house in the early 1920s: see Fielding, *Emerald and Nancy*, 66, and Masters, *Great Hostesses*, 140. Her home was at the centre of the abdication scandal in 1936; see George Moore, *Letters to Lady Cunard,* ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), 149.

[35] Harold Acton, 'Lady Cunard: A Celebrated London Hostess', in *Genius in the Drawing Room: The Literary Salon in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,* ed. Peter Quennell (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), 175-188. See also Harold Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948), 212-22. Evelyn Waugh described her as 'the Duchess of Covent Garden'; *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory (London: Penguin, 1980), 626. Sitwell comments that she appreciated how it was 'necessary to rely on regular attendances by numbskull nitwits and morons addicted to the mode in order to keeping opera alive.… In the world of opera and ballet Lady Cunard reigned alone. Her will-power was sufficient, her passion for music fervent enough to make opera almost compulsory for those who wished to be fashionable'; Osbert Sitwell, *Great Morning* (London: MacMillan 1948), 251.

[36] Wilson, 'Gender', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Greenwald, 781-84.

Covent Garden Opera

The man who was to be instrumental in engineering financial change at Covent Garden was Szarvasy: in 1928, he arrived at Covent Garden, working with Blois as his managing director. Szarvasy was one of London's leading financiers and industrialists: well known for various corporate reconstructions he had masterminded, he had brought new tools of finance options to old style organizations.[37] As a result of these restructurings, he was Chairman of the investment bank British Foreign and Colonial Corporation and Managing Director of Dunlop, Chairman of United Anthracite Collieries, and served on the board of many other companies, including the Daily Mail, Imperial Airways and Scottish Steel.[38] It is clear that Reith was in awe of Szarvasy's financial acumen and keen to take his advice: Szarvasy had already helped Reith finance the building of Broadcasting House by offering him a loan from another company of which he was director, the Guardian Assurance Co.[39]When Szarvasy arrived, he and Blois set about finding a modern funding solution for opera. It seems probable that the new team targeted several potential avenues of funding. As in the city, the old syndicate structure was no longer suitable: they needed an incorporated body to maximise funding options and duly set up a new company, the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate

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[37] He is mentioned in Judy Slinn, *Clifford Chance: Its Origins and Development* (London: Granta, 1993), 105, and John Scott, *Legibus* (London: King, Thorne & Stace, 1980), 56, with a portrait, 57.
[38] The reports of Szarvasy in the *Dictionary of Business Biography* describe him as a Hungarian born in 1875, coming to London in about 1901. He joined Montagu Oppenheimer, a discount house, and began a close and successful friendship with Lord Charles Montagu and Baron Springer. Together with these two, he was responsible for the remarkable success of the British Foreign and Colonial Corporation Ltd., which was an influential issuing house. The list of companies connected with his name seems to cover most aspects of growth at the time: he acted as consultant in the restructuring of companies such as Dunlop (which he is credited with saving from destruction), Imperial Airways, Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Co., Amalgamated Anthracite Collieries Ltd; as well as the companies mentioned in the main text, he was also a director of various other banks and investment trusts; he is mentioned in 1938 in *Hansard* in connection with attempts to form a national haulage company; see *Hansard*, Ministry of Transport, 17 June 1938. His obituary was published in *The Times*, 7 July 1948, and the *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1948. He is mentioned in various accounts of financial restructuring: see R. Higham, *Britain's Imperial Air Routes, 1918 to 1939* (London: G.T. Foulis, 1960), 1599-1603; J. McMillan, *The Dunlop Story: The Life, Death and Rebirth of a Multinational* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989); Steven Tolliday, *Business, Banking, and Politics: The Case of British Steel, 1918-1939* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 99-103; James Nye, *A Long Time in Making: The History of Smiths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 51-66; Richard Bourne, *Lords of Fleet Street: The Harmsworth Dynasty* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 95-96; J.F. Wilson, *Ferranti and the British Electrical Industry, 1864-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 129; and Robert Murphy, 'Fantasy Worlds: British Cinema Between the Wars', *Screen* 26, 1 (1985), 10-20.
[39] Szarvasy to Reith, 4 July 1930; BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

Ltd. (CGOS), paying £8,000 for the assets of the old syndicate and spending considerable sums updating the theatre.[40] They appointed Clarke and Ethel Snowden as directors of the CGOS: both, as we shall see, with a view to finding sources of funding. Clarke's appointment was logical: HMV had been paying only £1 p.a. for recording rights and it was anticipated that revenues from recordings could be increased. Snowden, who had been appointed a governor of the BBC in 1926, was also a logical appointment. Publicity quickly followed: the *Musical Times* on 28 April 1928 carried an article on 'The Future of Opera in England'; the *Daily News* on 30 April 1928 announced 'Operas and Ideas: Today a new regime is being inaugurated. It is based on High Finance: the last dynasty had its origin in Artificial Silk, the one before that in Whisky and the previous one in Pills'.[41]

The acrimonious breakdown in negotiations between Higgins and Reith in 1927 left Blois in a difficult position. Initially reluctant to broadcast, he wrote to Reith on 21 February 1927 hoping to re-establish a broadcasting fee of £100 per night, even though, as he put it, 'my Syndicate, as you know, is, rightly or wrongly, prejudiced against the mechanical transmission of music'. But he was soon happily charging the BBC for as many relays as possible; these broadcasts generated nearly £1,700 extra revenue in both 1928 and 1929.[42] For his first season in charge, 1928, Szarvasy introduced Saturday night performances at cheaper rates and, with Blois, launched the London careers of Rosa Ponselle and Beniamino Gigli.[43] The season opened with two

[40] For ease of reference I have not distinguished between the CGOS Ltd., and the CGOS (1930) Ltd., being respectively the first and second companies set up by Szarvasy at Covent Garden, the first operating from 1927 to 1930 and the second from 1930 to 1933. The second company was set up to receive the government grant. The assets of the old company included 40 opera scores, and they spent £6,705 on new scenery and costumes and £5,821 on the theatre, total expenditure rising to £20,526: details can be found in a memo by Szarvasy, 3 July 1930, in BBC WAC, R34/508 and in 'Memorandum re Covent Garden Opera Syndicate Limited', 13 April 1932 in Szarvasy's file, BBC WAC, R27/498. HMV and the Columbia Gramophone Co. were set to merge in 1931.
[41] References in the *Daily News* article are to Szarvasy, the Courtaulds, Major Loudon Greenlees (singer, talent scout, previously a director of Covent Garden and whisky inheritor) and Beecham.
[42] See Table 3.3.
[43] 'A new experiment … cheaper seats on Saturday nights … due to the weekend habit there had been no performance on Saturday since 1920'; The *Sphere*, 16 June 1928. Gigli was described by Beecham as the greatest tenor in the world: see 'Heard in the Interval', *Musical Mirror,* July 1930, 179. The writer of the regular column, 'Piacevole', introduced Ponselle on same page. Ponselle and Blois were very friendly – she used to call him 'Useless': see James A. Drake, 'Ponselle: The Seasons Abroad', *Opera Quarterly,* 10, 4 (1994), 73-90.

cycles of the *Ring* – at special (high) prices; but the standard prices were almost exactly what Courtauld had charged in 1927.[44] A financial assessment of the success or otherwise of these ventures is not possible without applying the ticket prices to seating capacities: such a calculation offers of course only a starting point for further analysis, in particular as a full house was never achievable. The Tables in this section thus help to analyse the actions of Szarvasy and Blois and compare revenues. Table 3.1 estimates the revenue that would have been generated from one night of opera in 1928. Table 3.2 shows that, in 1929, the CGOS raised prices significantly; a 21% increase in the orchestra stalls and an average increase of 16%. It is easy to see from these figures how a few performances with bad attendance figures could result in heavy losses: running opera was notoriously volatile in terms of profit margins. There was no concept of a steady profit margin – Higgins's references in his correspondence with Reith to historic losses (mentioned earlier) ranging from £6,500 to £17,000 over the previous few years are evidence of this. There was no inflation during this time; the price increases were significant and therefore risky.

Financial management of opera had, up to this moment, been at best amateur: Szarvasy and Blois had their work cut out in attempting to create accurate accounting records with which to record their efforts to reduce losses. The accounts for 1928 and 1929 reproduced in Table 3.3 reveal that they found it impossible to produce a net profit. They were able to achieve some cost savings and increase prices and made an operating profit in 1929; even with substantially increased rentals for non-opera activities, a net profit after taking administration and property costs into account was unachievable. Blois and Szarvasy made overtures to Reith with the hope that the BBC might take over opera, an idea that was backed by Ethel Smyth.[45] Reith was at that time embroiled with Beecham over the creation of the BBC Symphony

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[44] The figures for seats used by this team are different from those used in earlier chapters: I speculate that this was to produce a cautious estimate. Thus the full house estimate for 1925 of £1,661 6s is based on capacity of 2032 seats, while this estimate is for 1918 seats. The number of seats is included in schedules prepared for Reith; see BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

[45] Ethel Smyth, letter to *The Times,* 31 August 1929.

		SEATS	TICKET PRICE			TOTAL REVENUE		
			£	s	d	£	s	d
BOXES								
Pit & Grand Tier	17	68	9	9		160	13	
Balcony	7	28	4	4		28	8	
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	245	245		23		281	15	
Orchestra Stalls	245	245		23		281	15	
Stalls Circle	74	74		22	6	83	5	
Stalls Circle	128	128		20		128		
Dress Circle	95	95		20		95		
Balcony Stalls	154	154		18	6	142	6	
Amphitheatre	381	381		12		228	12	
Gallery	500	500		2		50		
TOTAL						£1,480	17s	

Table 3.1: *Armide*, Covent Garden, 3 May 1928.[46]

		SEATS	TICKET PRICE			TOTAL REVENUE		
BOXES			£	s	d	£	s	d
Pit & Grand Tier	17		10	10		178	10	
Balcony	7	68	5			35		
		28						
INDIVIDUAL SEATS								
Orchestra Stalls	245		1	8		343		
Orchestra Stalls	245	245	1	8		343		
Stalls Circle	74	245	1	4		88	16	
Stalls Circle	128	74	1	1	6	137	12	
Dress Circle	95	128	1	1	6	102	2	6
Balcony Stalls	154	95	1			154		
Amphitheatre	381	154		13		247	13	
Gallery	500	381		3	6	87	10	
		500						
TOTAL						£1,717	3s	6d

Table 3.2: *Tristan*, Covent Garden, 29 April 1929.[47]

[46] *The Times*, 2 May 1928.
[47] *The Times*, 29 April 1929.

ACCOUNTS FOR CGOS		1928		1929
INCOME				
Revenue from Grand Opera Season	66,871		69,505	
Russian Ballet			362	
Profit from programmes	1,676		1,622	
Broadcasting fees	1,694		1,685	
Refreshments profit	858		933	
Other income	531		361	
		71,629		74.468
EXPENSES				
Salaries of Artists	40,208		41,170	
Orchestra	11,988		10,563	
Repairs to scenery	5,488		4,829	
Front salaries	2,931		2,488	
Transportation	1,568		2,282	
Costumes	1,488		1,182	
Extras	1,742		1,333	
Advertising	1.271		1,369	
Other expenses	6,025		6,154	
		72,709		71,370
Operating Profit/ (Loss)		(1,080)		3,098
OTHER INCOME				
Bertram Mills Dance Season Rent	2,454		8,022	
Russian Opera Season July			2,644	
Gramophone recording fee	100		100	
		2,554		10,666
OTHER COSTS				
Administrative Expenses				
Managing Director's remuneration	1,562		1,875	
Secretary's salary	467		700	
Salaries of permanent staff	2,479		4,094	
Insurance	908		1,402	
Legal	168		152	
Audit	5		31	
Rent rates and taxes	5,125		7,491	
Repairs and alterations	673		3,330	
Depreciation	514		1,171	
Other costs	1,098		1,305	
		12,999		21,551
NET PROFIT/(LOSS)		£(11,525)		£(7,787)

Table 3.3: CGOS Profit and Loss Account for 1928 and 1929.[48]

[48] These figures were supplied to Reith during discussions prior to setting up the subsidy; see BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

Orchestra, a sequence of events described in Nicholas Kenyon's history of the BBC. The failure of the collaboration reveals a number of similarities with subsequent events at Covent Garden.[49] They include a level of press criticism; disagreements about the cost of the scheme; Reith's choices about the appropriate level of ownership/control of the BBC; and Beecham's erratic behaviour, which caused problems as negotiations progressed.[50] Orchestra talks between the two men began well but soon deteriorated: Philip Page took pleasure in rumours of dissent, reporting in the *Evening Standard* in January 1929 that 'the BBC have returned from the ride with Sir Thomas Beecham inside, and I imagine there is a smile on the face of the tiger'.[51] The negotiations came to nothing and instead the BBC Symphony Orchestra was formed in 1930 under Adrian Boult; Beecham subsequently formed his own orchestra.[52] An anonymous article published on 17 May 1930 in the *Popular Wireless* quoted Beecham lashing out at the BBC for having overstepped their remit. He called them 'the merest parasites on the body musical', and an organisation that 'squanders their money in a muddling way without a policy … or a future'.[53] Having found Beecham so difficult to work with in these orchestral negotiations, Reith must have been reluctant to take up the cause of opera, particularly if it involved Beecham.

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[49] Richard Morrison, *Orchestra, The LSO: A Century of Triumphs and Turbulence* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), 62-74.

[50] Nicholas Kenyon, *The BBC Symphony Orchestra: The First Fifty Years, 1930-1980* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981), 5-34; Nicholas Kenyon, 'Beecham and the BBC Symphony Orchestra: A Collaboration that Never Happened'*, Musical Times,* 121, 1652 (1980), 625-28; Doctor, 'A New Dimension', in *The Proms*, Doctor and Wright, 96; and Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting, Vol.2*, 173-83.

[51] Quoted in Kenyon, 'Beecham and the BBC Symphony Orchestra'*,* 627.

[52] In 1931 Beecham entered into an arrangement with Malcolm Sargent and his patrons, the Courtaulds, to form the London Philharmonic Orchestra; see Charles Reid, *Malcolm Sargent: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968), 185-205 and Kenyon, *The BBC Symphony Orchestra,* 28.

[53] 'Sir Thomas Beecham Tilts at the BBC: According to the press reports, Sir Thomas did not approve of the program of music chosen by the BBC. … "The BBC has mistaken its function", says Sir Thomas. "It should be a client of the music makers. It should not attempt the running of musical performances itself for that is a process for which it has proved itself, and very naturally, to be without knowledge or talent … The time is coming when broadcasting no longer a novelty will fall into a pretty insignificant position so far as music is concerned. The good musicians will no longer broadcast. Many do not as it is, and Schnabel refuses to make gramophone records. Wireless and the gramophone are the merest parasites on the body musical. In the essential art of making music they have never given a farthings worth of help … as for the BBC it simply squanders money in a muddling blundering way without a policy (on its musical side) or a future.'

The ILO's accumulated funds of £56,000 were tantalizingly attractive to Blois and Szarvasy: it was obviously to their advantage to access both the money and the ILO subscriber database. They approached Beecham directly, suggesting amalgamation: they knew that he needed a venue and could make use of their chorus and orchestra. It was clear that there were benefits to both sides in such a merger. It seems likely that Blois and Szarvasy used the press to further this option; many papers reported that such a merger might prove advantageous. The *Daily Mail*, for example:

> An Operatic Alliance: The immediate future of opera in England lies with two men: Sir Thomas Beecham who with indomitable brilliance and pluck has organised the Imperial League of Opera, and Colonel Eustace Blois, who has managed the summer seasons at Covent Garden for years, and when the BNOC seemed to be coming to a sad end, took up the story and has given it a happy sequel. Rivalry between impresarios has before now been disastrous in the cause of British opera. Sir Thomas Beecham is the most brilliant man in English music today, a man of exquisite taste and artistic intuition. Col. Blois meanwhile has provided London with what many think is very satisfactory operatic fare … many an onlooker would like to see some harmonious action between these two.[54]

On the same day, the *Evening Standard* was less optimistic:

> Operatic Harmony. The plea that the two most influential producers of opera in this country, Sir Thomas Beecham and Col. Eustace Blois, of the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate should combine their forces is an admirable one. But such advice is I fear likely to flat on the empty air. It is not so much that the two men are mutually antipathetic. I have seen them in amiable converse although that does not mean that they would find it easy to work together for both are autocrats; two consuls formed a satisfactory arrangement for classical Rome, but in modern musical London the experiment would be doubtful. I have for years urged that all the opera people, Beecham, Blois, De Lara, Moody-Manners, Carl Rosa, etc. should pool their resources and work in unison. But it is quite certain that they never will.[55]

But Beecham was notoriously difficult to deal with: a letter dated 1 April 1930 from Szarvasy to Blois reported that 'it seems quite evident that it will not be possible to do anything with him [Beecham] in a hurry. He may have to stew in the Imperial League juice just a little longer before he is ready to be dished'.[56]

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[54] *Daily Mail,* 23 December 1929.
[55] *Evening Standard,* 23 December 1929.
[56] ROHC Pre-War Business Papers, Szarvasy File.

State Funding for Opera

It is unclear who first proposed state funding: the evidence contained in the BBC WAC indicates that Snowden was the instigator. However, according to Beecham it was Ramsay MacDonald's idea, first suggested during the early days of the ILO. Also according to Beecham, MacDonald suggesting matched government funding that could be justified in terms of public approval since the ILO's initial success was proof of a popular demand.[57] Beecham's claim is not substantiated elsewhere; but whatever the case, it was Snowden who took up the cause and brought the grant to fruition.

In 1929 Snowden had been a popular man with a formidable reputation as orator and anti-war agitator; despite his humble beginnings (he was a weaver's son from Yorkshire) he had developed an appreciation of economics, which helped him make many of the fiscal changes that paved the way towards the welfare state.[58] He placed heavy emphasis on the reduction of the national debt, the redistribution of wealth, running the country with a balanced budget and a steadfast adherence to the gold standard. The political landscape of 1929 featured a new female voting population and social welfare took centre stage as the working class assumed much greater importance. The economy was in freefall because of the worldwide economic depression and two subjects polarized the nation in their desperate efforts to improve the economy: protectionism vs. free trade; and the rising unemployment problem. Snowden's popularity was largely due to his successful negotiations at The Hague conference, which ensured that the British benefited appropriately from First World War reparations: the negotiations earned him the moniker the 'Iron Chancellor'. Thorpe describes Snowden in 1929 arriving home to an enthusiastic public after his

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[57] Beecham always claimed that the subsidy should be 'his' as it was, according to him, when first mentioned. There is no reference to MacDonald mentioning the subsidy again. 'In the early summer of 1929, just before the General Election, I was asked to meet the Prime Minister of the present Government for the purposes of discussing the whole question of national opera. Mr MacDonald declared himself both willing and able, in the event of the Labour party being returned to power, to provide a subsidy of £30,000 per annum': letter to *The Times,* 17 December 1930.

[58] There are two books that discuss Philip Snowden in detail: *Philip Snowden: The First Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer*, eds. Keith Laybourn and David James (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth Publishing, 1988) and Colin Cross, *Philip Snowden* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1966). See also the second volume of Snowden's autobiography: Viscount Philip Snowden, *An Autobiography, Vol. 2: 1919-1932* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1934).

success; the press published photographs of him returning home triumphant with his wife, and again on the doorstep of No. 11 Downing Street on the budget day (see Illustration 3.3).[59]

Ethel Snowden had been active in politics before her marriage, and she continued to work towards her ideal of Socialism – an ideal that sought to widen participation in the arts as part of an overall scheme to lessen financial inequality. She was sixteen years Philip's junior, politically active first as a Christian Socialist and later as a Fabian, a pacifist and advocate for women's suffrage, preaching temperance in the Liverpool slums. She was the Labour candidate after the 1918 election for East Leicester (although she did not, in the event, stand for election) and thus could feasibly have become the first female Labour MP.[60] She earned a living from her lecture fees and books and was frequently on the same platform as MacDonald, Sidney Webb and George Bernard Shaw (see Illustration 3.4).[61] Her laudable enterprise as an advocate for social reform was not, however, recognized by the press: she was instead accused of seeking a peerage for her husband.

Snowden's obituary in *The Times* reported that she welcomed her position at the BBC, where she was described as 'a convenient representative of both Labour and women': she was pleased to be involved in this new technological sector because of the opportunities it gave her to shape the nation's musical taste.[62] She had little

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[59] Andrew Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 8-29; Cross, *Snowden*, 237. See also Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (London: Allen Lane, 1998).

[60] *The Times*, 13 May 1918, reported that Snowden was on the list of 'available Parliamentary candidates' of the Independent Labour Party: see also *Manchester Guardian,* 24 October 1922. She was not one of the 'Famous Four' socialist women who feature in historiographies: Margaret Bondfield, Susan Lawrence and Dorothy Jewson were elected in 1923; see June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[61] Snowden's books were: *The Woman Socialist*, 1907, *The Feminist Movement,* 1913, *Through Bolshevist Russia*, 1920 (following her visit to Russia as part of a Labour Party delegation) and *A Political Pilgrim in Europe*, 1921. She became a spokesperson on Russia after her trip in 1920, denouncing bolshevism at a time when others in the party were of the opposite opinion.

[62] *The Times*, 24 February 1951. See also Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility,* 110. Her appointment was criticized by some because of her pacifist and pro-Soviet views; see *Patriot*, 25 November 1926. For more detail, see Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting, Vol 2*, 413-39.

Illustration 3.3: Philip Snowden and his wife Ethel leave Downing Street with the Budget Box, London, 14 April 1930: photo by Central Press/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

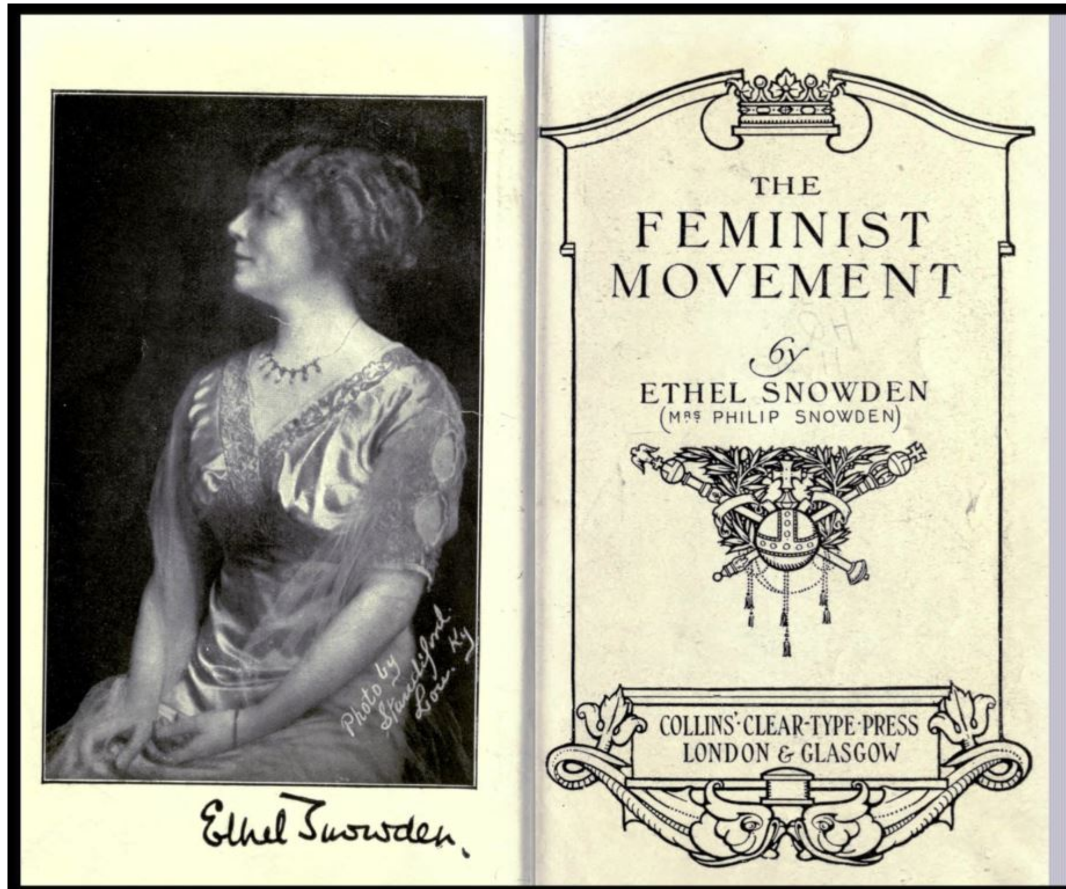

Illustration 3.4: Cover of Ethel Snowden's book, *The Feminist Movement* (London: Collins, 1913).

relevant experience, though, and Reith disliked her from the outset.[63] Her relationship with Reith and with the Chairman of the BBC, Lord Clarendon, is well documented: Reith described her as 'fearsome when crossed, with an unerring knack of squeezing the last drop of drama out of the most trivial incident' and 'a truly terrible creature, ignorant, stupid and horrid'.[64] The BBC web page suggests that the feeling was mutual; it quotes Snowden's describing Reith as 'a man whose overwhelming egoism is as distasteful as his character and ability are overestimated'.[65]

Snowden held various musical events in the Chancellor's official residence in Downing Street, using it as her Socialist version of a London salon: this was a novel twist on the familiar older style literary salon as exemplified by Cunard. Her musical soirees offered performances of operatic extracts in the drawing room of No. 11, to which the press were invited as photo opportunities; the music was broadcast and tea and biscuits were served (she was famously teetotal).[66] Her interest in opera was newsworthy because socialism and opera did not seem natural bedfellows: photographs were published of the couple at the musical soirées held on the eve of the budget: traditionally the April budget coincided with the start of the Summer Season and thus the opera season (see Illustration 3.5).[67] Accompanying coverage of his first budget in April 1930, the *Daily Express* published a cartoon showing a scene from *Die Meistersinger* with Snowden as Beckmesser being ridiculed by the crowd for

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[63] Reith, *Diaries*, 143.

[64] The threesome was referred to as 'silly Bertie, Mussolini and the Red Woman'; this is a chapter title in Ian McIntyre, *The Expense of Glory: A Life of Sir John Reith* (London: Harper Collins, 1993) 154-81. McIntyre describes how Snowden 'was accorded the distinction of a personalized niche in the Director-General's private demonology', 155. For further references to Snowden, see Reith, *Into The Wind*, 117-27; Cross, *Snowden*, 231; and *Reith Diaries*, ed. Stuart, 143.

[65] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/culture/reith-6?lang=cy> [accessed 18 September 2018].

[66] *Evening Standard*, 20 July 1930; the *Telegraph*, 28 April 1930; and the *Daily Mirror*, 29 April 1930, carried a picture.

[67] See, for example, the *Morning Post* and the *Star*, 25 April 1930; the *Daily Mirror*; the *Daily Chronicle*; the *Telegraph*; the *Daily Express* and the *Star*, 26 April 1930 and *The Times*, 28 April 1930 which included a list of attendees. The *Telegraph*, 28 April 1930 reported: 'Although the At Home … was not of an official character, it was as near an approach as England has yet seen to Government recognition of musical activities'. The parties were not only held at No. 11: later in 1930 there was a party at No. 10: 'A Party in Downing Street – a bit better than Glee singing. For the first time in history a Prime Minister has entertained the cream of Covent Garden at no. 10 Downing Street, though not the first time that unofficial music has been heard in these sombre precincts, as a bit ago we heard something about a glee party given by the Chancellor'; *Tatler*, 17 July 1930.

his song of Empire and free trade (see Illustration 3.6) and another in the *Evening Standard* pictured the couple enjoying opera at the taxpayer's expense (see Illustration 3.7).

Negotiations Towards the Subsidy Arrangement

Szarvasy managed to persuade Snowden to proceed with the opera grant, with negotiations taking place in the second half of 1930. Indeed, Snowden displayed considerable financial acumen in finding money for opera without depriving more deserving sectors of the economy. As mentioned earlier, the grant did not come directly from the government coffers, but instead was connected to the new stream of revenues generated by radio licences, sums that were split three ways between the Post Office (as payment for collecting the fees), the Treasury and the BBC, as a tax on broadcasting. Snowden's conception was that the Treasury could afford to take a slightly lower proportion of the whole without affecting other areas of the struggling economy. The licence fee had generated a total of £1,470,000 in 1929, and had been split approximately 13% to the Post Office, 23% to the Treasury and 64% to the BBC. The proposed opera subsidy would reduce the revenues of the Treasury by 5%, but since there was an expectation that the income stream from licence fees would continue to increase, it was thought that the grant would have minimal impact on the Treasury coffers.[68]

The BBC licence fees were collected and distributed by the Postmaster General (PMG); under this system, payment of the opera subsidy to the BBC also fell under his control. The PMG held a ministerial position within the Treasury (although not a cabinet post) and controlled the Post Office as well as the BBC licence fees, thus being responsible for a considerable portion of the GDP. MacDonald had appointed Hastings

[68] A.W Ganz, 'The Opera Subsidy', *Saturday Review*, 20 December 1930.

VISCOUNTESS SNOWDEN OF ICKORNSHAW AT ROYAL OPERA HOUSE.

FIRST VISIT TO HER NEW OFFICE.

Viscountess Snowden of Ickornshaw, who has accepted the Vice-chairmanship of the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate, paid her first visit to her office at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden this morning where she is continuing her strenuous endevour on behalf of permanent British opera, for which she has already done so much.

Photo shows- Lady Snowden in her new office this morning. With her is Mr. Edgar, manager of the Royal Opera House.
NOTE TO EDITOR. Lady Snowden is giving interviews to all the press today.
FOX. NOV. 26th. 31.

S06573

Illustration 3.5: Ethel Snowden at Covent Garden, 26 November 1931 (author's collection).

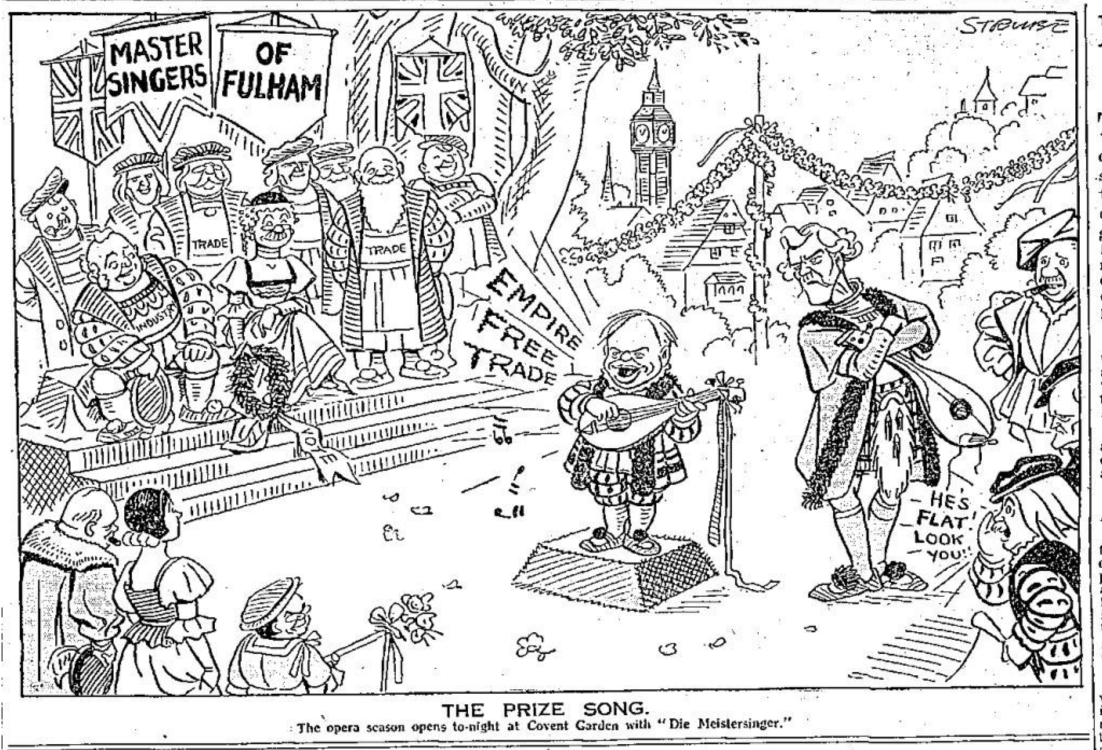

Illustration 3.6: 'The Prize Song', *Daily Express*, 28 April 1930.

Illustration 3.7: 'The Chancellor's Musical Soul', *Evening Standard*, 5 April 1930.

Lees-Smith as his PMG in June 1929: he worked closely with Snowden in setting up the opera grant.

Szavasy wrote to Reith on 4 July 1930, reporting that he had met the Chancellor and that Snowden had 'virtually promised to try to get through the scheme as you and I discussed it the other day'.[69] Szarvasy estimated that an annual grant of £25,000 would be sufficient to finance the international season of opera at Covent Garden and, in addition, an expansion into opera in English by means of an annual tour of the provinces, something that would be facilitated by the proposed merger with the ILO. The conditions of the subsidy included insistence that ticket prices would be lower for English opera seasons. The BNOC had been declared bankrupt in 1929, and Szarvasy and Blois took the initiative of employing the BNOC musicians knowing that the ILO merger was moving ahead and that subsidy negotiations were going well.[70]

A handwritten memo dated February 1931 recalls the details involved in the setting up of the arrangement.[71] From June 1930, initial discussions were held between Reith and Szarvasy; an outline legal agreement was sent to the Treasury for approval, with the Treasury, mentioned as a party to the agreement, contributing £17,500. The BBC had calculated that they could justify a £7,500 p.a. contribution based on broadcasting value, with the remainder to be provided by the reduction in Treasury revenues, adding up to the required £25,000.[72] Reith had envisaged that, with the BBC's contribution of £7,500 and the Treasury's £17,500 all three parties would sign the agreement. So he was surprised and anxious when the Treasury and the PMG insisted that their names be removed from the agreement and that their part of the subsidy, the reduction in the Treasury levy, be covered in a separate private agreement. It was becoming clear that, although the PMG would facilitate the grant,

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[69] BBC WAC, 34/508/1.

[70] The BNOC's last performance was at Golders Green in April 1929.

[71] Eckersley memo, BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

[72] Calculations for this figure comprise 20 performances at £150 each for the summer season (this amount arbitrarily increased from the previous rate of £100) and £100 for 40 performances of English opera, totalling £7,000; Reith seemed happy to round this up to £7,500: Boult to Assistant Director of Programming (ADP), BBC Internal Circulating Memo, 9 July 1930, in BBC WAC, R34/508/1. The total of 60 opera performances a year was a substantial broadcasting commitment. Reith expressed anxiety over this figure: 'I wish I felt happier about the £7,500. Don't you think that £7,500 is on the generous side?'; Reith to ADP, 15 July 1930, BBC Internal Circulating Memo, BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

he did not want the Treasury to be mentioned as party to the agreement. For Reith this was the first sign that he was to be forced into becoming the public face of the subsidy: as a result of this change, the new company, formed to receive the subsidy, would be owned 83% by the BBC (this proportion representing £25,000 of the total annual funding of CGOS, £30,000). Reith had anticipated that the BBC would simply be a minor contributor to the CGOS (£7,500 out of the total £25,000) and was not pleased by this turn of events; he had no option, however, other than to proceed as instructed.[73] Philip Snowden also indicated his approval of the scheme in a letter to Reith, confirming that the Treasury would 'approve of the agreement as drafted' but leaving Reith in control of considerably more than he had expected.[74]

The 'Government Grant for Grand Opera' agreement was signed on 27 November 1930 and announced in parliament; the Snowden's celebrated at Downing Street (see Illustration 3.8). It was for a term of five years but contained a clause that would permit termination after two. There followed days of questions in the House as it became clear to Snowden that he was unlikely to receive approval for the scheme.[75] Having employed the musicians from the BNOC, Szarvasy needed money to fund the 1930 autumn tour; the agreement included £5,000 for this purpose. In light of the Bill's adverse reception, Reith asked the Treasury's approval to make an advance payment to Covent Garden; they agreed to refund it when the bill was passed in parliament, but 'with the formal stipulation that if Parliament were to decline to vote any money, we could not pay you'.[76]

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[73] Szarvasy, 'Memorandum re Covent Garden Opera Syndicate Limited', 13 April 1932, BBC WAC, R27/498.
[74] 6 October 1930, BBC WAC, R34/508/2.
[75] *Hansard,* 20 November 1930, vol. 245, cc 718-9, 1485-7 and 1792-4.
[76] Sir Frederick Phillips to Reith, 3 November 1930, in BBC WAC, 34/508/2. The subsidy was eventually approved by a circuitous route without a vote: a supplementary agreement with the BBC was laid before parliament on 11 June 1931 and included in the Appropriation Act, which received Royal assent in July 1931, *Hansard,* 15 September 1931, Commons Sitting, Trade & Commerce, Vol. 256 cc 669-70, 20. See also Szarvasy, letter to Reith, 16 July 1931: 'it seems to me that the Government subsidy will go through by default, as there is too much between now and the end of the month for Parliament to discuss to allow time to discuss the Post Office vote', BBC WAC, R34/508/3. The supplemental agreement between the BBC and the PMG was signed on 11 June 1931; see letter to Napier at the General Post Office, 26 October 1932, in BBC WAC, R34/508/4 (Napier was sub PMG to Ormsby-Gore).

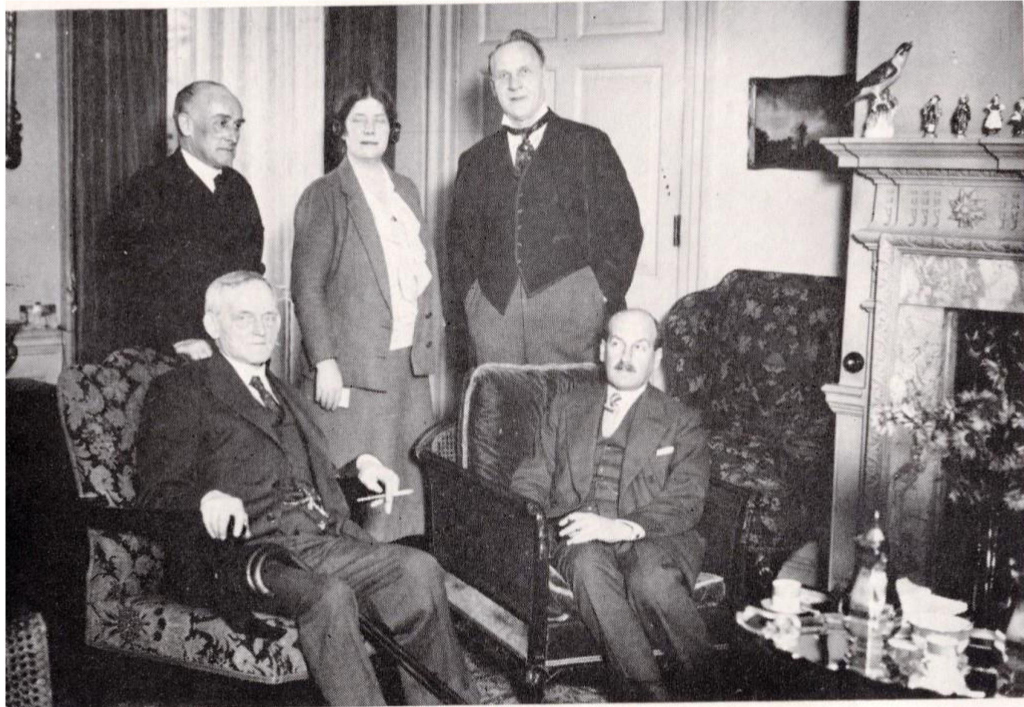

Illustration 3.8: Luncheon party at No. 11 Downing Street to celebrate the subsidy: December 1930. Seated Philip Snowden and Frederick Szarvasy, standing Lionel Powell, Ethel Snowden and Feodor Chaliapin; from the Radio Times Hulton Picture Library, reproduced in Colin Cross, *Philip Snowden* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1966), 149.

The Government Subsidy and the Merger

While the subsidy was being negotiated, Blois and Szarvasy continued negotiations with Beecham for the ILO to merge with CGOS. However, and critically, Szarvasy kept his negotiations with Snowden secret from Beecham, telling Beecham that he had private funding of £30,000 in place. In September 1930, Beecham wrote a circular letter to the ILO subscribers informing them that he had reached an agreement with the CGOS 'under which the main purpose for which the League was formed will be amply fulfilled'; and, on 4 October 1930, he announced to the press that he had entered an agreement with the CGOS to form a new organization. By 5 November 1930, 94% of ILO members had signed up to the merger.

The subsidy was announcement in *The Times* on 15 November 1930: an article entitled 'Grand Opera in Britain: Future Ensured' included a statement that 'arrangements are in course of being completed for the participation of Sir Thomas Beecham and the ILO'.[77] It was immediately clear to Beecham that Szarvasy must have been in secret negotiation with the government for several months.[78] Beecham and the ILO members were furious: it was clear that CGOS did not have the level of private funding they had been led to believe and was thus a much less valuable organization. The ILO members had assumed Szarvasy was bringing £30,000 of private funding to the table, when all along his calculations were based on the assumption that most of the money would be in the form of the government grant. This was important to the ILO members because they had already contributed to the ILO, and the merger had been agreed on the basis that the CGOS was similarly well funded. Szarvasy had historically been a major contributor to Covent Garden: prior to the opera grant he had personally been contributing £10,000 a year.[79] A further complication was that Szarvasy had guaranteed to Beecham that CGOS funding would be secure for five years, something that the ILO members considered essential for stability. In fact,

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[77] November 1930, BBC WAC, R34/508/2.
[78] A letter from Beecham to Szarvasy, dated 29 November 1930, complains again about Szarvasy's lack of candour: BBC WAC, R34/508/2.
[79] Eckersley memo, June 1930, BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

though, as mentioned, the government had a break clause that could be exercised after two years; as we shall see, that clause was indeed used.

As mentioned above, Beecham was also angry that the subsidy was not paid to him and claimed that Szarvasy had stolen his idea.[80] When the grant was announced, the ILO subscribers were irate: fundamentally they felt *they* should have been awarded the government funds; from their perspective, English opera seemed more worthy than opera at Covent Garden, because it was both more widely available (owing to the low ticket price) and was sung in English. What is more, the ILO intended to employ none but native singers. The subscribers felt that they were being penalised for their interest in opera, and were being made to contribute to opera twice, once to the ILO and again through their BBC licence fee.[81] Small wonder that Beecham and his members abruptly broke off merger negotiations.

Press Comment

The press was partisan in most musical matters, and this was no exception: it was well known, for example, that Ernest Newman, writing for the *Sunday Times,* was an outspoken critic of Covent Garden and a keen advocate of Beecham, while the *Telegraph* and the *Evening Standard* were very much on Covent Garden's side.[82] Newman was well known for his lengthy weekly column, 'The World of Music', and had already shown his hand as an ILO supporter in various articles criticizing the efforts of

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[80] A letter was sent to the editor from the solicitors representing the ILO: 'the desirability of amalgamation began to be seriously questioned by members of the League from the first public announcement concerning the proposed Government subsidy to the CGS … general feeling on the part of members was against both a government subsidy and an amalgamation with any organisation dependent upon such aid'; *Telegraph,* 5 January 1931. 'Under these circumstances the League is taking the only straightforward and dignified course open to it, which is to wipe the slate clean of the traces of all negotiations prior to the November publications on the part of the Government and the BBC and to start all over again'. Beecham's claim to have met the Prime Minister in 1929 was included in a letter to *The Times,* 17 December 1930. Ethel Snowden repudiated this claim: 'I have personally seen the PM Mr MacDonald at 10 Downing Street on the subject, and am assured by him that he never promised a State subsidy for Opera nor ever intended such'; Snowden to Reith, BBC WAC, 34/508/5.

[81] 'How was it that, having asked members of the league for one subsidy for opera to be voluntarily given, we had the impudence to acquiesce in a scheme under which a further tax upon them unwillingly for the same purpose'; taken from report of a meeting in Manchester of the ILO, *The Times,* 11 December 1930. A statement of subscriptions and subscribers confirms that £56,781 was held at the bank from a total 42,201 subscribers; September 1930, BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

[82] Philip Page was invited to some meetings of the CGOS and was a 'tame' reporter; see 10 March 1931, ROHC Pre-War Business Papers, Box 1, Board Minute file, 1931.

the CGOS.[83] His column on 30 November 1930 took the form of a 'Wanted' poster: 'Information Desired – The £30,000 Mystery'. As an ILO subscriber he wrote persuasively about the logical relationship between the ILO membership and funding structure. The latter, claimed Newman, 'threw the burden … not upon the millions of people who do not want it [opera] but upon the few thousands who do'. Newman described the subsidy as 'Snowden's bombshell': he was furious that Szarvasy's promise of £30,000 of annual funding was not, as Newman and the ILO had assumed, from independent private sources. Newman quoted a statement from Ethel Snowden demonstrating that she too was keeping the secret: 'I have known about this scheme for some time, but I have kept it a dark secret as I did not think the time ripe for a statement'.[84] Newman went on to criticize Szarvasy for having no qualifications to run opera ('a financier who has become recently interested in opera') and Blois for being in charge of the 'artistic side', similarly with no credentials.[85] In the following week his column, 'An Appeal to Common Sense' (14 December), referred to a statement from Szarvasy that had made a case for the subsidy on the grounds that it secured employment for the country's musicians. Newman derided Szarvasy for what he regarded a smoke-screen argument and criticized Reith for tackling a project that was beyond the BBC's remit.[86]

Conclusion

The announcement of the government grant to opera in November 1930 offered the possibility that opera in the UK might move into a new era of financial security. The provision of an external, 'democratic' source of funding could, it was argued, free opera from the commercial constraints that had held it back for so long, giving the art-

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[83] Newman criticized the CGOS, accusing it of being under a 'pathetic delusion' for attempting to stage Italian opera and treating the singers as stars when 'there is not an Italian tenor in the world at present that any connoisseur would hold to be comparable with the giants of the past … yet as much deference is paid to these minor luminaries as if they were stars of the first magnitude!' He also described the repertory as 'fourth rate' – and accused Covent Garden of having 'stood still' for the past 20 years: 'Some Covent Garden Errors', *Sunday Times*, 6 July 1930.
[84] *Sunday Times*, 30 November 1930.
[85] *Sunday Times*, 7 December 1930.
[86] 'That the BBC does not feel itself either called upon or equipped to "run" opera in the full sense of the word is shown by its leaving the administration of the new venture to the Syndicate'; *Sunday Times*, 14 December 1930.

form much-needed space to develop. But the grant was immediately extremely unpopular and there was much criticism in the press. The *Saturday Review* commented on the inappropriateness of the grant being made by an insolvent government:

> A Bankrupt State subsidizing a Bankrupt trade: Mr. Snowden's decision to provide a State grant for opera will no doubt please Mr. Clynes [the Home Secretary], who has a passion for music-drama; and, even more important, it will probably win Mrs. Snowden's approval since she is officially concerned to improve the B.B.C. programmes. Far be it from me to suggest that a Chancellor of the Exchequer should offend either his colleague or his wife, especially when they are on the side of the angels; but it does seem a little odd to see a Bankrupt State subsidizing a Bankrupt trade. [87]

Cartoons appeared in the *Daily Mail* on 26 and 27 November 1930 ridiculing the situation: 'with two million people unemployed, Mr and Mrs Philip Snowden have donated £92,500 to Grand Opera. Mr and Mrs Snowden apparently think that notes used by Wagner are worth much more than ours' (see Illustrations 3.9 and 3.10).

The timing of the subsidy was extremely unfortunate and caused the merger between CGOS and the ILO to fail. Had Szarvasy managed the two negotiations (the merger and the subsidy) better, or if events had taken place in a different order, the outcome might have been very different. On the face of it, the two schemes could have worked well together, the one facilitating the other. The CGOS and the ILO working together with state funding could even have served both old and new opera audiences. But the opportunity was missed: the grant was put in place in a rush; the government was unstable; Philip Snowden's power as Chancellor was rapidly diminishing. While plans to merge with the ILO stalled, there was no option except to pay the subsidy to the CGOS, which was desperate for funds in order to remain in business and had committed itself to the employment of English musicians from the BNOC and English opera seasons. The ingenuity of the solution had left Snowden with an insurmountable problem: the passivity of the subsidy, coming from a reduction in a revenue stream rather than directly as a new grant from government, meant that there was no clarity about who was administering it. Neither Snowden, the PMG nor Reith was willing to be the face associated with the project. Reith refused to be a

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[87] *Saturday Review*, 29 November 1930.

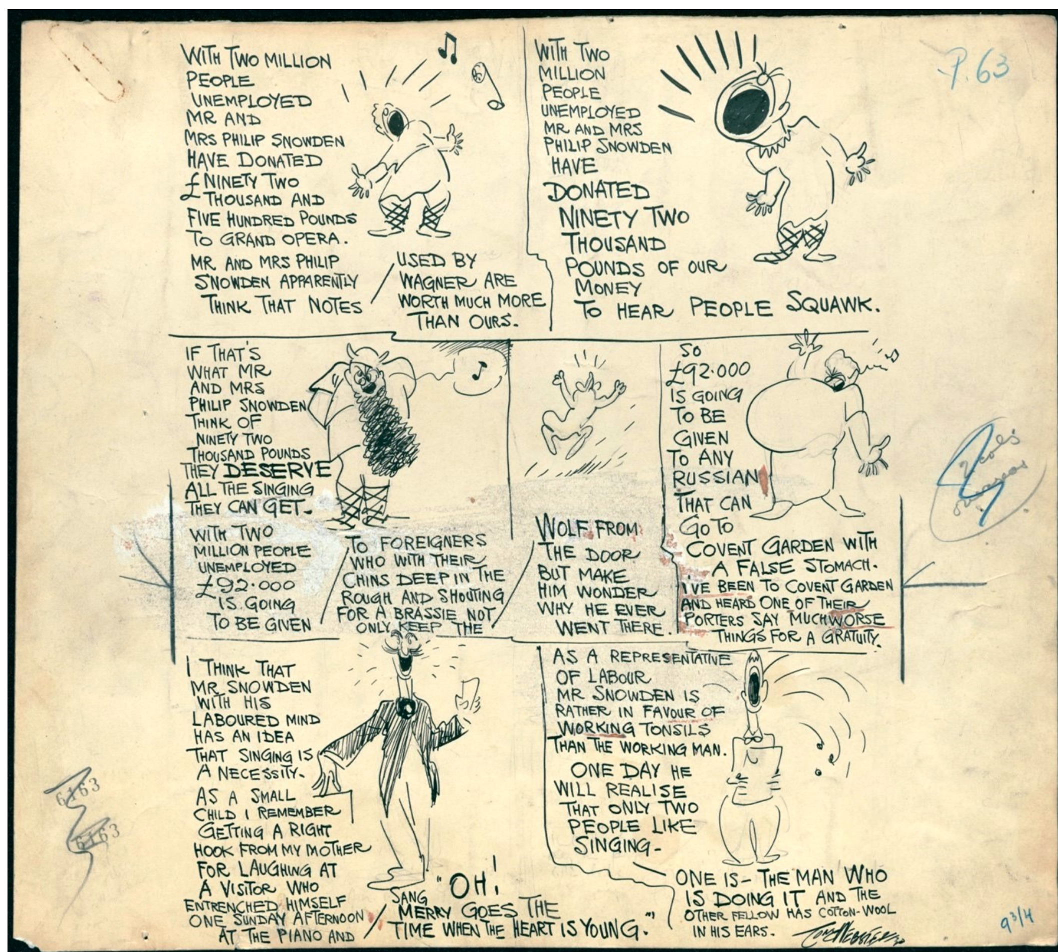

Illustration 3.9: 'With two million people unemployed, Mr and Mrs Philip Snowden have donated £Ninety Two Thousand and Five Hundred Pounds to Grand Opera': Tom Webster cartoon, *Daily Mail,* 26 November 1930.

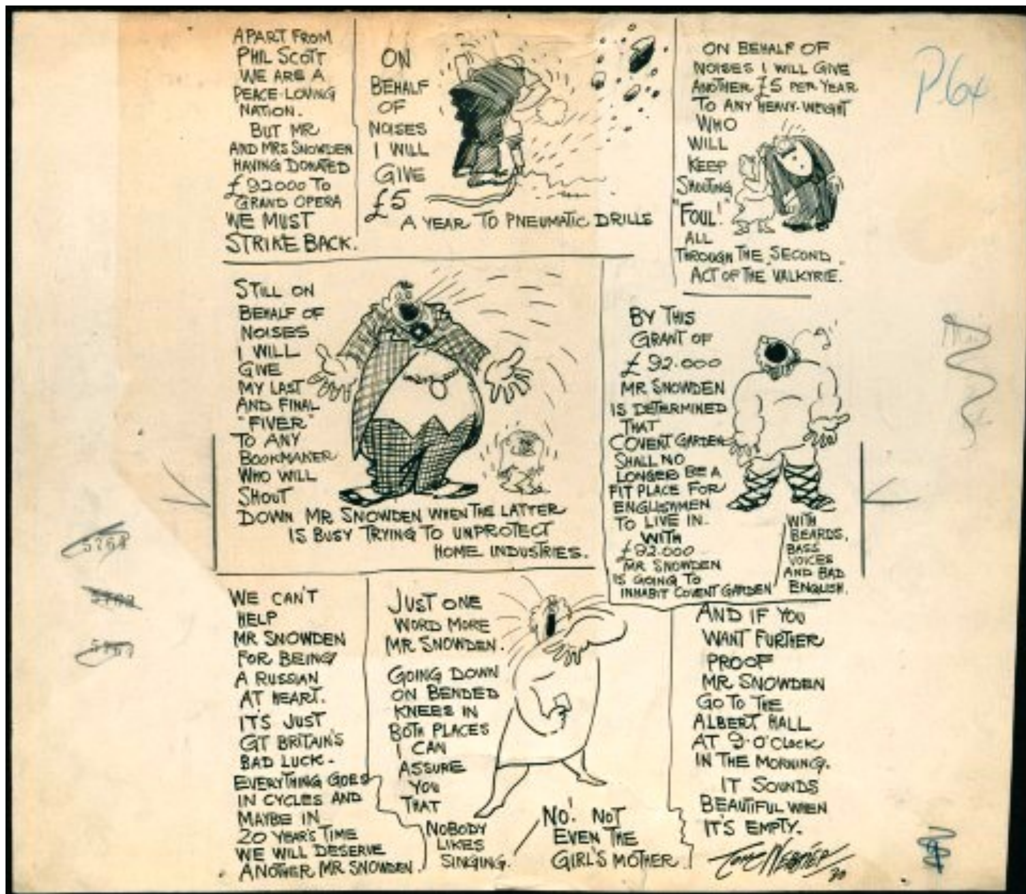

Illustration 3.10: 'By this grant of £92,000 Mr Snowden is determined that Covent Garden shall no longer be a place for Englishmen to live in': Tom Webster cartoon, *Daily Mail,* 27 November 1930.

director of the CGOS because he had serious doubts about whether the project should be run in the name of the BBC. This vacuum in ownership of the grant caused major squabbles, ones that form the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4
BBC Opera 1930-1933: The Opera Dole

Introduction

This chapter forms the second half of the central case study in this thesis; it concerns events during the early 1930s when the Socialist government paid a subsidy to opera. This subsidy represented an important landmark along the route to state funding of the arts, but there were many problems with the grant, and the arrangement lasted barely two years. Both this and the previous chapters investigate the personalities and motivations of the people involved in this affair, and offer a wider context of the period, during which there were many changes in the world of opera. The subsidy was intended to stimulate the progress of opera from its existing stalemate to a new future in which repertoire could be widened, standards improved and the feasibility of an 'English' school of opera explored. Under the old regime, dependent on seat sales as the main source of revenue, opera remained in a quagmire, increasingly unable to cover the cost of production.

In this chapter I examine of the actions and views of eight characters, all of whom have been introduced in the previous chapter: Philip Snowden and his wife Ethel, the Post Master General (PMG), John Reith, Frederick Szarvasy, Eustace Blois, Thomas Beecham and his patron and partner Emerald Cunard. It was the Snowdens who had the vision for the grant: facilitated through the PMG and Reith, it was to garner a portion of the British Broadcasting Corporation's licence fee, previously paid to the government via the PMG. Thus, although the subsidy was from BBC licence fee money, it was a source that, in effect, involved government funds. Together with two key members of the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate (CGOS), Szarvasy and Blois, and with the aim of involving Beecham and his partner Cunard, the group managed to get an agreement signed by the end of 1930.

I start this chapter in December 1930, after the announcement of the government grant. Initial plans were to pay the sums involved to a merged body comprising Covent Garden and Beecham's Imperial League of Opera (ILO); at the time of the announcement, the two groups were very near to agreement on a merger. In

Chapter Three I described how, only a month earlier, Beecham had received approval from a majority of his ILO subscribers for the merger. Negotiations surrounding the merger had been difficult because both sides had different expectations about the outcome. In one camp, Beecham hoped that it would help achieve his dream of running his own English opera company and fund a new English opera house. His ideal theatre would have had substantially increased seating capacity and thus been able to produce viable opera at the lower ticket price demanded by so many English opera goers. In the other camp, the management at Covent Garden hoped that the combined funds of the two bodies would facilitate the survival of the international season at Covent Garden, leaving a portion of the funds to promote opera seasons in English. As described in the previous chapter, the subsidy was announced before the merger had been finalized; to the disappointment of all my main characters, this timing ultimately caused the merger to fail.

The BBC had become an increasingly important patron of music over the previous decade, supporting various orchestras and taking over the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts in 1927.[1] These patronage activities represented milestones towards state funding of the arts: the funds came from licence fee money and were therefore, under the BBC's remit, 'democratic'; but they were not direct state funding. The BBC was at the centre of the national opera debate because of their support of the BNOC and because they were actively promoting opera by paying for broadcasts. But the proposed opera subsidy was quite different from the BBC's earlier patronage activities: even though it was carved out of licence fee money, it came from a reduction in the annual remittance to the Treasury (if you like, a reduction of the BBC's tax liability) and, most significantly, was outside Reith's control. Reith was not comfortable with this position. He had been left responsible for the grant after Snowden and the PMG had made it clear that they no longer wished to be associated

[1] The BBC supported the Hallé Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic and the Northern Philharmonic Society; see Edward Living, 'British Broadcasting and its Role', *The Fortnightly,* 857 (May 1938), 545-55. Footnote 9 in Chapter Three gives details of the various orchestras and bands formed by the BBC at this time.

with its, but he had no power to change it.[2] Although there had been considerable initial excitement about the subsidy, it was soon clear that there would be a problem in obtaining public support: many in the country thought the funds set aside for opera should support more deserving causes in the troubled economy. During the ensuing months Philip Snowden encountered significant difficulties in his political career, which meant he was increasingly unable to promote the grant. The PMG also became less inclined to publicly support the grant, which attracted much negative criticism.

Although Reith considered the possibility that the BBC might set up their own opera organization, he decided against it. He had recently, and successfully, founded the BBC Symphony Orchestra, but a similar 'BBC Opera' would be far more expensive. As revealed in Chapter Three, the amount of the annual grant (£25,000) was substantially in excess of the annual value Reith calculated that opera gave to the BBC, which was at most only £7,500.[3] But, despite determination that the BBC would not take over opera, Reith was left in ultimate control of the operation at CGOS: the £25,000 annual grant represented 83% of the CGOS's annual revenue and thus, under the terms of the arrangement, the BBC owned 83% of the company. The statutory company records reflect this position. Such ownership meant that Reith, by default, had to assume responsibility for future losses at Covent Garden.

Ethel Snowden had involved herself with both the BBC and opera, and had done so with a characteristic socialist zeal to promote music and its benefits to a wider audience. She was part of both the BBC and the CGOS teams; but despite her enthusiastic endeavours, she was not popular either publicly or within those two

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[2] On 30 November 1930 Snowden was challenged in the House of Commons by Victor Cazalet about whether this was a Treasury grant; Snowden denied this, stating that the grant was a matter between the BBC and the PMG. His answer was only partly correct – the Treasury had agreed but it demonstrated Snowden's efforts to remove himself from the situation.

[3] There were ambiguous reports in the press: that the grant was £25,000 or that it was £17,500 annually. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was £25,000 in total, but the BBC could justify £7,500 in terms of broadcast value, leaving £17,500 as the absolute government subsidy. See the extensive correspondence in mid-1930, prior to the grant, when the BBC struggled to reach even £7,000 ('value for broadcast opera – 20 spring @ £100, 20 summer @ £150, 2- autumn @ £100 – total £7,000'). See also the Eckersley summary from around the same date, detailing sums at the start of the grant: '£7,500 representing BBC's proper grant in respect of programme value of operas to be broadcast'. A second, unsigned memo around July 1930 confirms that Reith was only prepared to be interested in opera to the extent represented by the programme value for broadcasting, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.

organizations (see Illustration 4.1). To some extent the slights she suffered were understandable: she had extremely limited experience of the business world. The other prominent woman discussed in this chapter, Emerald Cunard, was more obviously ambitious to assume the mantle of first lady of opera. She entered the Covent Garden opera arena when Beecham was invited to conduct the 1932 season: her personal determination and combative manner became apparent during that year. As these two women came into competition with each other, both conducted themselves in ways that did a disservice to their ideals. Meanwhile, Szarvasy and Reith continued their efforts to keep the subsidy in place, particularly as it became clear that a merger with the ILO or Beecham was not sufficient to placate the critics. They set about coordinating as many opera groups as they could, endeavouring to satisfy critics of the grant by paying it to an amalgamated Opera-England group, a mammoth task because of the complexities of reaching agreement among the individuals concerned. The frustration of both otherwise level-headed individuals was apparent as the project progressed.

The various strands of the argument surrounding the grant are neatly summarised by the Conservative MP Victor Cazalet in a letter to the *Weekend Review* on 13 December 1930. It was by then apparent that no one was willing to assume responsibility for the subsidy in its journey through Parliament. Cazalet's letter is entitled 'The Opera Dole' – the nickname given to the opera grant – an apt description because it directly referred to unemployment, which at this point was the issue threatening to cause the government to fail, and therefore caused many to think that the money should help the unemployed instead of opera audiences. Cazalet summarised the confusion and outrage of the ILO subscribers, and indicated that Snowden's idea was unlikely to receive the support of Parliament:

> We are still left in the dark as regards many aspects of this case, and are even more astounded at the muddle and mystery with which the government continues to surround the whole business. Among the facts we have elicited since last week are the following: 1) Mr Snowden alone was responsible for the decision: however, he has handed the "baby" over to the Post Master General and refuses, perhaps wisely, to

Illustration 4.1: Ethel Snowden circa 1931. She was entitled Viscountess Snowden, due to her husband's elevation to the peerage in 1931: photo by Fox Photos/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

> be drawn on the subject…. 2) We are at a loss to know why the Imperial League of Opera was completely ignored by the government and the BBC in spite of the fact that officials of the League were in the process of negotiating with the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate at the very time the subsidy was offered…. It is not clear whether the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate desire to co-operate with the League or whether we are to assume that their actions in the last few weeks have been expressly designed to break off the negotiations and sever all connections between the two bodies. Whatever may be said in support of it [the subsidy] from an artistic standpoint has been counterbalanced by the minimum amount of tact and the maximum amount of confusion with which the offer has been announced. It is inconceivable that Parliament will sanction the grant.

The linking of the opera subsidy to the country's unemployment benefit crisis continued through the period under review. While reports and photographs of the Snowdens accompanying the 1930 budget, which coincided with the start of the 1930 opera season, had been somewhat playful, by 1931 they were replaced with a much harsher tone. Articles such as this one in the *Sunday Express* criticized the extravagance of opera and ridiculed the Snowdens for deserting their socialist ideals:

> Dole Opera: Mr and Mrs Snowden from the budget to Covent Garden. To enjoy the first instalment of your £92,000. Not the cavalier taxpayer. Tomorrow is to be a great day for Mr and Mrs Philip Snowden. At 4 o'clock Mr Snowden will introduce his 1931 budget. At 7.45 after listening to her husband's speech, Mrs Snowden will take her place in a box at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden to hear the opening of the season which it is proposed to subsidize with £92,000 of tax payer's money, or £17,500 a year for 5 years. The curtain will rise at Covent Garden almost immediately after Mr Snowden sits down to rest after breaking the bad news to the country. The opera subsidy is only a small part of it. The grand opera season lasts less than 10 weeks. A box for those weeks, costs the comparatively small sum of £472.10s. Owing to her position as director of the BBC, and of the proposed opera syndicate, Mrs Snowden will appear in the directors' box. Mrs Snowden has expressed herself as 'delighted' that her husband has 'saved opera'. Ten weeks of opera on the dole at £17,000 means that it is to cost the government £1,700 a week. Many people think that if the money were not spent on grand opera, it might be used to relax the strain of taxation which is at the highest point it has ever reached in this country. Or it could be used to solve some part of the problem of 2,500,000 British unemployed, of whom only a small proportion are singers in grand opera.[4]

[4] *Sunday Express*, 26 April 1931.

Political Landscape: 1930-31

Despite the relatively insignificant amount of the subsidy, there were many questions raised on the subsidy both in Parliament and in the press; here I should like to offer some wider political context for the subsidy.[5] Snowden was increasingly less vocal in his support of the grant: he and the Labour government became progressively more engaged with intensifying economic problems that threatened national stability. As Chancellor, Snowden played a major role in the political struggles that resulted from the great Depression of 1930-31, a slump that eventually led to the fall of the Labour government. Snowden had initiated the idea of the opera grant at the height of his career as a pioneering Labour economist; but by the time it was withdrawn at the end of 1932, he had lost all political potency and was no longer Chancellor. Indeed, Snowden's political demise became inextricably linked to that of the grant: public perception of the 'opera dole' was that it represented all that was wrong with the Labour government. His increasing desperation to distance himself from the grant is demonstrated by the dearth of correspondence from him in the BBC's Written Archive Centre (BBC WAC): there is only one document, and that records a phone call between Snowden and Reith on 13 February 1931 which discussed the difficulties in obtaining Parliamentary approval.[6]

Andrew Thorpe's study of the 1931 general election offers a comprehensive description of the British political landscape: one chapter, entitled 'From Elation to Despair: 1929-1931', describes the fall of the Labour party and of Ramsay MacDonald and Snowden.[7] As the country sank further into the Depression, Snowden's strict policies of free trade and limited borrowing became ever more unpopular; but he

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[5] The mechanism under which the opera subsidy would gain government approval was complex: it formed part of the 'Supplementary Estimate', an amendment to the 'Main Estimate' (the process by which the government's spending plans were approved). And so, because it formed part of the Government's overall spending plans, it did not require a specific vote in Parliament.

[6] As Snowden had anticipated, the House of Commons ran out of time and the grant was only passed by default as part of the Post Office vote.

[7] Andrew Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 8-29. For details of the acrimonious relationship with MacDonald, see Keith Laybourn, 'The Road from Leeds to the Lords', in Keith Laybourn and David James, *Philip Snowden* (Bradford: Bradford Libraries and Information Service, 1987), 59-80, esp. 59, and the final chapter in the same book, written by Brendan Evans, 'The Declining Years', 81-102.

steadfastly refused to accept that taxes should be increased or import tariffs imposed. Other previously staunch supporters of free trade became persuaded of the benefits of protectionism as the economic situation deteriorated, but Snowden's views never wavered. Unemployment was perhaps the single most problematic area of the failing economy; few agreed with Snowden's refusal to cut the levels of unemployment benefit.[8] The dole, introduced in 1920, had originally been intended to be self-funding and had a built-in borrowing limit of £40m: borrowing stood at £37m when Snowden took office in 1929 but, on his watch, the number of unemployed rose from 1.2m in September 1929 to 2.8m in July 1931. Snowden struggled unsuccessfully to find ways to fund the subsequent increase in the cost of benefits.[9] In photos from this time one can see the effect this struggle on him: one of his fellow cabinet ministers, J.H. Thomas, described him as 'ill in the head as well as in the balls': he had a prostate operation in March 1931; his wife reported that he was in a nursing home in Harrogate in July 1932.[10]

Indeed, Snowden's defiant stance in the financial crisis of August 1931, which was caused by a run on the pound, is remembered as one of the contributing factors in the resignation of MacDonald and a disastrous end to the Labour government. On 22 August 1931, the King sent for MacDonald and demanded that, as an emergency measure, he form a National Government, a coalition of all political parties. Snowden became isolated and more antagonistic towards MacDonald, their mutual dislike intensifying as both former Socialists were forced to abandon their ideals and adapt to the coalition.[11] Snowden made a radio broadcast on 17 October, speaking for the National Government and voicing his fears of the increasingly Socialist policies of the Labour party, describing them as 'Bolshevism run mad': Colin Cross suggests that Snowden's broadcast was responsible for winning hundreds of thousands of votes for

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[8] Chapter 3, 'Progress and Collapse, 1922-31', Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 59-82. See also Martin Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1851-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 478-79.

[9] Options available to him were to raise contributions, reduce benefits, raise the borrowing limit or fund the deficit out of taxes.

[10] Thorpe, *The British General Election*, 27 and Snowden to Reith, 24 July 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.

[11] Laybourn, 'The Road from Leeds', 59; Colin Cross, *Philip Snowden* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1966), 240 and Thorpe, *1931*, 27.

the National Government.[12] A General Election was called for November and the Labour party fell into opprobrium, entering what has been termed its 'devil's decade'.[13] Those who accused Snowden of abandoning his Socialist principles felt their fears were justified by his subsequent acceptance of a peerage and a position in the new administration as Lord Privy Seal: he was one of the first high-profile Socialists to enter the House of Lords.[14]

Overall, Snowden's economic policies are not given credit in traditional narratives.[15] John Maynard Keynes's economic principles prevailed for most of the twentieth century: his economic theory was largely formed in reaction to the failures of the early Labour government; as a result, Snowden's legacy as one of the first Socialist economists is not considered valuable. Keynes, a lifelong protectionist who advocated a 10% import tariff, was an economist whose theories were developed in reaction to the crisis of the times: his policies were thus diametrically opposite to Snowden's. Indeed, Keynes found fault with many of Snowden's policies, including the decisions taken at The Hague negotiations which, at the time, had been considered so successful that they gave rise to Snowden's title as the 'Iron Chancellor'.[16] Snowden's views were also at odds with many others, notably Beatrice and Sidney Webb and Winston Churchill, who had preceded him as Chancellor of the Exchequer and opposed the idea of government support of opera.[17] A recent re-evaluation of Keynesian

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[12] Cross, *Snowden*, 318-20.
[13] Thorpe, *The British General Election*, 5.
[14] Sidney Webb had been created a peer two years earlier.
[15] Skidelsky criticized Snowden and MacDonald for being failures; Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929-1931* (London: Macmillan, 1967). Julian Glover, writing in the *Guardian* on 4 April 2005, commented that the 1931 Government was 'formed in haste': <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/apr/04/electionspast.past6> [accessed 18 September 2018].
[16] Keynes claimed that Snowden's actions led to unduly harsh reparations on Germany, which were a contributing factor towards the economic Depression in Germany, which in turn played its part in causing the Second World War; see Keynes, 'The German Transfer Problem', *Economic Journal*, 39, 153 (March 1929), 1-7.
[17] Winston Churchill was questioned on 22 January 1929 in the house, but replied 'I fear I cannot undertake financial assistance at the cost of the Exchequer to such associations': Hansard, HC Deb. 22 January 1929, Vol. 224, cc 16-17.

economics might, though, support a more sympathetic assessment of Snowden's economic legacy.[18]

As Snowden fell from power and endeavoured to distance himself from opera, he forced the PMG into the limelight, insisting that the latter defend the subsidy. At the outset this was straightforward because the PMG shared Snowden's vision; but as the economic situation worsened and Labour fell from power, he was less keen to do so. In 1930 the ministerial post of PMG was held by Hastings Lees-Smith: Snowden left him to defend the grant in a question session in the House of Commons on 25 November 1930.[19]

Beecham and the ILO: 1930-31

The circumstances surrounding the subsidy and the resultant failure of the proposed merger between the CGOS and ILO were examined in the previous chapter. The announcement in the House of Commons on 1 December 1930 confirmed that the CGOS's funding was, for the main part, made up of the government grant: as a result, both Beecham and the ILO subscribers immediately withdrew their agreement to merge.[20] Beecham made a lengthy public statement on 16 December 1930 in which he

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[18] Ross McKibbin, 'The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government 1929-1931', *Past & Present,* 68 (1975), 95-123; Nicholas Owen 'MacDonald's Parties: The Labour Party and the Aristocratic Embrace, 1922–31', *Twentieth Century British History,* 18, 1 (2007), 1-53; Jim Tomlinson, *Managing the Economy, Managing the People: Narratives of Economic Life in Britain from Beveridge to Brexit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6-7.

[19] Lees-Smith was succeeded as PMG in March 1931 by Clement Atlee (Labour), who was replaced in August 1931, when MacDonald resigned, by Sir William Ormsby-Gore (Conservative) and after the General Election on 10 November 1931 by Sir Kingsley Wood (Conservative) who held office until 7 June 1935. Reith disliked Kingsley Wood, noting in his diaries that it was 'utterly damnable that the BBC should be made the political catspaw of a little bounder like K.W'; *The Reith Diaries,* ed. Charles Stuart (London: HarperCollins, 1975), 110. Wood went on to become Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1940 and was responsible for the introduction of PAYE. His budget of 1940 was described by Keynes as 'a revolution in public finance'; John Maynard Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, *Vol. 22*, ed. Donald Moggridge and Elizabeth Johnson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 212-15 and 353-54. In some ways, though, Wood's actions were balanced by the Secretary to the Post Office, then Evelyn Murray, who had held the post since 1914 and was vehemently against Wood's reform; D.O. Lumley, 'The Last Secretary to the Post Office', Post Office archives, Post 33/5529, M8566/1940. For more on Wood, see Roy Jenkins, *The Chancellors* (London: Macmillan, 1998) and G.C. Peden, 'Wood, Sir (Howard) Kingsley (1881–1943)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edn, Jan 2011 <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy2.londonlibrary.co.uk/view/article/37002> [accessed 23 April 2017].

[20] 'Imperial League's Statement: Replies in House Yesterday: Figures that seem irreconcilable:

lambasted the government and the BBC for switching allegiances and accused Szarvasy of lying about the sources of revenue.[21]

Broadly, Beecham saw himself as the country's premier opera magnate. Previously he and his father had run many opera seasons and had nearly managed to purchase the Covent Garden opera house, a move that might have changed the course of opera in this country by monopolising opera within the Beecham family dynasty. While Beecham's previous opera ventures had offered opera in a variety of languages and price points, his ILO had been set up to harness the increasing national support for opera in English: he planned performances around the country at 'popular' prices. Characteristically, Beecham saw himself as wholly in charge of the ILO without regard for its constitution or subscribers. He could, though, see the sense in co-operation with other opera producers to the extent that this could help raise London's profile as a centre for operatic excellence and help manage schedules of opera in London so that seasons did not clash.[22] Thus, he was in favour of the merger with Covent Garden, but only because he intended to out-manoeuvre the CGOS and take over their operation. He and Cunard, who were in a long-term relationship, had ambitions to take over

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The mystery of the Government subsidy for grand opera in this country was to some extent cleared up by answers to questions in the House of Commons yesterday. Mr Lees-Smith, the Postmaster General, stated that the production of opera would be in the hands of the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate (1930) Ltd. Grants totalling £30,000 a year would be paid to them, made up as follows: The BBC, £25,000, Private Subscribers, £5,000. Of the BBC contribution, £17,500 a year was described as "a special addition to their income". This is, of course, a government subsidy. The Gramophone Company is, it is understood, responsible for £2,500 of the £5,000 from "private subscribers". At the most then, the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate's financial contribution can be only £2,500. This conclusion is difficult to reconcile with the statement by the Imperial League of Opera when it circularized its subscribers regarding an arrangement for merger with the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate. That statement was: "the Covent Garden Opera Syndicate will contribute £30,000 a year to the scheme."' *Morning Post*, 2 December 1930.

[21] 'I was distinctly under the impression … that the £30,000 referred to was the direct contribution of the Covent Garden Syndicate and I had no previous knowledge of the contract with the BBC nor the government subsidy': 16 December 1930, Board Meetings, ROHC Pre-War Business Papers Box 1.

[22] Beecham described how he had 'plenipotentiary power' to deal with the merger; see letter from Beecham to Szarvasy, 5 May 1930, Royal Opera House Collections (ROHC), file 2, '1930 Correspondence' in Business Papers Pre-War Box 1. The letter also made reference to Beecham's 'most active and influential supporters', a suggestion that foreshadows later antagonism between Cunard and Ethel Snowden.

opera and the government grant, so that Beecham could assume control of all the country's opera.[23]

Meanwhile, in a separate dispute, a disgruntled minority of Beecham's subscribers had begun legal action against the ILO, wishing to have their funds returned to them. They were impatient that, several years after they had signed up, Beecham's arrogant attitude to the public did not help his cause; he continued to insist on what was now apparently an unachievable level of support before he was prepared to produce any opera. The subscribers had begun the legal process before the announcement of the subsidy and thus, by January 1931, the affairs of the ILO had moved into the control of the Court of Chancery: if the subscribers were vindicated, then the ILO would have to be wound up. The case was discussed in a letter to the *Telegraph* on 2 January 1931 under the title 'Winding Up League of Opera'.[24] Three days later a letter was published from the ILO's lawyers, protesting at the inference that the ILO was to be wound up and offering an explanation of the situation:

> A summons has been taken out at the instance of the Trustees in the Chancery Division of the High Court, asking directions as to whether the Trustees ought now, or at some future time, to take steps to repay to the subscribers of the League, or to such of them as desire repayment, their contributions.

Because the funds of the ILO were now under Court control, the views of the subscribers were less relevant. If the Court decided that the merger with the CGOS would be sufficiently beneficial to subscribers, the latter would not have a valid case to have their funds returned. This decision would mean that the merger could go ahead, regardless of the post-subsidy views of ILO members, thus releasing the ILO funds to the merged CGOS and ILO. This was, therefore, a case that Blois and Szarvasy followed carefully as they could see that they might benefit from a favourable Court decision.

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[23] Letter from Beecham to Szarvasy, dated 11 February 1930, in ROHC, 1930 file, in Pre-War Business Papers Box 1. Beecham reported a different point of view a year later in the *Telegraph,* 21 April 1931: 'Clash of Opera Seasons: Sir Thomas Beecham Optimistic: "All to the Good"'.
[24] Szarvasy to Reith, 2 January 1931, BBC WAC, 34/508/3.

Szarvasy, Blois and the CGOS: 1931

Despite its claim to be the most deserving representatives of English opera, the ILO was not the only group providing opera in English at this time: various other opera companies were producing opera in English, most notably Lilian Baylis's operations at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells.[25] At Covent Garden, following Blois's takeover of the (now bankrupt) British National Opera Company (BNOC) chorus, the CGOS had greatly widened its performance schedule and had added opera seasons in English, in response to an expanding appetite, both in London and in major cities around the country. These additional 1930 seasons had, however, been problematic for Blois, who struggled to make ends meet: economically English seasons were particularly unprofitable because of the low ticket prices. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show how Blois budgeted for these seasons: with a full house generating only £675 after Entertainments Tax (well under half what the international opera season would have made) and expectations of only 60% occupancy, he was forced to budget with minimum costs, much less than he was accustomed to.

After the announcement of the grant, Blois became more and more personally embroiled in the opera situation, allowing it to affect his judgement. He was managing opera at Covent Garden with Szarvasy's guidance: his annual statements for board meetings at Covent Garden track his mounting bitterness and discontent with the press; he took the insults personally.[26] He was singled out most notably by Ernest Newman (music critic at the *Sunday Times*) who was an ILO supporter. In January 1931, writing in the board's annual report, Blois was preoccupied with the deleterious effects of the press on opera, regretting 'the incredible attitude taken by the press and the somewhat childish procedure adopted by Sir Thomas Beecham'. An article in the *Radio Times* on 26 June 1931, written by W.J. Turner, asked: 'Is Covent Garden Out

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[25] Eric Walter White, *The Rise of English Opera* (London: John Lehmann, 1951). See also Steven Martin, 'The British "Operatic Machine": Investigations into the Institutional History of English Opera, c. 1875–1939' (Ph.D. dissertation, Bristol University, 2010).

[26] Blois's annual statements can be found in various boxes at ROHC. 1929 statement, ROHC Pre-War Business Papers, Box 1; 1930 statement, ROHC Pre-War Business Papers, Box 1, Board Minutes'; and 1931 statement, ROHC Pre-War Business Papers Box 2, Papers.

Autumn and Winter Season	Estimated Income and Expenses
Capacity	£675
	£4,050 per week for 6 performances
60% capacity	£2,430
Estimated Expenses	£2,215
Estimated profit	£215
Profit from bars and programmes	£110
Total profit	£325
	£3,900 for 12 weeks
Preliminary costs	£2,000
Net Profit	£1,900

Table 4.1: Autumn and Winter Seasons at Covent Garden.[27]

TICKET PRICE					REVENUE AT 100% CAPACITY BEFORE ENTERTAINMENTS TAX			REVENUE AT 100% AFTER ENTERTAINMENTS TAX		
BOXES		£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d
Pit & Grand Tier	17	3			51			44	4	
Balcony	7		34		11	18		10	10	
INDIVIDUAL SEATS										
Orchestra Stalls	245		15		183	15		159	5	
Orchestra Stalls	245		12		147			128	12	6
Stalls Circle	74		12		44	8		38	17	
Stalls Circle	128		8	6	54	8		48		
Dress Circle	95		12		57			49	17	6
Balcony Stalls	154		8	6	65	9		57	15	
Amphitheatre	381		5	8	109	10	9	95	5	
Gallery	500		2		50			673	19	4
TOTAL					£774	8s	9d	£673	19s	4d

Table 4.2: Capacity of the 'House' (Covent Garden) at 'Popular Prices.'[28]

of Date?': the piece blamed Blois for his conservative choice of repertoire.[29] Blois's reply was published in the same edition of the *Radio Times* and defended the CGOS position with reference to the dire financial situation. Blois described Newman as 'a

[27] Taken from a note in BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

[28] Taken from a note in BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

[29] The repertoire for these seasons is listed by Rosenthal in his comprehensive compilation; see Harold Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* (London: Putnam, 1958).

self-seeking propagandist': he went on to criticize Beecham and claim that journalists were negatively impacting on his efforts.[30]

The criticisms directed at Blois were cruel but valid: while the 1929 and 1930 losses at Covent Garden were manageable, the CGOS was by now desperately struggling financially: even with the extra support offered by the subsidy it was unable to present anything new in terms of repertoire, costumes or scenery.[31] At the start of 1931, Blois planned a total of 202 performances, of which 152 would be in English at popular prices, 110 of them outside London at the extremely low budgeted cost levels illustrated in Table 4.1.[32] When negotiations for the subsidy were taking place, it had been estimated the 1930 summer season would cost £18,500, with the English season and tours costing a further £11,500; it was thought that the proposed annual subsidy of £30,000 would thus ensure a stable future.[33] But the CGOS entered into the arrangement with extremely limited funds: in 30 September 1930, it had an overdraft of £12,859 plus creditors, with total liabilities of £23,000. The cash flow was critical: the BBC WAC Opera Policy file offers a schedule of when the 1931 subsidy was scheduled to be paid to the CGOS (see Table 4.3).[34]

Despite these worries, Szarvasy and Blois had begun the 1931 season at Covent Garden with some confidence. The *Evening Standard* on 1 May 1931 reported that 200,000 American visitors were expected that year; the *Morning Post* on 27 April 1931 similarly heralded the start of a successful London season, welcoming the return of brilliant London 'Seasons' with wealthy visitors from both the USA and South America.

[30] 'The editorial attitude has been in the main destructive; it has taken the form of ill-informed attacks upon the existing state of things without any constructive suggestion except nebulous generalizations.… There has grown up, largely through his own utterances, a popular superstition that Sir Thomas Beecham is a kind of super-genius in the production of opera': *Radio Times,* 26 June 1931.
[31] *Daily Express*, 24 June 1929, reported that the 1929 Covent Garden summer season had been run without a loss – a 'unique occasion'. But the real accounts provided to Reith show that while the grand opera season had generated a £3,098 'profit', there were a further £21,000 costs which (with various theatre revenues) resulted in an overall loss of £8,000. This is a good example of the problems of reporting accurate financial results, something I consider in more detail in the next section.
[32] These details come from a letter by W. Barrell, Secretary to the CGOS, to T. Lochhead, the BBC's Chief Accountant, 20 January 1931, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.
[33] Letter and memorandum from Szarvasy to Reith, 15 July 1930, BBC WAC, R34/508/1.
[34] See notes taken by Reith, undated but from around 30 September 1930, BBC WAC, R34/508/1.

BBC Program Value	COVENT GARDEN SEASON	OTHER LONDON SEASONS	PROVINCIAL SEASONS	TOTAL
Halfway Through	1,750	£1,000	£1,000	£3,750
End of Season	1,750	£1,000	£1,000	£3,750
	£3,500	£2,000	£2,000	£7,500
Subsidy				
Beginning of Season	£5,000	£3,000	£3,000	£11,000
End of Season	£2,500	£2,000	£2,000	£6,500
				£17,500
Total				£25,000

Table 4.3: 1931 Season Phasing of Government Grant Instalments.[35]

In April, however, with the start of the summer season only weeks away, it was announced that Beecham was to present his own season of Russian opera and ballet at the Lyceum Theatre, in direct competition with Covent Garden, and that his tickets would be at 'popular' prices.[36] London audiences would be able to see opera (and ballet) at Covent Garden standards for much less at the Lyceum and the CGOS knew Beecham's move would seriously undercut its prices. As recently as 1929, this same Russian company had given a season at Covent Garden in conjunction with the CGOS: it was obvious to many that Beecham had poached the Russians in retaliation for the breakdown in negotiations.[37] Beecham announced a brand new repertoire, confident that his season would be successful both artistically and financially.[38] With the exception of *Prince Igor* and *Boris Godunov,* all his operas were new to the UK. He went on to deride Covent Garden for their stale repertoire, calculating that, during the

[35] BBC WAC, R34/508/3.
[36] *GK's Weekly*, 18 April 1931, and *Sunday Referee*, 26 April 1931.
[37] L. Henderson Williams wrote about 'the miraculous birth of a good season of Russian opera… Looks as if some people were kinda kicking against the allocation of that subsidy. Kickers who count are Sir Thomas Beecham and Lionel Powell. Powell makes things hum commercially in his own way, and Sir Thomas may be trusted to look after the music … at popular prices, the entire Russian Opera Company, ballet and chorus, is closer to David's "something for nothing" than the dole itself'; 'The Realm of Music', *Era*, 15 April 1931.
[38] *Telegraph,* 21 April 1931.

previous ten years, the combined efforts of all of the UK's operatic interests had introduced only three new operas.

The CGOS directors held a secret meeting at the Theatre Royal on 14 April to discuss the crisis. Snowden agreed to see whether she could persuade Parliament to block the Russian season on protectionist grounds; Szarvasy suggested they use tactics of 'propaganda' and employ an agent to promote their interests and lobby critics to support their season.[39] It was agreed that they would collate promotional information to be passed on to Philip Page to publish.[40] The *Daily Express* on 9 April 1931 commented on the clash of the two seasons:

> A grand opera "war" has been declared in London. A wealthy syndicate has decided to issue a direct challenge to the Covent Garden season by financing a lavish season for the world famed Imperial Russian opera and ballet at the Lyceum Theatre. The two fixtures will clash … Mr F.A. Szarvasy, director of the CGOS said to a representative last night: "if Sir Thomas Beecham wants to carry out the plans which he has advocated for so long – to support British art and British artists – I rather think that in depressed times like these it is hardly the right thing to bring Russians over to this country.

The Covent Garden chorus chimed in with Szarvasy's protectionist plea and asked the Ministry of Labour to intervene against the 'Russian invaders'.[41] Newspaper columnists took up the dispute, scoring points on their respective sides about foreign vs. UK nationals performing at either theatre and Beecham's new repertoire vs. Covent Garden's old one. On 24 April 1931, the *Evening Standard* reported that some of Beecham's Russian operas were older than *Der Rosenkavalier,* which was part of Covent Garden's repertoire; the same day the *News Chronicle* retaliated that 22 out of the 71 singers at Covent Garden *were* British. Efforts by the Covent Garden team at a very moderate enlargement of the repertoire by the inclusion of *Falstaff* were met with derision; after meagre ticket sales for that opera, last-minute changes were made to the performance schedule, replacing *Falstaff* with a safer option. Neville Cardus, writing in the *Manchester Guardian,* was sympathetic but of the view that this sort of

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[39] This agent was Sydney Walton, who was to be paid £150 for six weeks.
[40] Philip Page was a writer with the *Evening Standard* who was sympathetic to Covent Garden and happy to accept money to write articles as required: ROHC Pre-War Business Papers, Box 2, Board Minutes.
[41] *Star*, 21 April 1931.

sacrifice to increase box office revenues was not sufficient.[42] Newman weighed in, defending Beecham, cheerfully fuelling rumours of Covent Garden's demise.[43] Beecham had not yet formed his own orchestra so he was using players from the Royal Philharmonic Society Orchestra: his scratch orchestra was to receive compliments from the press while, in comparison, the London Symphony Orchestra playing at Covent Garden attracted much criticism.[44]

CGOS and Their Relationship with the BBC: 1931

Under the terms of the subsidy, Szarvasy reported regularly to Reith. His first letter after the start of the 1931 summer season was full of optimism, reporting better-than-expected (86.5% and 84.6%) capacity in the first two (Wagner) weeks of the season: a promotional photograph shows Blois and Rosa Ponselle with Romano Romani and Tullio Serafin at Covent Garden (see Illustration 4.2). 'The opinion in Town', he claimed, 'is unanimous that never since the war has there been a better fortnight from both Vocal and Orchestral points of view.'[45] By the end of June, Beecham's season had also apparently been a great success; the *Daily Herald,* 26 June 1931, reported that 100,000 people had been drawn to the Lyceum. Other sources, however, suggest that it had made a loss of £4,500, paid for by Lady Cunard and her backers.[46]

Szarvasy's early optimism proved unfounded: it soon became apparent that the 1931 Covent Garden season was financially disastrous because of poor ticket sales. There was a wide discrepancy between the optimistic results announced in the press and the more accurate measures of profit reported to the BBC and archived in the

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[42] After changes to the announced season had caused the new production of *Falstaff* to be replaced with *Tosca* at short notice, Cardus commented: 'We feel sure that the syndicate is actuated by idealism': 'The Covent Garden Season: Unfathomable Tactics', *Manchester Guardian*, 20 June 1931.

[43] 'It seems that, incredible as it may appear, another Syndicate has had the temerity not merely to announce a season of opera at the Lyceum during the very time when the doors of Covent Garden are open! Shameful as this is in itself, worse still remains to be told… [the CGOS] has lately been in a very critical situation; it was whispered that it was on the point of collapsing': *Sunday Times*, 26 April 1931.

[44] Newman commented that 'the accompaniments of the vocal parts are often miracles of elasticity and precision … and one could only sit and wonder at the skill with which Sir Thomas fitted itself and the orchestra': *Sunday Times*, 28 June 1931.

[45] Szarvasy to Reith, 13 May 1931, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.

[46] Lucas, *Beecham*, 197.

Illustration 4.2: Eustace Blois, Rosa Ponselle, Romano Romani and Tullio Serafin, Covent Garden 1931; in **James A. Drake, *Rosa Ponselle: A Centenary Biography* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1997) plate 31, 240.**

BBC's WAC. The intricacies of accounting for the CGOS's numerous ventures, the difficulties of matching income to expenses on a season-by-season basis and the appropriate allocation of central running costs meant that results were often reported inaccurately: a season could, for example, be reported as having broken even by ignoring property and administration costs.[47] And there was a difference between a profitable season and the overall result for the theatre after all overhead expenses. Ultimately for the CGOS everything had to be accounted for and cash in the bank at the end of a season was the only accurate measure. By 24 June Covent Garden had run up a £6,800 overdraft (a very serious mid-season position, since revenues from ticket sales would always precede expenditure); Szarvasy estimated the overdraft would increase to £16,000 by the end of the season.[48] Szarvasy's letter to Reith detailed the problems and described the situation as 'critical', threatening the cancellation of the rest of the season immediately. Reith and Szarvasy met to ask whether the BBC might offer a £20,000 advance on the 1932 subsidy: Reith agreed. Incredibly, in return for this offer of £20,000 'floating credit', Szarvasy guaranteed to Reith that the 1932 season would definitely not incur a loss.[49]

Matters continued to deteriorate over the rest of the year; a program from October 1931 reveals the cheap prices and is an indicator of how expensive these English seasons were to CGOS (see Illustration 4.3). In October Szarvasy wrote to Reith, providing a summary of the losses and attributing them to the deep Economic Depression of the time. Table 4.4 illustrates the extent of the losses and the full amount of the deficit on the year, which amounted to nearly £50,000. This was far in excess of any loss suffered in the past and far more than anyone had anticipated. It had been a disastrous year for all concerned: the loss of almost £50,000 was twice that of the previous year. The £20,000 advance against the 1932 season, agreed in June, had been fully spent and was increased by another £10,000. Thus at the end of the

[47] Draft accounts in both the ROHC and the BBC WAC files demonstrate the wide variety of options used to calculate results.

[48] ROHC Pre-War Business Papers, Box 2 Board Minutes. The season at the Lyceum also made a loss: Szarvasy estimated that Beecham lost over £20,000; Szarvasy to Reith, 12 December 1932, BBC WAC, R27/498.

[49] Szarvasy 'guaranteed definitely that the Grand Opera Season will pay for itself next year, and in future years': BBC WAC, R34/508/3, 24 June 1931.

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Illustration 4.3: Program the CGOS's English Opera Season, 12 October 1931 (author's collection)

first full year of subsidy, Covent Garden had run up a loan of £30,440 from the BBC.[50] This loan, which had originally been offered as a partial advance on the 1932 subsidy, was now well in excess of the total amount of subsidy for that year! Reith was aware that his acquiescence to this level of BBC support was now well outside his remit and probably in breach of his fiduciary duty as Director General.

Continuing Negotiations Between CGOS and the ILO: 1931

Reith was certain by June 1931 that a merger between the CGOS and the ILO was necessary 'with or without Sir Thomas Beecham's assistance' because of their accumulated funds of £56,000 and the ILO's funds represented the only hope of repaying the loan to the BBC.[51] If the CGOS was able to access these funds then it might be able to reduce the BBC loan to a more acceptable level – although everyone knew Beecham would not agree that this was an acceptable use of his subscriptions. But despite the gravity of the situation and the fact that the BBC's ownership of Covent Garden was effectively 83%, Reith remained determined he would not get involved directly and continued to refuse a position on the board of the CGOS, his anxiety about the situation revealing itself in his efforts to camouflage the secret of the extent of the unsecured, unauthorised loan.[52] Reith's over commitment to opera well in excess of his fiduciary authority placed him in a perilous financial situation and left him desperate to find ways to repay the debt. Szarvasy had invited Reith to join the board or appoint someone from the BBC, but Reith had refused, offering merely to send his chief accountant, T. Lochhead, to attend the meetings, insisting that he did not want voting rights nor to be seen to be involved in decision making.[53] This was extremely unconventional: the BBC was taking a non-executive role in the running of the company when they owned a substantial share, acting as sleeping partner when they were leaking license fee payer money. Reith did not want to participate in the merger talks and asked Szarvasy to handle negotiations with Beecham. It would be reasonable

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[50] Lochhead to Barrell, 26 January 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.
[51] Reith to Szarvasy, 30 June 1931, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.
[52] See BBC WAC file 'CGOS Ltd, Memorandum and Articles of Association', R30 505/1.
[53] 24 June 1931, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.

	WEEKS	PERF.	RECEIPTS	EXPENDITURE	LOSS
1930 Autumn Tour	11	82	22,500	29,000	6,500
1931 Spring Tour	7	50	13,500	19,000	5,500
1931 Grand Season	10	50	58,000	79,500	21,500
1931 Autumn Season	6	42	8,000	17,000	9,000
1931 Autumn Tour	8	56	14,500	23,500	7,000
	42	260	116,500	166,000	49,500

Table 4.4: CGOS Losses.

to conclude that this refusal was partly because of Reith's previous orchestral dealings with Beecham; but it also indicative of his frustration at lack of control over the situation.

During 1931 the trustees of the ILO reconsidered their position: if the Courts found that subscriptions should be returned to subscribers, then all the ILO's work towards the establishment of an English opera school would be lost and the considerable accumulated funds would no longer be available for anyone in the opera world. While the final decision regarding the merger rested with the Court, the trustees determined that it was in their best interests to put aside their anger at the subsidy and re-open merger negotiations with CGOS. Szarvasy reported to Reith on 21 March that he had received a letter from Colonel Ridley Martin (chair of the ILO board of trustees) asking if he would resume negotiations with Beecham. Talks duly began again when Szarvasy met Beecham at the end of June 1931, picking up from where they had left off in December 1930.[54] While Reith was not inclined to be involved, he made it clear that he would not accept any change to the terms previously offered: Beecham, however, insisted that he wanted more power.[55] Szarvasy was able to find compromises and a

[54] Record of interview between Reith and Szarvasy at Savoy Hill, 26 June 1931, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.
[55] 'I should prefer not to become personally involved … we feel strongly that further collaboration by us along the lines indicated depends largely on the identity and autonomy of the Syndicate with or without Sir Thomas Beecham's assistance': letter from Reith to Szarvasy, 30 June 1931, BBC WAC, R34/508/3. Szarvasy reports on a board meeting after Reith had left: 'we had another half an hour of aimless perorations from our friend, but I made him repeat again, so there could be no possible misunderstanding, that, provided our side contributed a fixed amount equal to what the League could bring in and that the two sums would be devoted to the production of English opera, he would collaborate on these lines, leaving it open that against any balance that we had available after providing

draft memorandum of agreement was drawn up 16 July 1931, one that specified that Beecham would take artistic control but was to have no part in financial affairs and would 'work to [financial] estimates prepared'. Copies of this memo were distributed, although it took another three months to draw up a heads of agreement (the preliminary document drawn up and agreed by all parties).[56] A circular was also prepared for Beecham to send to ILO members, asking for their approval of the merger to maximise chances of the funds being released by the Court.[57] However, these plans were knocked off course when Lionel Powell, manager of the ILO (and the London Symphony Orchestra), died in December 1931. Up to this point, he had been a trustworthy manager of the ILO, offering much needed financial gravitas to Beecham's organization. The news of his death meant that Beecham's ILO was perceived as less financially stable: as mentioned before, Beecham was personally bankrupt and had a poor record of financial control. This had a significant effect on the decision process of the Court of Chancery and made it much more likely that they would decide that the ILO should return their funds to the subscribers.

End of the Subsidy and of the ILO: 1932

Reith was not the only one anxious about the situation. At the start of 1932, burdened with a large loan from the BBC for the 1931 losses, the CGOS was extremely nervous to commit to another season. By now the probability of accessing the ILO funds was extremely remote. In order to *not* run the risk of incurring additional losses, increasing the loan, the CGOS determined that the least risky course of action would be to cancel the 1932 grand season.[58] announcement provoked questions in Parliament, not

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for the above mentioned sum, he would put up a similar sum and that these two amounts would be devoted to Foreign Opera ... in other words, we practically come back to carrying out the original agreement, though, as you noticed at the beginning of his peroration, he violently denied any such possibility': 16 July 1931, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.

[56] This type of document is non-binding, but typically detailed the key terms of a proposed agreement and was used as part of the process of negotiating commercial transactions.

[57] Beecham's circular stated grandly that 'the cause of music would be greatly served if the League would join hands with the Syndicate': BBC WAC, R34/508/3.

[58] This was despite the fact that Szarvasy had guaranteed Reith there would be no losses for 1932. The board meeting is mentioned by Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera,* 476. See also *The Times*, 13 February 1932.

surprisingly, because the subsidy had been granted on the basis that the CGOS *would* present opera and that the BBC would broadcast it: Howard Kingsley Wood, then PMG, was reluctantly forced to defend the grant.[59] Blois was again criticized in an article by Gerald Young in the *Music Lover* on 20 February 1932, 'Gerald Young Nails up the Coffin – A Parting Word to Covent Garden', in which he described the previous autumn season as a 'piteous fiasco'; he also grumbled that Blois and Snowden had no qualification to run opera and that Beecham was the only man for the job.[60] There were more questions in Parliament about whether the subsidy was being used to pay for historic losses at Covent Garden, questions which were, of course, extremely pertinent.~~!~~[61]

The repeated questions in Parliament made it increasingly obvious that the subsidy was not sustainable. By April 1932, Wood determined he should enforce the break clause in the contract. On 17 March 1932 Reith met Murray, the Secretary to the Post Office (acting as intermediary), who reported that the Treasury intended to stop the subsidy at the end of the year. There was an ambiguity about this proposal, however: it subsequently became clear that Murray was referring to the *fiscal* year (ending 5 April 1932) while Reith had the *calendar* year in mind. Reith needed some of the funding to continue beyond April because that was the only way he could foresee that the CGOS loan might be repaid. Correspondence at the BBC contains a letter from Reith to Szarvasy, explaining that he had put pressure on the PMG, suggesting that he

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[59] 'The Post Master General was asked what "consequent reduction he proposed to make in the subsidy payable to the Syndicate for the current year." … [He replied] "under the terms of the agreement between the Post Office and the BBC of June 11 1931, no provision is made for a reduction in the amount of the opera subsidy in such circumstances. I am in communication with the BBC on the matter"': *The Times*, 23 April 1932.
[60] See earlier criticism 26 June 1931, 153.
[61] *Daily Express,* 3 May 1932: 'The Post Master General stated in the House of Commons yesterday that the amount paid into the BBC to date by way of opera subsidy was £31,250, being £5,000 for the last quarter of 1930, £17,500 for 1931 and £8,750 for this year. "The BBC assure me", he added, "that the money is being expended in strict accordance with the term of the agreement and that no part is being used for paring off losses incurred by the CGOS before the subsidy was granted"'. This was only partly true: the money was not being used to pay historic losses; but it was for current losses that had been well in excess of the amount of the grant.

(the PMG) was ‘morally bound to make payments up to the end of December and that it would be dishonourable to do otherwise’.[62]

The questions raised in Parliament about the cancellation of the 1932 season forced the CGOS to think again; but they needed to ensure that the losses were not as high as before. In an inspired move, Blois telegraphed Beecham, then in the USA, to ask him to conduct a short Wagner festival in May.[63] Beecham agreed. Rosenthal describes Blois’s actions as transforming Beecham from the CGOS’s ‘most conspicuous antagonist’ into their ‘most-doughty protagonist’.[64] The effect of the rapprochement was that Beecham conducted a ‘glorious’ season of opera at Covent Garden in 1932. This was not of course a merger with the ILO, merely a CGOS season in collaboration with Beecham. But Beecham conducting a season was bound to attract some of the ILO audiences, and also, for the CGOS, his presence at Covent Garden ensured that he could not stage a rival season. Despite misgivings, Blois was soon convinced by Beecham’s persuasive ways and reported positively about him to Reith.

Behind the scenes during the 1932 season, Reith and Szarvasy had managed to hold a series of meetings with other opera producers. The pair could see that there were huge advantages to an amalgamation with other opera groups: first, with Beecham on board they thought they might be able to stage a last ditch effort to obtain the ILO’s funds; secondly such an amalgamation represented their best chance of encouraging Parliament to change its mind and continue the subsidy. They had been encouraged by Beecham’s seemingly enthusiastic collaboration; Blois reported to Reith that ‘Beecham has worked wonderfully here in every way, and I am confident to say

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[62] Szarvasy letter dated 6 April 1932 in BBC WAC, Music General, Szarvasy, F.A. (Covent Garden Opera) 1932-1933, file 1, R27/498. Philip Snowden’s moral outrage in March 1932 was reported by his wife in a letter to Reith. In a typically rambling, six-page, hand-written letter, she wrote ‘my husband has just expressed horror at the idea of our voluntarily yielding up the subsidy … cowardice by the PMG … the end of the subsidy would appear to be wanton folly’: 24 July 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.

[63] Blois telegraphed Beecham in New York on 15 March 1932 to ask him to conduct the Wagner season at short notice: ‘if I can still pull off Wagner festival from middle of May as discussed between us would you collaborate as conductor in chief as originally promised. Your acceptance providing great season can be realized would mean great assistance to me personally and wonderful thing for London. Treat confidential owing to most delicate negotiations’: see telegram http://rohcollections.org.uk/Highlights/Beecham/.

[64] Herbert Hughes, *Telegraph,* 10 May 1932; quoted in Rosenthal, *Two Centuries*, 477.

that he is extremely well disposed and ready to bring in the League of Opera'.[65] On the last night of the season, both Blois and Beecham made optimistic speeches, revealing secret talks between various opera groups that would 'harmonize' the nation's opera interests. The plans were discussed by the press: both the *Daily Mail* and *Telegraph* reported on 4 June 1932 that a 'concrete plan' for a complete amalgamation of all opera groups was in place and that Covent Garden, the ILO, the BBC, the Old Vic and the Carl Rosa Company were set to join forces. Even though the ILO was party to these amalgamation talks, all interested parties could see that their funds were unlikely ever to be available. And indeed, the final nail of the ILO's coffin was about to be hammered in: in June 1932, an order was made by the Court to wind up the ILO and distribute its assets back to the subscribers.[66] But the formation of an umbrella group of opera interests even without the ILO remained the best chance of retaining the opera subsidy, even if this too was becoming a remote possibility. And if the grant were to come to an end, then the various opera companies could see that it was in their best interests to lobby for support together.

Snowden's Vision for Arts Sponsorship: 1932

The 1932 summer season was surprisingly successful: Blois and Ethel Snowden both wanted to do their best to promote the planned English opera tour and set off with the troupe to do what they could to promote ticket sales. Snowden and Blois travelled with the company, speaking at the opening and closing nights around the country.[67] This was an opportunity for Snowden to promote her vision for state subsidy of the arts, one that she relished. Many regional papers published extracts from her speeches, which demonstrate her passion for bringing opera to a wider audience: the reports offer evidence of Snowden's vision that the opera grant should be the first in a series to be rolled out to other sectors of the arts. Before she set off on the tour she

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[65] 26 May 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.
[66] 6 June 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.
[67] A file in the ROHC archive contains press cuttings from tours 1929-32. There is plenty of coverage of Lady Snowden's talks from around the country: for example, from Glasgow with a picture, *Daily Express*, *Daily Record*, *Bulletin,* with a photo with Blois and Szarvasy, *Glasgow News* with a photo, all 26 October 1931. *Glasgow Herald*, *Scotsman, Glasgow Daily Herald, Daily Express, Glasgow Evening Times Bulletin* and *Scottish Pictorial* followed on 27 October 1931.

gave a speech in London at the Association of Musicians' Clubs, pleading the cause of underpaid British musicians and unveiling an ambitious plan to roll out the government grant to other arts organizations: 'I believe it is a cardinal blunder … [to say] that music is a luxury trade, for music is one of the needs of our being…. Why it should be sneered at because it is British, by British artists for British people, I simply cannot understand… Unless we were willing to look upon music and art as a whole and encourage every bit of it that was good we should not arrive at that dignity and gain that reputation that great art of music and musical enterprise deserve'.[68] Her wider perspective was, however, largely ignored; instead the press chose to focus on the opera grant as a symbol that she wielded an unhealthy power over her husband, causing him to make decisions not in the best interests of the country. Here is the *Leeds Mercury*:

> Lady Snowden is making enthusiastic speeches about grand opera. That of course is all right. Grand opera can be beautiful, enchanting, and stimulating. I am an enthusiast for it myself. But what is Lady Snowden after? If I am not mistaken, she wants to lay hands on the BBC funds in order to carry out grand schemes of grand opera. Now that is not an object that wireless listeners as a whole have shown any desire to further. We must insist on justice for them. We must see that Lady Snowden in her ardent and laudable ambition to help music, does not help it on a wrong financial basis – wrong because unjust. Remember she is a masterful enthusiast. Under the most difficult conditions she secured a Government subsidy for Grand Opera. I do not think any other woman in the country could have done it. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was beset with problems of falling income. Taxation had reached its limit. The drain of unemployment pay had knocked the Budget all askew. A deficit at the end of the year was inevitable. The problem of making ends meet could only be solved in one way – by the reduction of expenditure. But Mrs Philip Snowden as she then was, said there had to be a subsidy for grand opera. It had to be. Mr Snowden, whom we had thought so stern and implacable a guardian of the public purse, meekly arranged it. The "Mercury" and other papers protested that this was no time for spending public money to delight the grand opera enthusiasts. It was all no good. Mrs Snowden said there *had* to be a subsidy. Parliament dutifully voted the necessary funds. Since the determined lady thus had her way, the state of the country has become a great deal worse.[69]

[68] *Telegraph*, 4 November 1931.
[69] 'A Masterful Enthusiast: What is Lady Snowden After? Money for Very Grand Opera' (By W.L.A.), *Leeds Mercury,* 9 May 1932.

Snowden's view was that the BBC should own opera outright; that the Government should continue to permit the channelling of the BBC licence fee to opera and increase the amount it required. Reith and Lord Clarendon (chairman of the BBC board of governors) did not agree. A letter to Reith contained details of how she had hoped to restructure opera; the letter reinforced her view that the BBC should take over opera in its entirety.[70] In reply to a letter from Szarvasy enquiring as to whether she thought they should cease opera after the grant came to an end, she wrote:

> I do not know what your answer to that will be but mine would be an emphatic NO. And more than that, I should add to that NO a request for a larger subsidy as a condition of carrying on. From whatever source such an additional subsidy comes it will be to help build up that £40,000 to £50,000 yearly guarantee, which I think absolutely essential if the awful strain and anxiety of the last two years is to be avoided…. I am in favour of the BBC taking the full responsibility for Opera in England, and whilst it should appoint an ad hoc Board to run it should maintain the strictest financial control. I have brought that before the Board [the BBC board] and it has been rejected for the present.[71]

Two Ladies of Opera: 1932

Beecham's presence conducting the 1932 season meant that Emerald Cunard was now able to come to the fore in the opera arena and challenge Snowden. The press commented on the presence of both two female ambassadors for opera, Snowden and Cunard, at the start of the 1932 season: for the purposes of my analysis this is a useful comparison between the behaviour and public perception of the two as they vied for power in the opera arena (see Illustrations 4.4 and 4.5). An article in the *Guardian* commented:

> Lady Snowden and Lady Cunard are both enthusiasts for opera in London and very potent in surmounting the difficulties of arranging for a Covent Garden season. Who can say to which of these ladies, thanks are especially due for the short season beginning on May 10 and ending on June 3, when two complete cycles of the *Ring des Nibelungs* [*sic*] will be given under the direction of Sir Thomas Beecham and Prof. Heger, for which the services of the most distinguished Wagnerian singers have been secured.[72]

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[70] 13 January 1933, BBC WAC, R34/508/5.
[71] 30 March 1932, BBC WAC, R27/498.
[72] *Guardian*, 6 May 1932.

Illustration 4.4: Ethel Snowden at the piano at her new home in Carlisle Mansions, Victoria Street, London, 24 November 1931: photo by Fox Photos/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Illustration 4.5: Emerald Cunard, 7 October 1933: photo by Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Both women were anxious to support opera – but their motivations were at opposite ends of the spectrum. As a devout Socialist, Snowden was politically motivated to increase accessibility of the arts. Cunard was a self-made cultural climber, delighting in her association with Beecham and the company of the wealthy and the cultivated: she wanted to take over from Snowden as London's lady of opera. Cunard's vision as Beecham's partner was to enable him to take over opera in the UK and improve her own social status: the couple daringly conducting a public relationship outside of marriage, flaunting society morality of the time.[73] She was already famous as London's 'most successful hostess' and was frequently in the gossip columns because of her literary salons, parties, opera balls and friendships with Harold Acton and George Moore – part of the fashionable London set that included Diana Mitford, Lytton Strachey, John Betjeman, Noël Coward and Duff and Diana Cooper.[74]

In early 1932, Cunard had been resolute in her defence of the ILO funds, determined to wrestle the government grant away from the CGOS. She had set up a society to monitor the use of the government grant and to ensure that the ILO funds did not go to Szarvasy, something that she considered of 'national importance'.[75]

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[73] *Emerald and Nancy: Lady Cunard and her Daughter* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1968).

[74] The hostess comment is from the *Daily Mirror,* 24 October 1929. Cunard is frequently mentioned in relation to the Mitford sisters: see for example Mary S. Lovell, *The Mitford Girls: The Biography of an Extraordinary Family* (London: Abacus, 2002); Mary S. Lovell, *The Riviera Set* (London: Little, Brown, 2016); Laura Thompson, *Take Six Girls: The Lives of the Mitford Sisters* (London: Head of Zeus, 2016). She also features in the memoires of famous diarists of these years and was later more famous still because of her connections to the Prince of Wales and Mrs Simpson: *The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon,* ed. Robert Rhodes James (London: Phoenix, 1996); *The Harold Nicolson Diaries: 1907-1963*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005); and John Julius Norwich, *The Duff Cooper Diaries: 1915-1951* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006). Several books cover the London social scene between the wars and its 'brilliant' society hostesses – Lady Nancy Astor, Ronnie Greville, Lady Sibyl Colefax, Mrs Laura Mae Corrigan and Lady Edith Londonderry: see Sian Evans, *Queen Bees: Six Brilliant Society Hostesses Between the Wars* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016); Ruth Brandon, *The Dollar Princesses Sagas of Upward Nobility 1870-1914* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980); and Brian Masters, *Great Hostesses* (London: Constable, 1982).

[75] The formation of 'the Opera Group' under the chairmanship of Sir Frederick Austin was reported in several papers: see, for example, *Edinburgh Evening Gazette,* 23 January 1932; a longer article in the *Birmingham Post,* 30 January 1932, gave more detail: 'Music and Musicians: The Opera Subsidy and the League, 'A society formed recently, under the title of the Opera Society met on Friday last to discuss the question of the Government subsidy…. Another subject mentioned was that of the League of Opera and here again the feeling was that the money should not be handed over to Covent Garden directors. Lady Cunard disclosed the interesting fact that she holds about one third of the League's funds – given to her by her friends in the cause of music – and expressed her determination to see that no part of the money should go to Covent Garden until the whole direction is changed.'

Cunard had also appeared in the press complaining of the limited repertoire at Covent Garden: a letter from her appeared in *The Times* on 16 June 1931, with a reply from Blois on 20 June; in the *Monthly Musical Record* on July 1931 she criticized the 'virtual stagnation' of the opera policy at Covent Garden. When Beecham was invited to conduct the 1932 season at Covent Garden she seized the opportunity to take over opera parties, opera balls, and to become involved with artistic matters at Covent Garden, travelling to Italy with Beecham and Blois in order to select singers and becoming a Director of Covent Garden in 1934.[76]

Reith and the BBC: 1932

Two years after the start of the opera grant the situation had worsened considerably for Reith: he was now seriously in breach of his responsibilities to shareholders. By now the PMG had made it clear that the opera subsidy was at an end. In an undated memo from around 4 November 1932, Reith wrote that 'the Corporation should not and does not wish to be an opera producing organization. It should confine itself to contributing to a central body'. Now without the government subsidy, he set about calculating how the BBC could move on to support opera but now within the fiduciary boundaries set by the Corporation's constitution. Somewhat surprisingly, Reith remained in full support of Szarvasy: despite the catastrophic losses of 1931, Reith appears a little in awe of Szarvasy, congratulating him and praising his efforts to control the finances at Covent Garden despite the figures suggesting that such level of trust was not warranted. A letter confirmed the extent of the level of trust Reith had in Szarvasy's financial acumen and again later in the same year: 'you now have such close financial control and such regard to economy that in this respect also the administration of the Syndicate has reached a high level of efficiency' and the extent of

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[76] Szarvasy to Lochhead, 16 January 1933, BBC WAC, R34/508/5. The *Telegraph* reported on 28 April 1932: 'Society's Eight Hour Musical Day…. Music and pageantry will vie with one another in making May 12 one of the most vivid and colourful nights of the London Season, which begins tomorrow. The pageantry of the second Court will absorb hundreds of debutantes and their mothers, whilst the rest of Mayfair is planning an orgy of music on this day. *At Lady Cunard's:* Programmes spread over eight hours have been arranged for these music enthusiasts. They are spending the afternoon at the house of one of the chief patrons of music, Lady Cunard to hear the Covent Garden star Lotte Lehmann, sing to them … this particular concert is timed from three pm so that the indefatigable audience can spend the evening at the Wagner Festival at Covent Garden'.

Reith's 1931 funding over and above the government subsidy is indeed strong evidence of this.[77] But both Reith and Szarvasy remained wary of Beecham – unlike Blois, who displayed growing levels of confidence in their collaboration. They became anxious to exclude Blois from meetings because they knew he was relaying everything back to Beecham.[78] During 1932, Szarvasy wrote to Reith outlining his vision for the future of opera.[79] He hoped that the government subsidy could be replaced by a 'fairly generous contribution from the BBC' – which he suggested should be £15,000 annually: this could be a more private arrangement and would, in his opinion, attract less public complaint. He suggested that the BBC grant, together with another £15,000 from ILO subscribers (who he still hoped might be a viable source of finance) and possibly another £15,000 from the Carnegie Foundation, could fund the new amalgamated opera group.

Amalgamation: Late 1932

Snowden was increasingly side-lined during this time; she continued to be left out of meetings and was not included in the negotiations towards amalgamation.[80] In September 1932 she wrote to Szarvasy to resign her post as Director of the CGOS. As mentioned in Chapter Three, by this stage, Beecham had formed his own new orchestra and Szarvasy had taken the decision (without board approval) to agree to his appointment and that of his orchestra for the following season – something that put Snowden in an uncomfortable position because she had promised the contract to the London Symphony Orchestra. For her, this was an important policy decision involving large expenditure that had been made without her knowledge and it was likely that the LSO might make the matter public, thus revealing how little say she had at Covent

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[77] 30 June 1931, BBC WAC, R34/508/1, Reith to Szarvasy, BBC WAC, R34/508/2, 29 October 1931. Reith also reported after 1932 season that the BBC board of governors 'felt that this [result of 1932 grand season] was due to good management and to your personal energy and supervision and they desired me to communicate their congratulations to you'; June 1932, BBC WAC, R27/498.
[78] Memo, 2 April 1932, and Szarvasy to Reith, 27 June 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.
[79] 24 March 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.
[80] Things were no better at the BBC: in November, after hearing of a BBC opera meeting to which she had not been invited, she sent a telegram to Reith 'received no notice of today's opera meeting. Hearing accidentally. Disgusted but not astonished': November 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.

Garden.[81] Szarvasy managed to persuade her to change her mind about resignation but continued to exclude her from all business negotiations.[82]

However, all opera groups managed to keep amalgamation talks moving forward. A public announcement was made on 11 November 1932: agreement had been reached between representatives of the Old Vic, Sadler's Wells and Carl Rosa and an umbrella opera council was to be formed. The plan was that the enlarged board of the CGOS would continue to receive the new BBC grant; they would form a working body to act in an 'advisory capacity' and distribute the grant among the various opera groups. But the announcement did not contain details of who would be in charge. Both Beecham and Szarvasy felt the position should be theirs and set about bombarding Reith with justification of this. A series of letters in the BBC files demonstrate the battle between the two men. In a long, undated memorandum dating back to June 1932, Beecham had set out his vision and requirements for the amalgamation, making it clear that he thought that the new controlling body should exclude Szarvasy and Snowden, further that the BBC should have no role.[83] The demands were proof of Beecham's increasingly fervid ambition; his conceit was obvious in his exclusion of others who, based on previous events, might have proved helpful to him. What is more, he chose to drive his demands through by claiming that his supporters insisted on the resignations of Szarvasy and Snowden. Cunard's views echoed his own and together they remained adamant. By December things had come to a head and Beecham sent a volley of letters to Reith (2, 9 and 12 December 1932), each fulmination increasing in bluster.[84]

Szarvasy had been prepared to put his personal reservations about Beecham aside in order to get the latter to conduct the 1932 season. However, with

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[81] 'I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the Board will work better without me, and will ask you to accept my resignation as soon as the question of the subsidy is settled. I am quite sure there was no desire nor intention to wound, but I find it less insulting to be insulted than ignored'; letter from Snowden to Szarvasy, 22 September 1932, BBC WAC, R27/498.

[82] Szarvasy wrote a three-page letter in reply in which he excuses himself because, he wrote, the board had had to find ways to work in harmony with the League. 'It has never occurred during my very long business experience that action taken under similar circumstances by The Managing Director and Chairman has necessitated the resignation, or even dissent from any member of the Board, and I therefore even more deeply deplore your decision': 26 September 1932, BBC WAC, R27/498.

[83] BBC WAC, R34/508/3.

[84] 2, 9 and 12 December 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.

expectations set by his previous financial restructuring arrangements in the City, Szarvasy fully expected to emerge as chairman: he had made it clear that he would withdraw if not elected and that Beecham should only have an artistic role, and emphatically no part in the administration.[85] Szarvasy was scathing about Beecham's proposals: a letter to Reith listed the failures, most notably that the scheme had 'no effective financial control by any competent body' i.e. did not permit Covent Garden or the BBC any say in the financial management and that 'Sir Thomas Beecham himself is not apparently responsible to anybody and remains a free agent to do as he pleases'.[86] Szarvasy's patience was at an end. He wrote to Reith making his position clear:

> In view of the position I occupy in the City, I am not in the habit of remaining on a Board unless I am either Chairman or occupy some leading position … neither Lady Snowden nor myself, with due regard to the positions we occupy in life, can be driven off the Board by Beecham or those who stand behind him…. It seems to me that the cause of opera is made to take second place in the heat of personal animosities.

He made reference to the bad blood between Cunard and Snowden 'his [Beecham's] main supporter … "the lady" would never work with Lady Snowden … a woman's hatred is not a matter to be trifled with'.[87] Snowden also wrote to Reith refusing to retire: 'in no circumstances will I retire at the bidding of Sir Thomas Beecham and his unnamed intransigent friends.'[88] By now a weary Reith wanted to wash his hands of the whole matter. In a memo dated 6 December 1932 he wrote:

> I now feel free to consider opera form a purely Corporation point of view. Up until 31st December we were bound to look on it to a considerable extent from the point of view of the Treasury… Even until receipt of Sir Thomas Beecham's last letter I had considered that the Corporation was not entirely free to give up the organization and control of opera in a central sense, for the reason that you [Szarvasy] had personally brought all parties together. Sir Thomas Beecham has now shown that opera is still a matter of personalities and as I am sure that this attitude will continue to be a source of trouble, I think the Corporation should keep clear of the direct management of opera so far as possible. In my opinion there are only two ways of dealing with the situation and that which is first dealt with below is the one I think is most desirable. 1) Those who are directly

[85] He had stated in March 1932 that his contribution was subject to the proviso that he should be chairman of both the syndicate and the central body: see 24 March 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/3.
[86] 6 June 1932, BBC WAC, R27/498.
[87] Szarvasy to Reith, 12 December 1932, BBC WAC, R27/498.
[88] 11 December 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.

> concerned with the organization and production of opera should be informed that the Corporation is going to help financially and by advice any central scheme of opera, but that it will not take part in the management…. As regards CGS, this would be kept in existence until the end of July next year, until which date it would be possible for any individual or Syndicate to acquire its rights as a going concern.[89]

Conclusion: 1933 and Beyond

By now the decision to end the government grant was irreversible and the ILO funds were a pipedream; neither of the two sources of funds would be available. Reith and Szarvasy could see that it was necessary to create a larger group of opera interests by amalgamation: the logic was that opera seasons could alternate at the same opera house and share administrative costs; singers, conductors, orchestra and chorus could be employed on a year-round basis; funds from whatever source could be fairly allocated thus giving the various ventures the best chance of survival. With the new umbrella group formed, it remained unclear whether the group would be led by Szarvasy or Beecham; both parties were at loggerheads. The battle between the two men thus had important repercussions: under Szarvasy, all opera groups would work collaboratively; under Beecham each group would be left to its own devices. There was a strong feeling at the CGOS that Szarvasy was the worthy victor because he represented the wider survival of national opera. But Beecham's ideas for opera were self-seeking and he had no concern for other opera producers.

As things stood then, Covent Garden in 1933 was solely dependent on Reith for financial support. At the start of that season, a report that Blois was unwell was received from Milan; Blois was in Italy with Beecham and Cunard selecting singers for the forthcoming season. His health quickly deteriorated and the *Evening Standard* reported his death on 16 May 1933.[90] Szarvasy made sure the 1933 season went ahead with Beecham conducting: with a BBC contribution of £19,000 the loss on the 1933 summer season was only £687. Beecham continued his campaign and made a speech

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[89] The second suggestion was that the BBC take over opera completely and, because of the public nature of the money, would be held responsible in the public eye and would require appropriate representation on the board.

[90] *The Times* reported on 18 May 1933 that the 'soldier, singer, business man and impresario' had been taken ill in Italy while 'making initial preparations for the present season'; *Evening Standard*, 28 April 1933, and a letter from Szarvasy to Lochhead, 20 January 1933, BBC WAC, R27/498.

on the last night of the season, promising that he would present opera in London in 1934 whether or not it was at Covent Garden.[91] But there were rumours that the house might be sold or demolished. During the ensuing months, the deadlock between the two contenders was resolved, but the causal factor was unrelated to the relative strengths of each individual; it was based on the property itself. The lease to the opera house came up for renewal at the end of 1933; the clincher in the power struggle was Beecham's connections with the property company that owned the theatre. These dated back to when he and his father attempted to buy Covent Garden in 1914; these associations gave Beecham the upper hand and he was able to persuade the property company to grant him and not Szarvasy a new lease.

At the end of 1933, Reith took stock of the opera situation and wanted to draw a line under the events described in these two chapters. He had put strenuous efforts into making the subsidy a success. The CGOS's dire losses of 1931 had forced the BBC to contribute a total of £50,440, more than twice the annual amount of the subsidy. Although 1932 and 1933 had not been so costly, Reith was distressed by the excess cost of opera to the BBC over the benefit to licence fee payers and he vowed to step away from the situation.[92] For the 1934 season, he agreed with Beecham to take 24 broadcasts for a flat fee of £5,000, more than doubling his 1930 fee of £100 per concert; in addition he offered a guarantee of £5,000 against losses. In the absence of the government grant, he also felt obliged to pay £6,000 to Sadler's Wells and £2,000 to the Carl Rosa Company, both companies being intended recipients of the grant from the outset. But after this he determined to restrict the BBC's input and made a new statement of policy:

> I think it should be adopted as a principle that the Corporation should not give such assistance as will enable a concern to be run on our support alone. Any concern with which we deal should be a going concern and though our assistance should be generous judged by commercial standards, it should not exceed a) such a sum as is reasonable for permission to broadcast their performances and b) an additional sum to allow improvement in the standard of their performances.[93]

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[91] A report of the speech is included in a press cutting in the ROHC files, although there is no record of what newspaper it is from: ROHC Newspaper Cuttings file: Tour and Grand Opera Seasons, 1929-31.
[92] Memo around November 1933, BBC WAC, R34/508/5.
[93] 15 November 1933, BBC WAC, R34/508/5.

Reith thus 'withdrew' from the situation and was at last in a position to fund opera only to the extent to which he deemed appropriate: he had learnt much from the experience, predominantly that bodies with which the BBC would cooperate must be going concerns. The BBC's Opera Policy files present a fascinating portrait of the complex relationship between new technology and fluctuating events. In reaching an agreement that would, albeit briefly, accommodate opera into the emerging broadcasting industry, boundaries between broadcasting and opera production had to be created; but the evanescent nature of both opera and of broadcasting made such definition extremely complex. In addition, the negotiations demonstrate the difficulty in balancing the high aesthetic ideals of the reformers with the attempt to restrict financial risk. In hindsight, the BBC was never the right custodian of opera: although the genre formed an important part of the broadcasting schedule, its value to the BBC and its listeners did not match the contribution required in order to keep it afloat and this imbalance proved fatal. The BBC were responsible to their licence-fee payers – the value of opera was simply its broadcast value, a sum much lower than that required to ensure survival.

Szarvasy withdrew because Beecham had won the turf war: he had been able to wrest control of Covent Garden; his trump card turned out to be not, as everyone had expected, the ILO funds, but the theatre itself. Unlike Reith and Szarvasy, he had no long-term altruistic intentions to preserve the umbrella group: instead, and together with the chairman of the property company, Geoffrey Toye (who had been the business manager at Sadler's Wells), he set up a new company for the purpose of securing the lease of the opera house, the Royal Opera House Company Ltd. The collaboration did not last long: Toye resigned after a clash with Cunard and, as a result, Beecham's seasons only continued until 1939.[94]

While the efforts of all the individuals concerned in this venture were affected by personal antagonisms, their efforts were predominantly scuppered by events beyond their control. There was, however, one significant exception. Ethel Snowden's

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[94] Rosenthal blamed Cunard for the fall-out between Beecham and Goeffrey Toye: see Rosenthal, *Two Centuries,* 394. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

efforts to forge a future for opera out of her own idealism were impressive: but her efforts to find funding for opera were all but overwhelmed by the negative public perceptions of her personally, and the heavy gender bias of the time. Her positions at Covent Garden and at the BBC were important and deserved: she had an opportunity to make significant improvements to opera. But from my perspective it was a disappointment that she allowed her vendetta against Beecham and Cunard to divert her from these targets.[95] A letter to Reith made reference to the ongoing antagonism between herself and Beecham and 'his opulent friends', a term she used to describe Cunard and her entourage.[96] The resulting acrimony did not help her position either at the BBC or Covent Garden, where her bitterness marked her as unstable: she was increasingly side-lined in both organizations.[97] Despite her enthusiastic and worthy attempts to promote opera and the arts generally for the common man, her tenure at both the BBC and CGOS ended in failure. Reith was reported as being 'profoundly relieved' when she was not reappointed in 1932. The correspondence on the BBC files, however, suggest she did indeed bring some interesting ideas to the table; it is a shame that she and Reith were not able to work effectively together as she could have brought both her Socialism and a female perspective into play. Neither was her role in opera deemed as serious as she herself intended: it was seen by many as merely a concession from her husband.[98] Like the latter, she fell out with many people, not least with Beatrice Webb, who described her as having 'caricatured social climbing' and accused her of bad behaviour towards other Labour ministers' wives.[99]

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[95] She permitted herself to be drawn into the personal slanging match with Cunard: in a memo from January 1933 she reported that 'intrigue for position … by individuals … is as clear as the noonday sun', going on to accuse Beecham's team of doing 'all in their power to weaken and destroy the CGOS … revealing more concern for their own personal position than for the future of British opera', BBC WAC, R34/508/5.

[96] 13 January 1933, BBC WAC, R34/508/5.

[97] A letter to Reith expressed her annoyance that he was negotiating without holding board meetings, and a plea to be kept informed about negotiations with Beecham: 16 May 1932, BBC WAC, R34/508/4.

[98] Cross, *Snowden*, 243. Reith described her as poisonous and as the 'Scarlett Woman'; see McIntyre, *The Expense of Glory*, 155.

[99] For references to Webb, see *Beatrice Webb's Diaries*, entry on 19 March 1932, available at https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:nut827hel/read/single#page/58/mode/2up. See also Cross, *Snowden,* 200, and Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, 110. Some suggested she held undue influence over her husband, was guilty of having an 'independent' social life that led to her not being at his side when he died, and was inappropriately affectionate to Lloyd George after Philip's death. This last accusation seems unreasonable: Lloyd George was a neighbour and close confidant of

In terms of the central five dilemmas of opera outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, this was of course a ground breaking model: one that offered the possibility of opera for all. Both the first and the second dilemmas were solved with an original form of state funding. But because the merger with the ILO had not been completed before the government grant was announced (or perhaps because Szarvasy made an error in not being open about his plans in the first place), there was a central problem. If the grant had been originally paid to a group that included the ILO, it could have provided both elite opera and opera for all; state funding that could have produced state opera, crystallising a workable funding model for national opera. Although this initial solution failed, others emerged during the subsequent two years, and also could have proved viable. All eight characters had come very near to solving opera's funding problems; their solutions had the potential to work well into the future. Szarvasy's expertise in restructuring much larger industries had been extremely useful: under his direction, new funding models for opera seemed a real possibility. His vision of opera, part funded by state support, part funded by new revenue streams derived from emerging technology was a viable alternative. In the end, though, the potential was wasted because the eight individuals were not able to put aside their personal animosity and focus on the greater good.

Philip after he left the government, sharing many political views; see Brendan Evans, 'Snowden: The Declining Years', in Laybourn and James, *Snowden*, 83 and 97.

Chapter Five

Glyndebourne 1934-39: Myths of Enchantment

Introduction

While encomiastic reports of John Christie and his work at Glyndebourne abound, there are few critical investigations of why the business model employed at country retreat-cum-opera-house was (and remains) so successful. Those who might have criticized Christie's efforts have perhaps chosen to ignore the venture because it was a rich man's hobby and thus not worthy of academic study. But it is important not least because so many opera companies have tended towards similar funding models, not least Covent Garden and English National Opera because state funding was neither stable nor adequate. In this chapter, I seek to remedy the dearth of academic analyses and suggest that Christie's philanthropy is worthy of recognition. The pioneering financial model he employed for his rural opera festival was remarkably successful and has since been replicated many times. Christie's efforts may indeed have attracted criticism because his high ticket prices made Glyndebourne the domain of the wealthy: there was speculation that he was less interested in offering high quality opera than in supplying social opportunities for those who attended his festival. Such reductive assessments, however, overlook an important point: Christie's financial model was the result of a strong development in private philanthropy; the movement was fuelled by a belief that the arts, funded by such patronage, could operate with a higher degree of freedom than was possible under state funding.[1] Cultural studies that suggest the move towards state funding of the arts in this country was inevitable should perhaps be revised to recognise the significance of Christie's Glyndebourne Opera Festival in the development of UK arts funding models.

The overall cultural landscape of Britain at the time is described by Janet Minihan: she identifies a crisis as the nation sought a new 'common culture' to match the encroaching world of mechanical entertainment and as a result Minihan sees the

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[1] This subject is explored by Benjamin Wolf in 'Promoting New Music in London, 1930-1980' (Ph.D. dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2010), 89-90.

development of British opera in the context of other democratic expansion: the increased powers awarded to the National Trust in 1937 and the formation of other arts bodies, such as the British Film Institute – all significant points in the development of formal groups representing cultural sectors.[2] Ethel Snowden's efforts towards opera (which Minihan regards as 'a major precedent') are paired with the unsuccessful efforts to build a new National Theatre (under the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Executive Committee).[3] While Minihan's thesis documents an inexorable move towards state funding, she does not mention any uncertainty over which model would prevail. But the model of private funding supported by Christie had significant support. A more 'American' style of funding, it promoted private resources as a less politically charged method of supporting the arts, even though such funding came with other strings attached: high standards of excellence could be maintained without cultural dilution or prescriptive cultural judgement by those in power. In the 1930s, live theatre groups and museums were increasingly reliant on financial support from two well-endowed private funding bodies, the Carnegie Trust and the Pilgrim Trust, both charitable bodies with funds originating from the USA.[4] It is important to remember that the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), which subsequently, under the guiding hand of John Maynard Keynes, developed into the Arts Council, was initially funded with large donations from these two trusts.[5]

While private philanthropy of music thus showed strong development in the 1930s, the government stance on widening accessibility to the arts was in some ways in conflict with it. Endeavours to encourage wider participation, such as the increased powers of the 1925 Public Health Act (this enabled local authorities to spend a penny

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[2] Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), 172-214.

[3] There were other groups formed to lobby parliament and to press for state aid for the performing arts, most notably the League of Audiences and the British Drama League, which broadly were working towards a national theatre and state funding of theatres in general, all with a view to widening demand for live theatre.
<https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/sites/default/files/stagebystage-pt1_beginning.pdf>

[4] The Carnegie Trust was funded by Andrew Carnegie, the Pilgrim Trust by Stephen Harkness, an American railway millionaire.

[5] The formation of CEMA in 1939 and the creation of the Arts Council is discussed by Kate Guthrie in 'Music and Cultural Values in 1940s Britain' (Ph.D. dissertation, King's College London, 2014), 122-35.

in the pound on providing entertainment), were at odds with other policies of censorship and taxation, most of which served to discourage leisure. The prime example of restrictive legislation was the Entertainments Tax; introduced in 1916, this was a tax on tickets to live performances that effectively served to restrict access to theatre for the less well off.

Christie's festival was a departure from the ventures that had preceded it in the UK and, in the depressed economic climate of 1930s England, a remarkable success. His Glyndebourne venture was a Mozart Opera Festival held in the summer at his home in Sussex: it was unique and audacious not least because it was in direct competition with London's society's summer season. Christie himself remained supremely confident that he could make the project work, even though there was a general consensus that operatic ventures could not be made to pay.[6] Having previously staged a few Wagnerian home-opera experiments in his organ room, events during which he met his wife, the singer Audrey Mildmay, Christie built a small, 300-seat theatre in the grounds of his country house with the vision of creating a 'British Bayreuth'.[7] Providence led to a meeting between Christie and Fritz Busch, an eminent conductor who until 1933 had been employed by the Dresden State Opera House: Busch had been removed from his post because of his opposition to Nazism. Busch[.] who had worked with the artistic director Carl Ebert, similarly displaced by the political climate from his office at the Städtische Oper in Berlin, proposed to Christie that they employ Ebert as artistic director – a role that was at that time relatively unfamiliar to UK opera audiences. Christie's early press statements indicated that Wagner operas would form the mainstay of Glyndebourne's season.[8] But Busch and Ebert had recently

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[6] Ashley Dukes, 'A Note on Glyndebourne: A Theatre in the Patron's Tradition', *Theatre Arts Monthly*, XVIII, 9 (September 1934), 704-8.

[7] Christie inherited the house in 1920 and set about renovations and adding an organ room. He was enthusiastic about this because he wanted encourage his old music teacher, an enthusiastic organist, to stay at his house. The organ was probably the largest domestic organ in the country and Christie took the opportunity to purchase the company who built it, Hill, Norman & Beard Ltd, which he ran as a successful enterprise for many years. He intended his opera festivals to avoid an orchestra by using instead the special effects of the organ: Busch and Ebert ensured that this did not happen. See Spike Hughes, *Glyndebourne: A History of the Festival Opera* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1965), 36. Hughes was music editor of the *Daily Herald* and responsible for the 'Gramophone Notes' column.

[8] This is discussed in some detail in Hughes, *Glyndebourne*, 34-42 and *The Times*, 29 January 1934.

worked together on Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the Salzburg Festival and could easily see that Mozart opera, relatively unfamiliar at that time in the UK, was a better fit than Wagner for Christie's small-scale venture. Based on their recent Mozart experience, the pair cajoled Christie into a 'Sussex Salzburg' – a tag that he was to employ in his remarkably effective PR campaigns. Christie's staged his first season in 1934 performing *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Così fan tutte*; his Mozart Festival then performed each summer until 1939.

In terms of the five dilemmas central to opera outlined in my opening chapter, Christie had made a decision at the outset about the second dilemma: he determined he would fund the project himself. As a result, he had complete control, unlike any of the other major characters considered in previous chapters. His ethos was to provide opera at a level of excellence only otherwise available at the opera festivals on mainland Europe. His formative decision about funding then had a vital effect on the other four dilemmas he faced. To some extent, it fixed the way he was able to respond to the first and third questions, those concerning elitism and the choices regarding the nationality of singers. The seemingly endemic accusations of snobbishness and elitism against opera companies appear repeatedly in all preceding chapters of this thesis. News reports of the time repeat these most frequently raised criticisms, that opera was unreasonably exclusive and that those in charge were oblivious to the country's growing demand for protectionism.[9] The criticisms of snobbery and anti-protectionist policies were linked in the public's mind: both indicated a disregard for the plight of the less well off, who regarded protectionism as an economic panacea. The seemingly thoughtless employment of expensive foreign singers by opera companies for the pleasure of the country's very wealthiest implied a sneering attitude towards the less wealthy, one that served to accentuate the perception of stereotypical class exclusions of opera audiences. These accusations were relevant to Christie as much as they were to earlier philanthropists: perhaps in the case of Glyndebourne, complaints were even more relevant because his choice of private funding and high ticket prices forced an exclusivity in terms of wealth. His venture, founded in the midst of the worst economic

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[9] The archives at Glyndebourne contain files of press cuttings from the opening season onwards. The archives are open to the public. There is no formal referencing system.

depression of the century, had at its heart a disregard for social equality: his opera house had no amphitheatre or gallery and thus no possibility of large numbers of cheap seats.

Curiously Christie partially escaped denigration because his venture appeared to be charmed. This enchantment factor was perhaps in part a Christie inspiration, in part serendipitous and obviously bore some relation to the pastoral setting and the origins of the festival. Whatever the case, the evident allure served to encourage mawkish adulation. Indeed, in the early years Glyndebourne's enchantment quota served to protect Christie from some of the harshest critics of opera: even his policy of internationalism escaped the wrath of the critics. In addition, the private funding meant that Glyndebourne opera was better rehearsed than at Covent Garden: with the help of his German experts, Christie achieved remarkable levels of excellence and a degree of directorial expertise previously unknown in this country. The rural isolation also offered sharp contrast to sweaty, noisy, London theatres. The Glyndebourne experience required audiences to commit to extended time away from London: but the pastoral isolation also provided financial opportunities from various onsite ancillary activities such as dining and drinking. Further, Christie was an excellent promoter and was able to achieve a high level of financial efficiency in terms of pricing and audience numbers; he did not use the ticket agencies that Covent Garden relied upon and thus maintained control of ticket sales. Another innovation contributing to financial stability was the opportunity for revenue generation from broadcasting and recording; additionally, Christie instituted the concept of a festival programme that became central to the financial model he established after the war, with its prominent lists of donors and sponsors.

Christie was a man of enormous energy and enthusiasm: he took up a wide variety of projects with great, although sometimes short-lived, gusto. The opera project, for which his legacy is so strong, was only one of many. He had another musical project which, in contrast, ended in failure. Although this project is slightly outside of the remit of my thesis, the developments are relevant as they represent Christie's attempt to solve one of the dilemmas central to opera, that of whether amalgamations and economies of scale could provide a solution to the current

hardships of opera and of musicians generally. This chapter will present biographical details about the man and his opera endeavours, moving on to focus particularly on the financial decisions he made regarding his opera project and how he drew on the expertise of the team around him to ensure success. I then briefly consider Christie's efforts to expand his musical reach into forming a national music group representing the interests of musicians generally.

John Christie: Opera Impresario

John Christie (1882-1962) was one of England's quintessential eccentrics: a country squire with a plaything of a miniature opera house. Most accounts focus on the house rather than the man; the only biography of Christie was written in the 1960s by Wilfred Blunt (the brother of Anthony).[10] John's founding of Glyndebourne is also the subject of the 2015 biographical play *The Moderate Soprano* by David Hare, a play which gently pokes fun at Christie.[11] However, the picture that both of these accounts give of him stumbling into the project requires some revision: Christie was a master at marketing and promotional reports of his venture serve to blur the relevant facts. The sequence of events could easily be re-imagined along different lines: having enjoyed visits to Bayreuth and Salzburg and spent some time running the Tunbridge Wells Theatre as an opera house, Christie hatched a master plan that involved deriving value from his expensive to maintain country mansion in a way that derived income to remedy his asset rich, cash poor situation. Previously a 'confirmed bachelor' he found an English opera singer to marry and star in his new theatre and thus he was able to establish himself as one of the country's foremost opera impresarios.[12] There is so much sentimental mythology associated with Glyndebourne that a larger truth – that Christie was an ambitious and successful entrepreneur – is often obscured.

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[10] Wilfred Blunt, *John Christie of Glyndebourne: A Biography* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1968).

[11] The title derives from a description of Mildmay as 'moderate in timbre, not quality'; see David Hare, *The Moderate Soprano* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 16.

[12] Mildmay was originally Canadian although many accounts claim her as English: 'Canadian girl has her own opera house in Great Britain', *Daily Province, Vancouver,* 16 June 1934. David Hare mentions the Tunbridge Wells venture, recording that Christie tried *Parsifal* on the audiences there unsuccessfully and had to 'compensate' with a week of Gilbert and Sullivan; see Hare, *Moderate Soprano*, 15.

An early report of Christie's venture at Glyndebourne in the *Morning Post* gives a good account of his character, describing him as having 'imagination, enthusiasm, unflagging energy and unbounded optimism'.[13] He was a direct contemporary at Eton of John Maynard Keynes, a fact that becomes relevant later in this narrative.[14] His career had been unremarkable until 1922; after inheriting property, he left his teaching post at Eton in 1922 at the age of 40 and embarked on his next career with extraordinary vigour and enthusiasm. His successful business projects included the building company and the organ company he purchased to facilitate the construction of his organ room and theatre; he also ran a garage and the Saunton Sands Hotel.[15] He was 48, a retired school teacher and seemingly a confirmed bachelor, when he met Mildmay, then 28 (see Illustration 5.1).[16] He had some interest in opera, having visited a few European opera houses with his old Eton music master, Dr Charles Harford Lloyd (for whom he built the organ), but he was, it seems, equally passionate about motoring and fishing before he met Mildmay.[17] She certainly served to focus his efforts towards opera: one of the most often repeated myths of the building of Glyndebourne's opera house was that Mildmay said to Christie: 'If you're going to spend all that money, John, for God's sake do the thing properly'.[18]

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[13] *Morning Post,* 22 March 1934.

[14] There were many similarities between the two, not least the fact that both 'confirmed bachelors' married a much younger artistic wife, later in life, with what might be described as more than a purely romantic agenda.

[15] Hughes, *Glyndebourne,* 23, 26. Details of his other commercial enterprises are fully described in Blunt, *John Christie*.

[16] John's family life is described in Blunt, *John Christie*. Bad relations between his parents (an understatement) had led to an acrimonious court case concerning his late father's estate, during which it became critical to determine whether Christie intended to remain a bachelor. He was forced to confirm that he did intend to marry, his confirmation being received with 'incredulity'; see Blunt, *John Christie*, 136. There was a rumour that his legacy was dependent on him taking employment. As one newspaper reported it: 'some years ago he was left a fortune by a relative who, as a condition of the legacy, stipulated that he should, for a certain period, take up some useful occupation. Mr. Christie chose to become a schoolmaster and for some years very successfully taught sciences at Eton'; see *Morning Post*, 12 February 1934.

[17] Christie wrote fondly of his fishing in the forward to the 1959 *Silver Jubilee Glyndebourne Programme*: 'No longer a fisherman, my own experience of opera was limited to sitting in a few opera houses listening almost in ignorance to the performances, instead of searching for imaginary fish…. But I had married an opera singer. Now the fish must be opera stars, and the opera house replace the river bank.'

[18] This story is mentioned in Hare, *Moderate Soprano*, 27, and on the Glyndebourne website <http://www.glyndebourne.com/about-us/our-history/early-years/>. See also Daniel Snowman, *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), 354, and Karl Shaw, *Curing*

Illustration 5.1: Audrey Mildmay photographed in *The Lady*, 9 May 1935; copy from Glyndebourne Archive, Press Cuttings Files.

Hiccups with Small Fires: A Delightful Miscellany of Great British Eccentrics (London: Pan Macmillan, 2009), 269.

Christie's plans for an opera festival were set out in November 1933 in an early manifesto for the *Monthly Musical Record*. He aspired to world class opera excellence, employing major international soloists together with lesser roles filled by singers from the UK, thus offering a training ground not available at this standard elsewhere – but he also had wider ambitions to find ways of attracting a larger audience once the core of the project was secure. This extract from the article reveals what was central to Christie's plan:

> Part of the public does not clamour for opera because it has not been well impressed, another part because it chooses as long as it can to remain ignorant, while the enthusiast, owing to the low England standard, goes abroad…. The Glyndebourne Opera House has two possibilities. 1) to offer superb performances to people who will regard them as the chief thing in the day or week to be looked forward to, and who will not try to sandwich them between business interviews and a society party; 2) to give educational performances for the ordinary public, with the best possible stage setting and only English orchestras and lesser known singers… I incline towards the superb performance assisted by a marvellous holiday *Festspiel* atmosphere, but expense would prohibit the admission of the poorer part of the public, and so it may be desirable to give local performances after the *Festspiel* is over. We also hope to have Shakespeare festivals and fairly frequent concerts. At all the performances the feeling of general happiness and benevolence should be conspicuous. The scenery and lighting, being designed new for every opera, should be superb. There are no vested interest, no traditions in the way.[19]

Christie was evidently working hard to deflect the criticisms of elitism. As the *Daily Telegraph* reported it:

> "Please do not call this venture a rich man's folly, or even a rich man's hobby," Mr C pleaded with me. "We are in deadly earnest here, and we feel we have started something remarkably fine, which will make the Glyndebourne Festival Opera House known throughout the world. We have here, not a village hall, but a fully-equipped opera house…. We do not wish to compete with the Continent. In fact, we would encourage opera-lovers to go there, but I believe we have started something which may be just as good. The reason why similar ventures have failed in England is because they have not been good enough. We aim at the best possible. Admittedly the prices are high – 40s and 30s a seat – but anyone

[19] Blunt, *John Christie,* 161, and Asa Briggs, 'An Unexpected Triumph: Glyndebourne in its Social Setting', in *Glyndebourne: A Celebration*, ed. John Higgins (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), 111.

who thinks opera can be made cheaply is a fool. I do not want to make money out of it, but it must pay its way."[20]

Christie certainly had an excellent grasp of the importance of publicity and set about advertising his plans by embarking on a campaign of wooing journalists, inviting representatives of all the major newspapers and magazines to Sussex. In the twelve months prior to the opening of the opera house he entertained a huge number: Christie filled their heads with carefully crafted sound bites; 'Sussex Salzburg', 'British Bayreuth', 'Opera on the Downs', etc., an example of which is included as Illustration 5.2.[21] The success of his PR campaign is documented in the press clippings file in the Glyndebourne archives, which display page after page of coverage and encouragement from journalists from the widest range of publications. Christie also drew heavily on his own eccentricity for publicity purposes, for example wearing his ancient tennis shoes with evening dress.[22] The *Monthly Musical Record* announced:

> A gem of a theatre! And the charmed audience could not get over wondering at an English country gentleman who had chosen this way of spending his money, instead of building racing stables. Evidently, to indulge in a private opera house is an eccentricity. But if it is a choice between a theatre and a stable, Mr Christie has, at any rate, the more uncommon toy. Christie's vision for the first year was – not that he wanted to be a modern day 'anachronistic Esterhazy', or a 'Beckford' born out of his time: in other words, that though he is prepared to subsidise Glyndebourne, and do so handsomely, he does not pretend to ignore the fact that two and two make four. He does not propose to throw away

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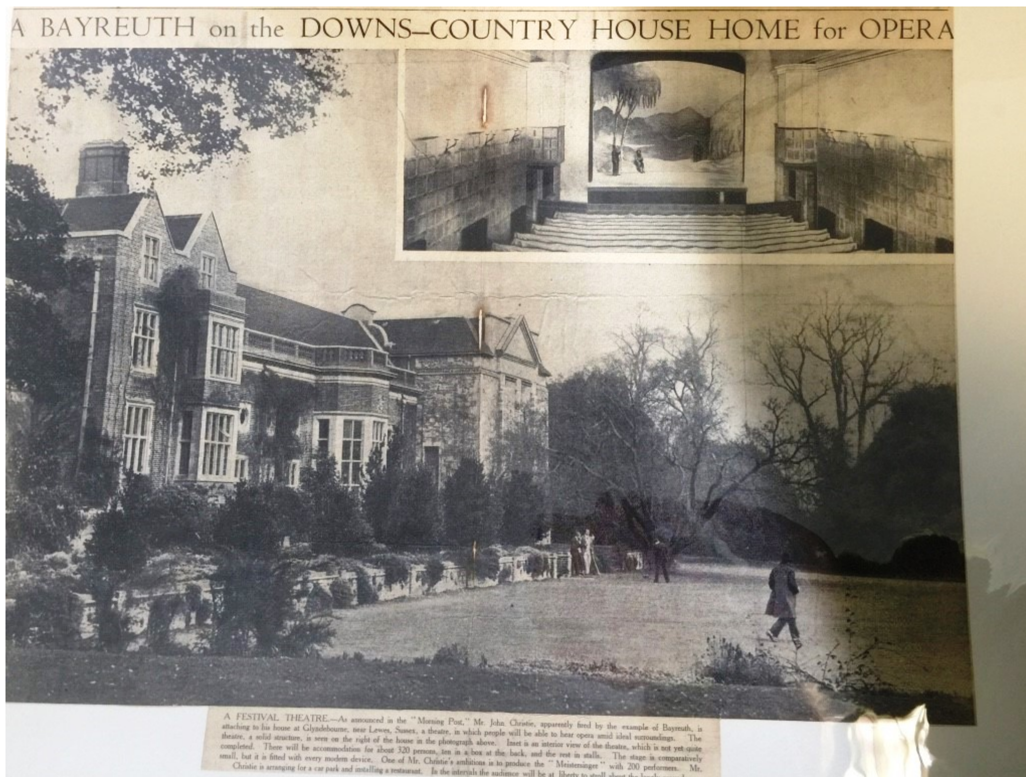
[20] *Daily Telegraph*, 16 May 1934.

[21] A reporter from the *Evening News*, 21 May 1934, described how he had lunched with Christie in his house, part of a house party of twenty, and had beaten a gong to get guests to the table. Other reports, too numerous to list completely, include: 'Opera House: Opera in the Heart of Sussex: Big Future for a New Little Theatre', *Evening News,* 29 June 1933; 'Opera in a Mansion. A Sussex Salzburg', *Daily Mail*, 26 February 1934; 'House in Sussex: Glyndebourne: Mr John Christie's "Private Bayreuth"', *Star*, 19 March 1934. A report in *Vogue* described Christie's venture thus: 'Salzburg in Sussex? The mists surrounding the mystery of the Season (there is always one) have cleared and we distinguish the forms of well-known music lovers making their way through the late afternoon sunshine, Lady Colefax, Lady Bridges, Lady Maud Warrender, toward the rural opera house of Glyndebourne. The opera motorbus arrives from Lewes with operagoers. The car park is elaborate. There are 300 seats in an oak panelled theatre with better lights than Covent Garden. All can sit down to dinner in the interlude; and walk in a foyer that links with Mr Christie's own house. It is possible to reach town the same evening. The prices are still very Salzburg, and they're giving Mozart too'; *Vogue*, 1 June 1934.

[22] Blunt, *John Christie*, 167.



A BAYREUTH on the DOWNS—COUNTRY HOUSE HOME for OPERA

A FESTIVAL THEATRE.—As announced in the "Morning Post," Mr. John Christie, apparently fired by the example of Bayreuth, is attaching to his house at Glyndebourne, near Lewes, Sussex, a theatre, in which people will be able to hear opera amid ideal surroundings. The theatre, a solid structure, is seen on the right of the house in the photograph above. Inset is an interior view of the theatre, which is not yet quite completed. There will be accommodation for about 320 persons, ten in a box at the back, and the rest in stalls. The stage is comparatively small, but it is fitted with every modern device. One of Mr. Christie's ambitions is to produce the "Meistersinger" with 200 performers. Mr. Christie is arranging for a car park and installing a restaurant. In the intervals the audience will be at liberty to stroll about the

Illustration 5.2: 'Bayreuth on the Downs', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 July 1933; copy taken from Glyndebourne Archive.

> money without counting, but reckons on a good measure of public support.[23]

As a result of his successful PR campaign, there is a steady stream of reports that eulogize Christie's enchanted theatre in the gardens surrounding his Elizabethan manor, and celebrate the idea of the unconventional Englishman whose dream came true against the odds. Bernard Levin offers a typical example in his book on music festivals; he examines early events at Glyndebourne in a chapter entitled 'Enchanted Garden'.[24] Other accounts rely heavily on vintage images of expensively dressed audiences arriving in vintage cars and on coiffured lawns, dinner tables laden with silver candelabras; for an early example, see Illustration 5.3. The quantities of mythology described above make it difficult to tease out the facts without disturbing the legacy of a man who some consider a national treasure. Early reviews such as this one in the *Musical Times,* were obviously distracted:

> After some heart breaking experiences with operatic ventures in this country, one felt entitled to anticipate Mr. John Christie's festival performances at Glyndebourne with some healthy scepticism. One knew the settings to be perfect, the material resources, ample and the artists distinguished; but after all there were glorious opportunities for the usual muddles attendant on divided counsel and rash enthusiasm. Well, if the festival performances of two of Mozart's Italian operas, *Figaro* and *Così fan Tutte*, were a surprise, one need not mind saying so now. For they were an enchantment!... Glyndebourne, of course, is in the first place a capitalist's hobby and a capitalist's resort ... one revels in the rather exclusive enjoyment of a kind of 18th century princely-ness that prides itself on presenting opera as exquisitely as possible for a minority of people of taste.[25]

His first season of Mozart opera in 1934 was repeated in 1935, performing more Mozart operas. Illustration 5.4 shows the schedule for the 1935 season; three new Mozart operas were performed alongside the original two from the previous year. The schedule also gives ticket prices. An article about Glyndebourne was published in

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[23] *Monthly Musical Record*, July 1934, 133-35.

[24] Bernard Levin, *Conducted Tour* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981). Other efforts, similar in tone, include: John Joliffe, *Glyndebourne, an Operatic Miracle* (London: John Murray, 1999); Brigitte Lardinois and Val Williams, *Glyndebourne: A Visual History* (Glyndebourne: Glyndebourne, 2009); John Julius Norwich, *Fifty Years of Glyndebourne: An Illustrated History* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985).

[25] Eric Blom, 'Glyndebourne Opera Festival', *Musical Times,* 75, 1097 (July 1934): 651-52.

Illustration 5.3: Guests at Glyndebourne, *Daily Sketch*, 6 June 1934; copy taken from Glyndebourne Archives.

Vogue during the 1935 season: it demonstrated how Christie was skilfully wooing female audiences with publicity based on the pastoral idyll (see Illustration 5.5).[26]1935 was the year of George V and Mary's Silver Jubilee: in a repetition of the events surrounding the Empire Exhibition in 1924, the Jubilee served to encourage national fervour and cast a critical light on anyone who didn't adhere to strict protectionist policies, especially opera companies. But while Covent Garden was condemned for its employment of foreign singers, Glyndebourne was (somewhat incongruously) praised. The contrast is curious because, on the face of it, the protectionist policies of the two institutions were all but identical: the cast sheets for *The Ring* at Covent Garden demonstrate that while the main roles were given to foreigners, as at Glyndebourne, the smaller parts were taken by English singers. But, as Briggs notes, Christie's efforts were judged differently, simply because, in the context of opera in Britain, his efforts were seen as innovative and indigenous compared to those of Covent Garden, a sentiment Christie made great efforts to encourage.[27] Lady Dunn, writing in the *Sunday Referee,* made a further reference to operatic affairs of the recent past when she noted that: 'Earnestly, simply and in no spirit of rivalry, Mr Christie laid plans for the festival … Mr Christie holds no brief for English voices merely as English voices – but, perhaps equally or even more important, he has no prejudice against them – and would gladly engage William Jones or Mary Smith if they had owned the right voice.'[28] The *Yorkshire Post* noted that at Glyndebourne 'the principal singers already engaged are a cosmopolitan set': there were seven English names amongst the fifteen stars– 'not a bad proportion'; the *Daily Herald* reported that, in the *Figaro* cast of eleven principals, eight were English.[29]

The level of criticism of the anti-protectionist policies at Covent Garden was damaging for Thomas Beecham, who, with Geoffrey Toye, had taken over opera at the theatre: they were publicly criticised in a letter to *The Times* on 7 March 1935, written

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[26] *Vogue*, 12 June 1935.

[27] Briggs, 'An Unexpected Triumph', 110-26.

[28] Lady Dunn, *Sunday Referee*, 'Opera Festival in a Country Mansion', 14 April 1935.

[29] *Yorkshire Post*, 26 April 1935, and *Daily Herald*, 7 June 1935. This figure included Mildmay.

GLYNDEBOURNE FESTIVAL OPERA HOUSE—MOZART FESTIVAL, 1935

Monday.	Tuesday.	Wednesday.	Thursday.	Friday.	Saturday.	Sunday.
27th May Dress Rehearsal ZAUBERFLÖTE	28th May Dress Rehearsal COSÌ	† 29th May ZAUBERFLÖTE	† 30th May COSÌ	31st May ZAUBERFLÖTE	1st June COSÌ	2nd June *No Performance*
3rd June *No Performance*	4th June Dress Rehearsal FIGARO	5th June COSÌ	† 6th June FIGARO	7th June COSÌ	8th June ZAUBERFLÖTE	9th June CONCERT
10th June FIGARO	11th June ZAUBERFLÖTE	12th June FIGARO	13th June COSÌ	14th June ZAUBERFLÖTE	15th June FIGARO	16th June *No Performance*
17th June Dress Rehearsal ENTFÜHRUNG	18th June FIGARO	† 19th June ENTFÜHRUNG	20th June ZAUBERFLÖTE	21st June FIGARO	22nd June ENTFÜHRUNG	23rd June CONCERT
24th June ENTFÜHRUNG	25th June ZAUBERFLÖTE	26th June ENTFÜHRUNG	27th June FIGARO	28th June ENTFÜHRUNG	29th June ZAUBERFLÖTE	30th June *No Performance*

The Management reserves the right to make any unavoidable changes in the cast or repertoire.
The times of the performances will be announced later.

BOOKING ARRANGEMENTS

† OPERA PRICES: Stalls, £2 0s. 0d.

Subsequently: Stalls, £2 0s. 0d. and £1 10s. 0d.

Patrons making application direct to the Management for the reservation of seats for four or more Operas are entitled to a reduction of 5%.

SUNDAY ORCHESTRAL CONCERTS: Stalls, 12s. 6d.

To the choice
opera festival
added last night
Nozze di Figaro,
masterpiece.
The music was
utmost skill and sp
Devotees of G
will not need to
partnership of the
in the triple allia
production and sc
there in rare pe
This, and the
Ebert and Hami
co-ordination of t
virtually the sam
made it faultless.
The Susanna
Mildmay and M
particularly real

Illustration 5.4: 1935 Festival Schedule; taken from Press Cuttings Files, Glyndebourne Archive.

Vogue's Spotlight

THE English Salzburg—that's what you see in this series of pictures. First the lovely, leafy setting of Glyndebourne; below, a group including Mr. Hamish Wilson, scenery designer and stage manager, and Mr. D. Morgan Jones, tenor; below again, rehearsal in the long music room; far right, Dr. Fritz Busch, head conductor, for once not conducting. The other pictures are various glimpses of the opera house, cast and grounds

GEORGE MILES

DR. FRITZ BUSCH

Illustration 5.5: 'English Salzburg', *Vogue*, 12 June 1935; copy from Glyndebourne Archive, Press Cuttings Files.

by 158 MPs outraged that there were no British singers. The *Spectator,* 5 April 1935, also criticised the lack of protectionist policies at Covent Garden in an article that demonstrated how these practices aggravated the perceptions of snobbery.[30] In contrast, Martin Cooper, writing in the *London Mercury* in April 1935, found that Glyndebourne offered at least a partial solution to England's opera problem (that the country had up until now only offered the option of low quality opera at Sadler's Wells or what was perceived as snobbery at Covent Garden). He described how Glyndebourne helped the previous operatic situation in England, which was:

> an English compromise which really satisfies nobody but a few snobs …. They can hunt their lions, or at least watch them behind the zoo bars of a box. The rest of us are tired of this unhappy arrangement and intermittent grumbling in the papers and the grandiose solutions which never come to anything … Mr Christie at Glyndebourne has found his private solution…. His advertisement note says that "a company of very distinguished international singers, British and foreign, has been selected and, as before, there will be a first class orchestra of leading British instrumentalists.[31]

Another part of the Glyndebourne mythology surrounds the circumstances of the appointment of Busch and Ebert in the first season: this was, according to various accounts, 'the merest chance' (Blunt) or the 'greatest stroke of good luck' (Sir George Christie writing in *Glyndebourne: A Visual History*) or 'good fortune heavily disguised in a brown shirt' (Dyneley Hussey, describing the 'miracle' of Glyndebourne in the 25-year anniversary 'Silver Jubilee Programme' of 1959).[32] Whatever the circumstances, Christie was certainly keen to welcome Busch and Ebert and their German expertise; he offered them artistic opportunities and freedom that was impossible in Germany at that point.[33] This legend also requires some closer

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[30] 'It is for the Covent Garden management to eradicate this kind of snobbery, which is but one symptom of their preferment of the social aspect of the season over its artistic quality'; *Spectator,* 5 April 1935.

[31] Martin Cooper, *London Mercury*, April 1935.

[32] Blunt, *John Christie*, 162, George Christie, *Glyndebourne*, 8, Hussey, 25-year anniversary 'Silver Jubilee Programme', 23.

[33] 'Two of the foremost opera directors in Germany, who were compelled to leave their country recently because they refused to obey the Nazi order to "cut" their Jewish friends, are rehearsing a company of well-known international opera singers at a country house near here. The short season for which they are rehearsing may well be the forerunner of a permanent opera festival in this country, similar to that at Salzburg;' *Telegraph*, 16 May 1934.

inspection: it seems likely that there was at least a guiding hand from Jani Strasser, Mildmay's singing teacher from Vienna, in the initial meeting between Christie and Busch.[34] Christie's German-mania had already been apparent from his trips to Bayreuth, and from his amateur Wagner productions in the organ room; he himself had received many hours of coaching from a friend so that he could play Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger* (see Illustration 5.6).[35]

Certainly Busch and Ebert brought a level of expertise that had not before been seen before in the UK; their high level experience of opera on mainland Europe was exactly what Christie needed to secure his 'world class' enterprise. They had both suffered increasingly under Nazi rule and had sought employment outside Germany, finding work in the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and were looking for summer employment to supplement the Argentinian season.[36] The two were able to make demands of Christie concerning rehearsal times that would not have been accepted anywhere else, thus facilitating the unsurpassed level of excellence and the smooth collaboration among all opera's constituent parts. The programme for 1934 accorded conductor Busch and director Ebert equal billing on the programme: a concept of artistic direction all but unheard of at Covent Garden.[37] Ebert's production was lauded in the press: 'Ebert's productions abounded in neat touches and intelligent sidelights that made Mozart's music seem more richly illusive than

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[34] The Glyndebourne archives contain a note from Strasser discussing Ebert's approach to production 'as he is surely imbued with that benevolent contempt of the artistic competence of the English which is so common on the Continent… I strongly recommend and beg John and Hamish therefore, to read this, before Ebert comes; I of course by no means wish to be mentioned.'

[35] Christie received this coaching from Fanny Mounsey, a family friend who had stayed at the house frequently before the suicide of her husband. According to Blunt, Christie received three hundred hours of coaching from her: Blunt, *John Christie*, 121. Wagner was still extremely popular, as evidenced by a contemporary report; 'Thus the revival of Italian opera which has been in full swing in Germany for some years now has not yet taken place in London where the Wagner mania shows little sign of abating. England and America are the only places left where Wagner is not on the decline'; *Truth*, 13 June 1934.

[36] *Music and Letters*, 15, 3 (July 1934), 199-202.

[37] Busch and Ebert were also given equal billing in the advertisements and programmes (see for example *The Times*, 18 May 1934). Beecham had employed Otto Erhardt at Covent Garden at 1934 as 'producer' but his productions were not considered of the same standard as Ebert's. An article in the *New Statesman,* 6 July 1935, compared the relative strengths of Ebert and Erhardt: 'Beecham … always speaks with great enthusiasm of his producer Otto Erhardt at Covent Garden, but I doubt if anybody else does.'

Illustration 5.6: John Christie as Beckmesser, 1928; in Wilfred Blunt, *John Christie of Glyndebourne: A Biography* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1968), 144.

ever.… an achievement not only by an international assembly of artists but of international significance.'[38] Basil Maine, writing in the *Glasgow Evening Herald* on 1 June 1934, certainly understood what Ebert had brought to the festival:

> Glyndebourne, of course, lacks the tradition of those European shrines. But this, perhaps, is not altogether a disadvantage, since it offers the opportunity of regarding the opera from a completely fresh point of view. It was a good idea to invite as producer Carl Ebert, late of the Charlottenberg Opera, Berlin, for he has made Mozart one of his special provinces…. It was refreshing to note a complete absence of the traditional "business" of opera, business which has been merely invented for the sake of something to do. Ebert permits a minimum of gesture, and always the movement conveys a meaning or stresses a passing of thought or emotion.[39]

Christie's policy of high ticket prices, together with the Glyndebourne package, which of necessity included the train ticket, a meal and drinks, meant his audiences comprised only the very wealthy. This population was, admittedly, shrinking because of changes in demographics and tax structures, but Glyndebourne somehow represented a nostalgic recapturing of their cultural privilege and remained popular. The audiences were not, however, necessarily the country's most cultured. Asa Briggs described how some found fault in Christie's endeavours, suggesting that Glyndebourne was 'as much about the audience as the performance and about the settings as much as the theatre.'[40] Indeed Christie's promotion of the venture successfully attracted Covent Garden audiences: Illustration 5.7 shows Ethel Snowden at Glyndebourne in 1935 together with Austen Chamberlain's wife and the Austrian Princess Hohenlohe. Briggs's description highlighted an aspect with which Christie himself was uncomfortable: his relationship with a section of the audience for whom cultural appreciation was not important. Christie described such people as 'snobs'. It was not until much later that he came to terms with the fact that such an attitude was

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[38] Eric Blom, *Musical Times*, 75, 1097 (July 1934), 651-52.
[39] 'An absence of stageyness' was the description used by the *Monthly Musical Record,* July-August 1934.
[40] Briggs, 'An Unexpected Triumph', 110.

Illustration 5.7: Lady (Austen) Chamberlain, Ethel Snowden and Princess Hohenlohe photographed in *The Lady*, 6 June 1935; copy from Glyndebourne Archive, Press Cuttings Files.

counter-productive and that the entire audience could be useful to him for financial support.[41]

Christie's Financial Management

Christie had predicted that he would make losses in the first year; with an opera house that held only 311 it was inconceivable that he could make ends meet. He had plans to increase the audience size by finding additional seats but he knew he also had to find alternative sources of revenue. At this point there was no complete recording of any of Mozart's operas in the UK.[42] Christie saw that there was potential in recording revenues: he agreed with Fred Gaisberg of HMV that at the end of the first season they would record excerpts from *Figaro.* With a mobile recording van they made six 78's which were then attractively boxed; these first recordings were subsequently augmented by the addition of the overture and solo arias in two further boxes. The Mozart Opera Society was created for the purpose of selling the discs and, in a clever joint venture, membership of the Society secured 10% discount on ticket prices at Glyndebourne.[43] The recordings were described by Gaisberg in a letter to Busch on 14 June 1934 as 'in every instance, completely successful. They are the finest set of concerted records from any opera I have yet heard and they are a grand tribute to Glyndebourne and yourself.' Another letter, dated 12 September 1935, went further: 'they [the recordings] are indeed the most successful opera recordings we have to our credit up to date'. Christie was delighted and filled hat boxes with 78's around the

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[41] Ebert and others at Glyndebourne referred to this section of the audience as 'Die Snobs': see Briggs, 'An Unexpected Triumph', 112.

[42] Gillian Widdicombe, 'Glyndebourne's Extensions', in *Glyndebourne: A Celebration*, 131-59. The *Figaro* recording is HMV DB 2474-79 and DBS 2583-93, 1934 (17x78s-33 sides); *Così fan tutte*, HMV DB 2653-2672, 1935 (20x78s); *Don Giovanni*, HMV DB 2961-2983, 1936 (23x78); Beecham's *Zauberflöte*, recorded in Berlin, was on HMV DB 3474-83, 1937-8). The Glyndebourne recording venture ended with on sour note when, in 1937, HMV recorded *Die Zauberflöte* with Beecham and the Berlin Philharmonic. Frank Hoffmann considers these and the later Glyndebourne 78-rpm recordings as highly influential, playing a key part in the establishment of Mozart opera in the operatic 'canon': Frank Hoffmann, *Encyclopaedia of Recorded Sound* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1524-34.

[43] This structure for selling records was employed frequently during this period because it permitted the record company to gauge demand in advance of production; see Nicholas Morgan, 'The National Gramophonic Society' (Ph.D. dissertation, Sheffield University, 2013).

house.[44] The Mozart Society was a popular success and HMV went on to record three Mozart operas in their entirety.

Christie also knew there was potential revenue from broadcasting and approached the BBC optimistically as it became clear that the project was more and more expensive. His initial determination, that he should be the sole funder, was weakened as the festival took up more and more of his liquid wealth. It was not so much that the festival was making losses, more that he wanted to embark on development projects requiring capital expenditure. There was no BBC broadcast from Glyndebourne in the first two years: a journalist in the *Star* noted – 'Alas! The BBC missed the chance of enabling us to share in this feast and thus also of ensuring the success of the project, which would have been benefited by the advertisement of a broadcast and gained many patrons who otherwise could not realise its charm and excellence.'[45] But from 1936, the BBC agreed to broadcast opera because Glyndebourne was established as part of the UK's opera world: accounts in the Glyndebourne archive show that the BBC paid Christie £600 in 1936, £1,000 in 1937, £870 in 1938 and £805 in 1939.[46] In April 1936 he approached the Corporation because by then he was a valuable member of the country's opera community and had information to contribute to the Opera Policy Committee (the BBC's expert panel on the subject).[47] Christie also thought he could persuade the BBC to subsidize his operations. He was duly invited to attend an Opera Committee meeting at the BBC on 7 October 1936, but his request for a subsidy was turned down and he was not asked to join the Committee.[48] Christie was angered and wrote to John Reith on 11 November 1936, pleading that his opera venture should be eligible for a subsidy:

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[44] Widdicombe considers Busch's conducting 'revelatory'; Widdicombe, 'Glyndebourne's Extensions', 133.

[45] *Star*, 13 June 1934.

[46] Blunt claims that the BBC were 'clamouring for permission to broadcast' from the beginning and that Christie refused them because they were not offering sufficient fees. According to Blunt, Christie relented in 1936 and offered the broadcast rights for free, but was told this was contrary to the BBC's policy and that he must take their fees: Blunt, *John Christie*, 180. There is no evidence on the files to suggest that Christie made such an offer.

[47] K.A. Wright from the Programme Division of the BBC Wright to Christie, 2 June 1936, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives.

[48] R.J.F. Howgill to Christie, 2 October 1936, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives.

> Glyndebourne Opera Subsidy: It is with some diffidence that I am writing to you on this matter and I am doing so because I feel that the Opera Advisory Committee has not begun to grasp the situation in dealing with the request by Glyndebourne for a subsidy - only on the grounds of its and their respective values to our Country. On this point, which to my mind, is an essential condition, I was not really cross-examined by the Committee at all. And, in fact the only comment was one made by the Chairman, that because I was not doing a British opera this year I did not really seem to be much use... there is the suggestion that we are merely a rich man's hobby. This suggestion shows an entire misconception of our objects and of what we have already done.

Reith's reply revealed that Christies appeal was to no avail. The Opera Committee had unanimously rejected the idea of a subsidy: the Board of Governors also determined that they agreed with the decision of the Opera Committee.[49]

Christie's financial discipline and acumen, together with the fact that he was solely responsible for funding the venture, meant that he was very clear even before the first season of the amount of loss he was expecting: the 1934 season would cost him £7,000.[50] It is astonishing that he should have been able to predict this with such accuracy: the sum was indeed shown in subsequent accounts. However, estimates of the cost of building the opera house and the alterations he carried out during the pre-war seasons suggest that he spent a total of £100,000 on capital projects, depleting his available funds to the extent that he was not able to continue.[51] Blunt reports that he made a loss of £7,000 in 1934, £10,000 in 1935, £4,000 in 1936, a profit in 1937 of £2,700 and a loss of £7,000 in 1938. Christie was aware from the outset that increasing the capacity of the house was desirable, raising it from 311 to 450 by 1937 and to 537 by 1939. Wine sales played an extremely important part in the reduction of the deficit. In the first season he had asked a firm of caterers to provide a meal, but for

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[49] Reith to Christie, 25 November 1936, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives.

[50] *Morning Post*, 16 May 1934. The *Daily Mirror*, 16 May 1935, reported that 'Mr Christie is shy. As he showed me round his opera house he kept repeating that really he had nothing to do with it at all. He will not talk about how much it cost him. "A Stock Exchange Spec" paid for it all last year was all he would say.'

[51] Hughes estimates Christie spent £100,000 on the project before the war; Blunt, *John Christie*, 150. This number is repeated by Briggs, 'An Unexpected Triumph', 118. *Tatler* estimated that the house cost £50,000; *Tatler,* 6 June 1934.

subsequent seasons he built a dining hall and hired his own catering team; by 1939 he was making £5,450 and £3,250 for food and drink sales respectively.[52]

While Christie had initially boasted that ticket prices would be only £1, by the time the 1934 season was announced they were £2 for a stalls seat, and 20 guineas for a box.[53] While at Covent Garden Blois and Szarvasy had kept prices stable at around £1 8s for the stalls, Beecham had urged them to put the prices up so that, for *The Ring* cycle in 1933, stalls seats cost 33s 6d.[54] Beecham and Toye put the prices up again in 1934 and advertised seats for performances of *The Ring* for 35s; for the first performance of *Schwanda* and *Arabella,* stalls seats were £2 5s. Thus Christie's prices were not, as suggested by some, 'unheard of'; they were very much in line with those in London. Christie reinforced this point by comparing his prices to those at Bayreuth, which he estimated as £2 8s, and Salzburg, at £2, to justify the price.[55] He was also vehement that he would find a way to avoid the Entertainments Tax; he was angry that he had to pay as much as £1,500 in tax in his first year.[56] Having discovered that Sadler's Wells had obtained an exemption because its constitution was both charitable and educational, he immediately set about reconstituting Glyndebourne as an educational charity; The Glyndebourne Society was incorporated on 27 May 1935, just in time for the 1935 season.[57] Another example of Christie's awareness of the key drivers of his profitability was his innovative approach to the prohibition of Sunday opening; he was not permitted by law to open on a Sunday, despite the day being

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[52] The *Sketch* reported 'you may eat your own sandwiches and drink your own ginger pop at the Opera House's tables' (22 May 1935); *Vogue* reported that there were two dining rooms with one serving a meal for 10s and the other for 5s 9d 'run this year by Mr C himself'; *Vogue*, 15 May 1935.

[53] The initial price was announced in the *Daily Sketch,* 30 June 1933.

[54] At Sadler's Wells tickets were typically 6s 6d; see *The Times*, 2 May 1933.

[55] A letter from Christie to M. Whitehouse described his pricing policy; 5 February 1934, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives.

[56] Both *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Express*, 16 May 1934, report this claim.

[57] Correspondence in the Glyndebourne archive suggests that he was warned that his exemption would be withdrawn in 1936; but the accounts indicate that he didn't pay any Entertainments Tax. A subsequent letter to Neville Chamberlain, 12 January 1938, indicates that Chamberlain had intervened to help Christie (and Chamberlain's wife attended the opera). A letter to *The Times* from Oswald Stoll, 11 May 1938, indicates that, by then, Covent Garden had also obtained exemption from the tax. See also Mary Glasgow, 'The Concept of the Arts Council', *Essays on John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Milo Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 267. Christie to J.C. Turner at the Treasury; 'his entertainment tax was remitted on partly educational and charitable grounds', 14 December 1936, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives.

suitable for audiences to travel out of London. To get around this restriction, he founded the Sunday Opera Club in 1935. This permitted him to sell Sunday tickets to members, thus increasing the number of performances he could offer. Membership take-up was excellent and Christie took the opportunity to launch the sale of packages of Sunday opera and dinner.

Busch and Ebert convinced Christie that the managerial expertise of those running opera houses in Germany was far superior to that of UK theatres. In 1934 Christie had initially appointed Alfred Nightingale, previously Covent Garden's general manager, in the first season. But Busch and Ebert were not impressed with Nightingale's managerial skills which to them represented all that was wrong with the amateurish management of opera in the UK: they persuaded Christie to employ Rudolf Bing at the end of the 1935 season as General Manager (Nightingale left to become manager of the D'Oyly Carte). Bing brought a far greater level of expertise to the role than that possessed by anyone in the British opera business: his promotion of the venture together with his micromanagement methods secured the pre-war success of the venture. Bing's daily letters to Christie provide convincing evidence of his business acumen, with his prowess as a promoter soon becoming apparent.[58] He had a preference for paid publicity over the less controllable free variety, and was responsible for the inclusion of a Glyndebourne advertisement in the Salzburg Prospectus (which had a circulation of 500,000), also managing to send a Glyndebourne prospectus to the Metropolitan Opera subscription list.[59] Bing's detailed cost analyses for these years remain in the archives (see Table 5.1); as well as demonstrating the sophistication of his analysis, they also reveal how, by 1937, he had been able to achieve an operating profit, something that was not possible at Covent Garden.

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[58] After he left Glyndebourne, Bing went on to found the Edinburgh Festival before becoming General Manager at New York's Metropolitan Opera in 1949.

[59] In a letter dated 4 November 1935, Bing wrote to Edward Johnson of the New York Metropolitan Opera asking for a list of his subscribers. Johnson's reply, dated 16 November 1935, states that The Met would not divulge the list, but would agree to distribute 5,500 copies on Glyndebourne's behalf for a fee of $150.

AVERAGES PER PERFORMANCE	1935	1936	1937	1938
EXPENSES	890	700	715	845
TAKINGS	440	540	755	735

SUMMARY	1935	1936	1937	1938	Budget 1939
PERFORMANCES	25	32	35	37	38
NEW PRODUCTIONS	2	1	0	2	0
TOTAL COSTS	£22,000	£23,500	£28,000	£35,000	£31,000

Table 5.1 Bing's Detailed Cost Analyses 1935-38.[60]

Another of Christie's innovations was the introduction of a substantial programme book, an item that in time generated considerable revenue. This weighty volume, in sharp contrast to Covent Garden's flimsy sheet offered opportunities for corporate advertising, lists of individual supporters, as well as synopses and analytical articles connected with the repertoire, became and has remained a distinctive feature, central to the enterprise in terms of revenue and identity. The concept has been much copied by other opera festivals. Christie created a so-called 'Golden Book', a publication that served to emphasise Glyndebourne's exclusivity.[61] In the early years Christie printed both a prospectus to be sent out when the season was announced and a programme for the performances: the latter, a 20-page document, included essays on the acoustics of the theatre, glossy photos, a map and an article entitled 'where to live'. It was as if Christie were not just selling opera but an entire lifestyle.[62] By comparison, programmes for Covent Garden at this time were much less comprehensive, comprising two sheets giving cast members, prices and future scheduling together with small box adverts. Christie's 1935 Golden Book is yet another illustration of his flair for self-promotion. It featured an essay commissioned from the eminent art historian Herbert Read, which compared Christie's venture to the *fêtes champêtres* of Watteau (whose philosophy was that art could be enjoyed at a higher

[60] Taken from the Glyndebourne Archives.
[61] Hughes, *Glyndebourne*, 67, and Norwich, *Fifty Years*, 33.
[62] Norwich describes it as a manifesto and prints a large extract from it: Norwich, *Fifty Years,* 33.

level if experienced in an ideal landscape). The Glyndebourne archive contains correspondence between Christie and Read (then editor of the *Burlington Magazine*) detailing how Christie commissioned the article. He suggested that Read insert a paragraph justifying the cost of the ticket by comparing it to a day's shooting or a new dress. The 1936 book contained an article on Mozart and written by Sacheverell Sitwell, a well-known expert on the subject.[63]

There were several other distinguishing features of the financial model employed at Glyndebourne, not least of which was the significance placed on artistic excellence: Christie paid for more rehearsal time than at any other venture. Toye was moved to write to the *Spectator* in reply to an article by Dyneley Hussey; he grumbled about 'the impudent Hussey' making the 'scandalous' accusation that Covent Garden skimped on rehearsal time, something he felt was unwarranted and damaging. Hussey's response served only to reinforce his view that standards were much higher at Glyndebourne – and that it was a mistake to mention Glyndebourne in the same breath as Covent Garden.[64] As *The Times* reported, 'it was the chief glory of the recent Mozart festival at Glyndebourne that these ensembles were so well done that they set a new standard for operatic performance in England.'[65] Peter Ebert's book on his father offers a close analysis of this unique aspect of Glyndebourne. Ebert and Busch had not had this amount of rehearsal time before, even at their prestigious opera house engagements in Germany: Ebert claims that the Glyndebourne rehearsal system was 'to transform the operatic scene in Britain totally' and permit Ebert the time to teach singers to act.[66]

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[63] Sitwell had recently published a short, pocket-sized book on Mozart that he had dedicated to 'Mrs Samuel Courtauld'; Sacheverell Sitwell, *Mozart: Short Biographies Series No.6* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1932).

[64] Dyneley Hussey, *Spectator*, 19 April 1935.

[65] *The Times*, 16 July 1935; 'The complete cast is available for three weeks before the first performance, and rehearsals go on all day and sometimes far into the night'; *News Chronicle*, 20 May 1935.

[66] Ebert described the regime whereby no one was permitted leave of absence (for guesting elsewhere). There was one week of purely musical preparation. He further considered the teamwork between Bing and Ebert 'an invigorating oasis' and suggested 'it began a renaissance which led to the establishment of many more opera companies, a spectacular increase in opera appreciation and a fundamental change in the style of productions': Peter Ebert, *In this Theatre of Man's Life: The Biography of Carl Ebert* (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1999), 101-3.

Christie's Expansion Plans

Fuelled by his successful opera project, Christie was ambitious to extend his success. He had numerous plans, all of them unsuccessful. Initially he drew up a strategy to emulate the Salzburg Festival and incorporate drama into his schedule: his opera success even led to suggestions that he might take over the running of a new Shakespeare theatre.[67] The Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee, set up in 1908, had some £80,000 of private funds and had attracted much criticism for its failure to make progress with the project.[68] The *New Statesman* suggested:

> Now, it seems to me, the sooner Mr John Christie is invited to take charge, the better. He is neither an actor, a producer, nor a musician, but evidently (for I do not know him) a disinterested lover of the dramatic and musical arts who has real judgement and taste of his own, which he is not afraid to act upon. Such a man in charge at Stratford-Upon-Avon could certainly make it rival Salzburg as a centre for drama and music in the space of a few years. But will Mr Christie ever be invited? Never! The Shakespeare Committee will sit upon their money bags and spend their halfpence cautiously on compromises that please nobody. Stratford-upon-Avon, far from becoming a festival centre the level of Salzburg, will degenerate to the level of any English touring provincial town.[69]

Christie, though, was more interested in finding a way to perform opera in London; he sent Bing to book either Covent Garden or Drury Lane for an autumn season in 1937.[70] Bing was unable to secure either theatre but, undeterred, talked to Sir Oswald Stoll about taking the Coliseum to do an 'Aida-type' opera later that year: Christie wrote to Busch in April 1938 and suggested Bing could take over as General Manager at Covent Garden, thus opening a door for Christie; Bing worked hard to get his 'foot between

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[67] He told the *East Sussex News*, 13 October 1933, 'we shall also have a Shakespearean festival, for I think we certainly ought to do Shakespeare'. The Golden Book of 1934 season mentions opera, concerts and Shakespeare Festivals in the section 'Where to Live'.
[68] Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture*, 190.
[69] W.J. Turner, 'Figaro and Arabella', *New Statesman and Nation,* 2 June 1934, 846. *The Truth*, 6 June 1934, had the same argument: 'While we have all been deploring the lack of enterprise shown by the committee which is responsible for running the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon, which is heavily endowed and if conducted by a man of vision and enterprise could make Stratford-upon-Avon a rival as a summer festival resort for drama and music to the famous Salzburg festival in Austria … a private individual has suddenly achieved what has never been achieved in England before.' W.J. Turner, in another article for the *New Statesman*, 13 April 1935, wrote that he wanted Christie to take his opera festival to Stratford and perform Mozart.
[70] Bing to Christie, 14 December 36, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives; and Hughes, *Glyndebourne*, 128.

the door'.[71] The archives contain a letter from him to Christie, dated 23 November 1938, describing how he had tried to contact Beecham, who had just announced in the papers that his company, then running opera at Covent Garden, was to be wound up. Bing suggested that they get Harry Colles (music critic for *The Times*) to publish a report intimating that collaboration between Glyndebourne and Covent Garden was likely. By 1939 Christie had changed tack and was drawing up plans to run the opera year-round, with more than 100 performances in London's Drury Lane as well as a longer season at Glyndebourne. Bing wrote to Christie urging him to continue with these plans:

> I am convinced that the continuation of Glyndebourne's isolation may prove dangerous, perhaps not in one, perhaps not even in two or three years, but certainly in the long run. It is essential for Glyndebourne to develop, and in particular to acquire more power. If we do not get in at Covent Garden now, others may get in and that may mean the establishing of this isolation for some time.[72]

None of these schemes came to anything but it was clear that both Christie and Bing saw that expansion to London could be extremely beneficial.[73]

National Council of Music

At this point Christie turned his attention towards an even more ambitious amalgamation of music interests. He could see that the music business was particularly

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[71] 'I hope there may be a reasonable chance of managing Covent Garden as well as Glyndebourne, but I suppose it depends on whether Beecham makes a muddle and a loss again this year. This is in confidence, but I want Covent Garden to be combined with us. It is bound to be more efficient and more economical'; Christie to Bing April 1938, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives. There are other references to the fact that Christie hoped that Beecham would make such a muddle of Covent Garden that he could take it over; Widdicombe, 'Glyndebourne's Extensions', 131-32 and file entitled '1938 Correspondence with Covent Garden re: the possibility of Rudolf Bing going there', Glyndebourne Archives.

[72] Letter dated 23 November 1938, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives.

[73] Bing drafted a letter Christie to send to Bruce Ottley (Chairman of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the company that owned the theatre); 'It is not without regret that I come to this conclusion because from the first time you approached me some months ago the idea of collaboration with Covent Garden seemed most attractive to me … not attractive in the way of making money for Glyndebourne and not for getting personal glory out of it for myself, but very interesting because I thought it a natural development and because I could foresee further far reaching developments to the benefit of English Opera, which we all have at heart…. I regret that it seems unavoidable, for the moment, to continue the isolation of Covent Garden and Glyndebourne and the maintaining of quite different artistic policy of these two institutions.' 17 November 1938, JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives.

badly hit by the effects of emerging technology and the poor state of the economy. Many musicians were out of work because venues were closing and opportunities for live performance much reduced. Christie thought he could bring his expertise to their aid and set about forming a National Council of Music (NCM). There had been several occasions when musicians, under the auspices of the Musicians' Union, had protested at the employment of foreign musicians, judging that stricter protectionist policies would protect their jobs. Christie disagreed. His scheme would promote the employment of high quality foreign musicians so that national levels of artistic excellence would be improved. His amalgamated group of musicians would, he thought, have great lobbying power and would ensure that the rights of musicians were properly protected.

The earliest reference to this project is a letter dated 4 February 1936, from Christie to Herbert Read. Christie spelled out his plans:

> I want to form a Royal Society of Music. There are only three musical bodies at the moment in England: 1) The Musicians' Union – ignorant and hopeless, 2) the Incorporated Society [of Musicians] – nearly as bad 3) the Musicians' Company – which as far as I know only dines and sleeps. In consequence, music fails and is un-respected. If Music had an effect on Society it would be able to command respect, it would give sound advice to the various Government Departments and in addition to Municipal Corporations and its influence would soon be felt… I want your help in setting out the purposes of the Society and its ideals. I want to get the command of the King to form this Society. My idea is that it should be composed mostly of people who are not professional musicians but who have power in the land and wish to secure some prominent politicians and people of substantial position we should be able to obtain financial help for Music.… The Society has got to be authoritative. In coming from Glyndebourne it would, perhaps, have behind it the only authority which at present seems probable.

This manifesto for a 'Royal Society of Music (British Empire)' had at its core Christie's unique blend of 'autocratic' ideology. There is no reply from Read on the files, but Christie tried out his ideas again with A.P. Herbert, the independent MP for Oxford University (a man who had campaigned against the Entertainments Tax). In a letter to Herbert dated 6 November 1937, Christie set out revised plans, using a new title for the committee, a 'Council of Power', a body that would make sure that musicians would be represented properly by a central body:

> Musicians … they are difficult – they are unpractical – they have little experience of affairs…. Politicians pay little heed to them because they do not understand them, because the musicians are small minded and generally incapable of organizing... the first step then is to alter the representation of music. My theory is to constitute what I call a Council of Power consisting of several people who may be musical but are essentially wise and experienced ... the advice I have been given by leading musicians has patently been colossally bad…. I think it would be a mistake to expect the Government to finance and guarantee the work planned by the Council of Power. My plan is that the guarantees should come chiefly from the local councils where the work is being carried out…. The expenses on the government would be the expenses of headquarters, plus some special feature, such as the engagement of Toscanini, or Fitz Busch or Bruno Walter… to put the scheme into practice would require a modification of the Music and Drama Bill because neither I nor you nor anyone else have any power to influence the local authorities, who are at present ignorant and ready to remain ignorant. My argument with them is that we are trying create a new industry and we are trying to provide for the increased leisure of the people in times to come.… Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to have you closely associated with this movement. Of all the people in the House, I would rather have you.[74]

Although Herbert replied, he was dismissive and failed to respond to either of Christie's invitations to conferences convened to create his Council.

Christie's early efforts towards this project became increasingly coloured by the efforts of another group, The League of Audiences, a wider collection of musicians, actors and other live performers. The League, run by Alfred Wareing, had reached the stage of drafting a Music and Drama Bill (mentioned by Christie in his letter to Herbert). Wareing had considerable support for his project, which proposed state aid for the performing arts: Christie was adamant, though, that his style of private funding of the arts was superior.[75] He also criticised Wareing's proposals to give power to the Commissioners appointed to manage the fund; Wareing suggested that his Commissioners would be able to operate a theatre themselves and select which production they would support, powers that Christie could see might be abused. A letter from W.E. Edwards, Christie's personal secretary based in London, on 30 December 1937, urged Christie to take action against the Bill. Edwards reported that a

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[74] Christie to A.P. Herbert, 6 November 1937, in John Christie File: Letters re Glyndebourne, Conference of Musicians, Glyndebourne Archives.

[75] Eric David Mackerness, *A Social History of Music* (London: Routledge, 2013), 267.

recent meeting of the League of Audiences had been attended by more than fifty people, and that the League had the support of a large group of important musicians.[76] By now, Christie was vehemently against any Government subsidy of the arts: his success at Glyndebourne had, he thought, proved his thesis. He set out the key differences between his scheme and that of the League. His main objectives were:

> To raise the standard of Music and Drama throughout the Country;
> To develop latent talent in the Country;
> Create a larger listening public for first class music by proper organisation and representation and co-ordinate musical interests.

The objects of the Music and Drama Bill were:

> To combat mechanisation by increasing living music and drama;
> To promote the art of music and drama by means of a Government subsidy whether for artistic undertaking research, education and training or other means, and
> Popularise music and drama – "More, better, cheaper".

Christie was also keen to obtain the support of Parliament for his scheme and wrote to Neville Chamberlain on 12 January 1938 asking for his support.

Evidence of Christie's progress was that he held two conferences at Glyndebourne in 1938, managing to secure the attendance of many of the most important people in the world of music.[77] The first conference was held early in 1938 and the group agreed on a mandate for Christie's NCM.[78] Colles from *The Times* attended and wrote enthusiastically on 6 March 1938 to Christie:

> Actually I think you have achieved not only more than could have been predicted, but possibly more than you know. 1. You have obtained a mandate from representatives of widely divergent musical interests to act on their behalf. 2. You have given to most of your guests (I do not include

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[76] The meeting was reported in the *Musical Times*, 79, 1140 (February 1938): 142. Wareing had secured the support of many of the musicians that Christie was to invite to his conference, including Hugh Allen, Ethel Smyth, Rutland Boughton, Eric Coates, Malcolm Sargent, Richard Austin and Sir Thomas Beecham.

[77] His first invitee list was: Mr Eames (ISM), Stanley Marchant (RAM), Dr Dyson (RCM and a director of the Pilgrim Trust), Sir Hugh Allen (RCM), Adrian Boult (BBC), Mr Hodgkinson (Pilgrim Trust), Mr Stratton, Mr Paul Beard, Mr R. Forbes (RMCM), Mr and Mrs Mayer (concert series), Dr Vaughan Williams, Mr Harold Holt (promoter), Lord Lytton (Sadler's Wells), Mr Richard Austin, Sir Donald Tovey (*Telegraph*), Dr Harry Colles (*The Times*), Mr J.M. Keynes, Mr A.F. Lascelles (private secretary to King George VI), Dr Thatcher (BBC), A.P. Herbert MP, Rt. Hon. Harold Baker MP. More details of those who attended both conferences may be found in Blunt, *Glyndebourne*, 226-39.

[78] The first committee comprised Robert Mayer, Hodgkinson, Eames and Christie; subsequently Dyson replaced Hodgkinson, while Forbes of the Royal Manchester College of Music was elected.

> myself in this because I did not need conversion) a wholly new and sympathetic interest in Glyndebourne, its achievements and aims. 3. You have enabled your guests to form friendships among themselves and given them a chance of removing those little misunderstandings which arise from lack of contact. Your Group conversations were a stroke of genius. We all feel deeply indebted to you for all this and I especially so.

The second conference, held on 2 July 1938, was less successful. There were arguments between Christie and Ralph Vaughan Williams about the relative importance of wider participation versus high standards of performance. After the conference Christie, disillusioned by lack of progress, decided to reassess; he concluded that if he raised substantial funding, he could proceed without the support of critics like Vaughan Williams. He wrote to Stella Isaacs (Lady Reading, founder of the Women's Voluntary Service) asking for a million pounds. His letter, dated 27 October 1938, pointed out the merits of his NCM, which he described as:

> well in hand and a Committee is at work on what should be the final details…. I want £1,000,000 and I want the Trust controlled by me as an autocrat, with an advisory and Consultative Committee which can only talk and not decide … I hear on all sides that I have succeeded because I am an autocrat and not a Committee … I cannot believe that the Dictator of this Trust would not act wisely and that, in the circumstances, the Committee would act wisely … I should aim at working just as carefully as if it were my own money.… Its influence could be all important influence in music and the fund would supply what, at the moment is generally misdirected by misguided enthusiasts, but would fulfil a condition which at the moment is always laid down by the Government, that private enterprise must look after these arts. It would be free from taxation, death duties and income tax. It would be a force the Government would have to reckon with if the Government started interfering with music, there is no rival in the field.[79]

[79] Lady Reading was the widow of Rufus Isaacs, Lord Reading, who had died in 1935 leaving her almost £300,000.

Lady Reading responded but politely declined.[80] Although Christie continued in his efforts, his scheme came to nothing.[81]

Conclusion

Traditional cultural studies describing the development towards state funding do not discuss the parallel development of private funding of the arts before the Second World War and therefore Christie's endeavours are generally ignored, with very few serious studies of his work at Glyndebourne.[82] But Christie's enterprise is worthy of academic study both because it was astonishingly successful. Christie's success at Glyndebourne did not, though, translate into success for his other endeavours. His work to invigorate the live performance marketplace by forming the NCM was a failure: despite welcoming many of the country's top musicians to his conferences, a list of names that should have assured his success, his aim for an umbrella group of musicians came to nothing.[83] Aside from the innovative aspects of the Glyndebourne model, there is an interesting behavioural characteristic that perhaps explains why Glyndebourne was successful but the NCM was not. At Glyndebourne Christie was able to make all the decisions himself without reference to others. In seeking to establish the NCM, however, he needed the co-operation of other senior industry figures. This was difficult for someone whose previous 'amiable eccentricity' seemed to have been replaced by what Blunt describes as 'signs of zeal, not far short of megalomania'.[84] All

[80] 'I was most interested in your letter, but I am afraid that I must have raised in your mind, hopes and expectations which, much as I wish to do so, I am quite unable to implement. I need not say how much I am in sympathy with your project but as you will yourself appreciate, it is by no means easy to call up from the air, backers for this sort of enterprise. I should like to help if I could, but frankly I have not amongst my acquaintances anyone who I think might possibly be prepared to offer £1,000,000 for your scheme'; 11 November 1938, in John Christie File: Letters re Glyndebourne, Conference of Musicians, Glyndebourne Archives.
[81] The Glyndebourne Archives reveal that Christie held more meetings during 1941 in London at the Dorchester and Ritz Hotels – both with attendee lists that were as impressive as before.
[82] Minihan's description of post-war opera at Covent Garden perpetuates this somewhat myopic view: 'while foreign companies and artists were still invited to perform at Covent Garden, the British companies provided the backbone of the season's entertainment. The old system, under which the opera house served to accommodate brief visits by prestigious foreign companies, to the near total neglect of native talent, was at last thrown over'; see Minihan, *Nationalization of Culture,* 254.
[83] Blunt describes Christie's efforts in a chapter entitled 'Planning a Better World'; Blunt, *Glyndebourne*, 226-39.
[84] Blunt, *Glyndebourne*, 230.

hopes of establishing his umbrella group were quashed with the creation of CEMA – a group that was to be run by Keynes.[85] During the war Christie and Bing successfully continued their operatic activities and staged Frederick Austin's version of *The Beggar's Opera*, with John Gielgud as producer; Mildmay and Michael Redgrave took the leading parts.

Christie had invited Keynes to both of his conferences but the latter did not attend either.[86] The two men were almost exact contemporaries: Briggs refers to antagonism between these two near neighbours (Keynes lived at Firle just outside Lewes).[87] Keynes became involved with CEMA and, with his vision and guidance, the latter group went on to form the basis of the Arts Council, the group that promoted and protected the interests not only of musicians but of artists generally, an even wider group than Christie had proposed.[88] Interestingly, after the war Christie applied to CEMA for funding. His application was refused: Mary Glasgow (who worked with Keynes) went to some pains to explain that Christie's application was justifiably rejected because Glyndebourne was 'a rich man's pleasure' and did not therefore deserve taxpayers' support.[89] In many ways this rejection was helpful to Christie, although he did not think so at the time. It meant that Christie was forced to devise an independent financing structure that secured the future of his venture. His ingenious post-war funding model found ways to tap the support of both the cultural elite (his

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[85] Catherine Pearson, *Museums in the Second World War: Curators, Culture and* Change (London: Routledge, 2017), 90; Jörn Weingärtner, *The Arts as a Weapon of War: Britain and the Shaping of National Moral in World War II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 55-63; Donald Moggeridge, *Maynard Keynes: An Economist's Biography* (London: Routledge, 2002), 696.

[86] In a letter from Keynes to Christie dated 27 January 1938, Keynes claimed he was 'out of health and unable, for the present, to accept any engagements. As I do not expect to be fit to go back into residence in Cambridge for a period yet, it is possible that I may be living down here at the end of February. If I am, and I feel fit to take part in a conference, though I am afraid that it is unlikely, I will let you know,' JC Corresp. File, Glyndebourne Archives.

[87] Briggs, 'Unexpected Triumph', 119. Correspondence between the two confirms they knew each other: letters addressed to each other as 'Keynes' and 'Christie' suggest a degree of informality.

[88] Guthrie, 'Music and Cultural Values in 1940's Britain', 122-53; Weingärtner, *The Arts as a Weapon of War;* T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948); Sir Benjamin Ifor Evans, *Prospects for a Ministry of Fine Arts* (London: BBC, 1959); Sir Benjamin Ifor Evans and Mary Glasgow, *The Arts in England* (London: Falcon Press, 1949); Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures, The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995).

[89] Glasgow, 'The Concept of the Arts Council', 266.

'snobs') and welcome corporate sponsorship. This modern membership structure was to be his lasting legacy.[90]

[90] In Brigg's view, Glyndebourne's success was down to its 'efficient financing in often difficult and unprecedented circumstances – largely independent financing'; Briggs, 'An Unexpected Triumph', 113.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Five Dilemmas

The four case studies considered in my thesis examine various efforts to ensure the survival of national opera through the development of private and state funding models in the inter-war years. On one level they illustrate the relative benefits of private, state and hybrid funding and examine the other features relevant to opera production of the period. But they have a wider function: to demonstrate how other choices made by the various opera producers defined their efforts and affected their relative success. In my introductory chapter, I suggested a framework of five dilemmas central to the overall challenges facing opera producers: a framework that enabled me to analyse and draw conclusions from the case studies. These five dilemmas are, of course, not exclusive: they merely represent my best effort to order the challenges surrounding the funding of opera during this period into some kind of explanatory matrix.

Opera had been the virtually exclusive domain of impresarios of one type or another until the start of the twentieth century. Indeed, after the end of World War One, opera remained in private hands: although there were many discussions about state funding as it existed in continental Europe, such a model remained unlikely to succeed in the UK. There were multiple reasons. Social attitudes towards culture in the UK at the start of the period of my thesis were largely unchanged from the second half of the nineteenth century and took the form of a general mistrust of high culture. Such unsophisticated attitudes do not appear to have been class driven: subsequent commentaries suggest these scepticisms continue across the various social strata.[1] As Matthew Arnold had famously suggested, Britain remained predominantly a nation of philistines.[2] To some, opera even embodied all that was wrong with the class divides of the time: those who were not part of the cultural elite often regarded opera with suspicion, wary that it was somehow part of a conspiracy to deepen social exclusion. It

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[1] John Holden, 'Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy', https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Culturalvalueweb.pdf

[2] 'Guardian Enquiry: Are We Dumbing Down?', Stefan Collini, *Guardian,* 28 October 2008. See also Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (1869: rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), ix-xiii.

was against this backdrop that my cast of earnest endeavourers set about discovering new sources of finance for opera at a time when old models were widely acknowledged as becoming defunct. Opera was fully commercialized but was not financially viable: it remained dependent on the patronage of the wealthiest and inextricably linked to the social season – an association that served to strengthen hostility amongst the masses. One of the problems with each of the models considered in this thesis was that all four groups or individuals believed that they had a mission to provide 'national opera' – and all were surprised when the nation at large spurned their efforts.

Five Dilemmas

In summary, my five dilemmas are as follows:

1.	Should opera be elite?	or	Opera for all?
2.	Should opera be privately funded?	or	Receive state funding?
3.	Should it be performed in the original language, with performers from around the world?	or	In English with English singers?
4.	Should each opera producing entity stand alone?	or	Work as part of a group?
5.	Should the institution be autonomous?	or	Have a 'National' identity?

Figure 6.1: Summary of the Five Dilemmas.

In a Prologue, I considered the opera season of 1924, when the Grand Opera Syndicate (GOS) staged its final season of opera. Its model was firmly intended only for the elite, as part of London's society season: as a result, the GOS had no interest to widen access to opera and only performed in London.[3] Funding was from a syndicate of wealthy individuals and performances were staged in the language of the original work: for the most part German and Italian opera, with the principal singers coming from those countries. The GOS also had no interest in aligning itself with other opera groups: it

[3] I am considering only the main part of the theatre: there remained a large number of cheaper seats available in the gallery and the amphitheatre, but they did not contribute significantly to the finances of the project.

considered itself the rightful national opera body, this presumption being borne out by royal patronage and its alternative title of 'Royal Opera'. This model had the fault of striving to be the national opera – but refusing to make changes in sympathy with other changes in society of the time, thus making opera available to a wider demographic. The anger and distrust directed at the model arose because the wider public could see that opera was very much still the plaything of the wealthy: for those who were outside of the ruling elite, it could not represent the nation. The information about the dilemmas is presented here visually so that an overall view can be taken.

Figure 6.2: Five Dilemmas, Grand Opera Syndicate (GOS).

The rival opera group in 1924 was the British National Opera Company (BNOC), a democratically formed group offering opera in English. As such it was very much a venture that aspired to provide opera for all, with tickets at low prices and opera tours around the country. Although the funding was from individuals, it took the form of small contributions from a very large number of subscribers. The BNOC was independent of other opera groups, not making any effort to share resources with the other English opera groups of the time. It also considered itself the rightful national opera body – in opposition to the GOS. It worked to establish an English opera school – something that the country lacked – but its singers were inexperienced. The fault in this model was that the BNOC could not achieve artistic excellence: its funding model, comprising subscriptions and cheap ticket prices, meant that productions were of poor quality. And this meant that it was not considered good enough to represent a nation with such high cultural aspirations.

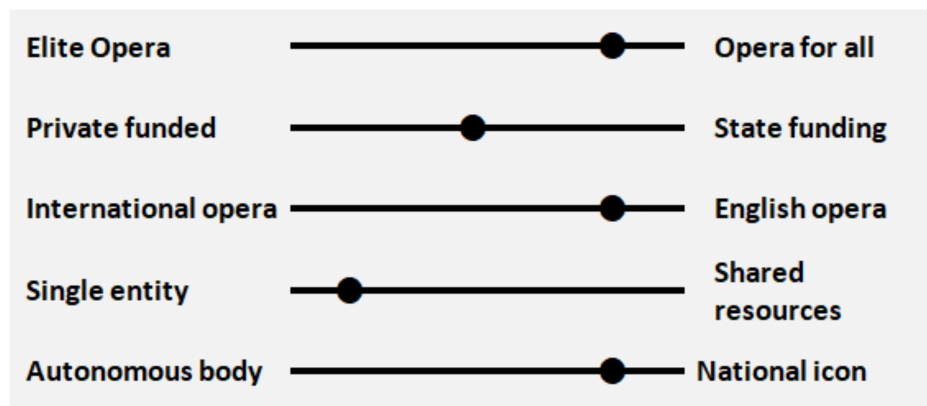

Figure 6.3: Five Dilemmas, British National Opera Company (BNOC).

As described in Chapter Two, when Elizabeth Courtauld took over opera at Covent Garden in 1925, she set about finding a new model for opera, striving to chart a new course that might open it up to a wider audience. While opera inevitably remained expensive, her long term goal was to find ways to welcome new audiences. She was not part of the aristocracy: her efforts at transparency of financial reporting are one indicator of her endeavour to break away from the secretive nature of the GOS and share her endeavours with a wider public. However, the press comments reporting the 'ingratitude' of the public demonstrate that many remained suspicious of her efforts. Perhaps this was because, unlike previous sponsors of opera, her funding was private, coming from her husband's company: in many ways this represented the first example of corporate funding of opera. Courtauld had no intention of promoting opera in English as she was determined that, under her instruction, the sole criterion was that it should be excellent in quality. More than this, she expected her opera to represent the nation – and was surprised that she was criticized in her efforts. Because she was cautious financially, she was not able to improve wider accessibility as quickly as she had hoped. This proved the fault in her model: she wanted to maintain international levels of excellence and offer opera for all – two aims that proved mutually exclusive.

Figure 6.4: Five Dilemmas, Courtauld Opera.

I discuss the evolution of the Imperial League of Opera (ILO) throughout this thesis: formed in 1927, ultimately it did not produce a single opera. But its constitution revealed a determination to offer opera for all. Its funding was democratic in that it comprised small subscriptions from a large number of (predominantly) middle-class subscribers, with ticket prices set so that opera was affordable for most. Like the BNOC, it intended to produce opera only in English, and saw no reason to align itself with other groups, considering itself the rightful national home of opera, but it failed because it only attracted a third of its target of subscribers. While the ILO was welcomed as an innovative model, my analysis reveals that, financially, it was a simple duplication of the BNOC model.

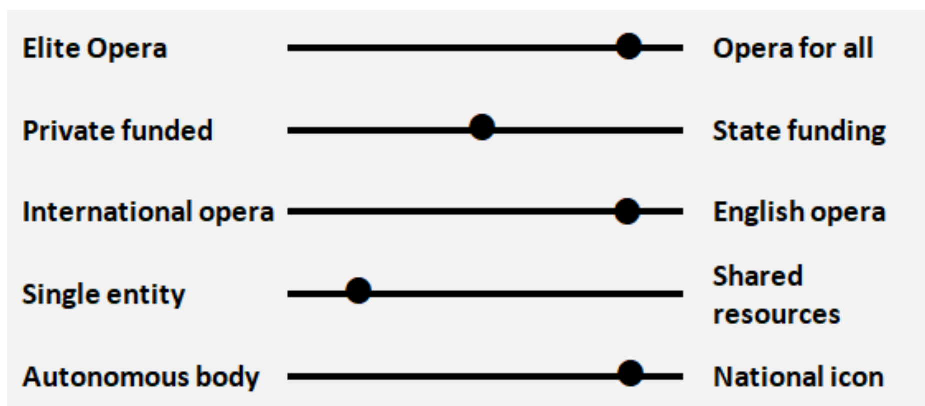

Figure 6.5: Five Dilemmas, Imperial League of Opera (ILO).

Under the government subsidy to opera envisaged by the eight individuals described in Chapter Three, the intention was to subsidize the combined efforts of the

Covent Garden Opera Syndicate (CGOS) and the ILO. The result would have been both opera for all and elite opera: at a variety of prices points with a mixture of private (subscriber) funding and state funding. This would have been a shared concern (although not one that incorporated all existing opera bodies) and perhaps one that could have represented the nation. The flaw at its centre, however, was in-fighting about government funding. Both groups felt that they were the rightful recipients of the funding and both were anxious to win that argument because the funding would authenticate the winner as truly representing the nation, not to mention, dominating the merged entity. Unable to agree, the merger did not proceed.

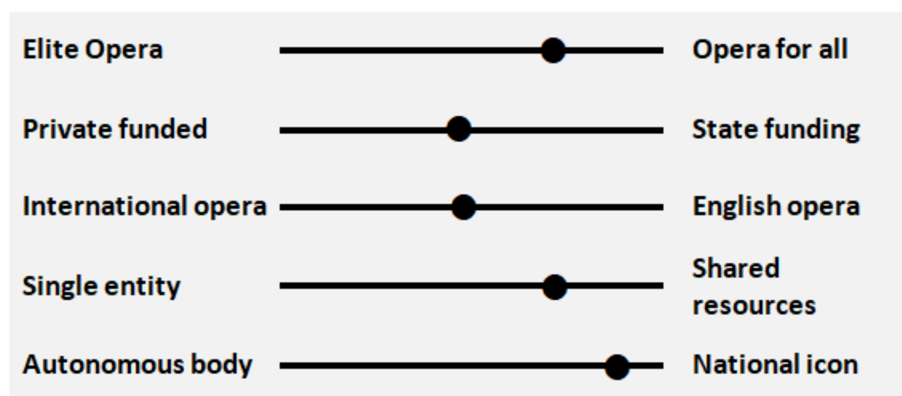

Figure 6.6: Five Dilemmas, Covent Garden Opera Syndicate (CGOS) and Imperial League of Opera (ILO) When Merged

As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, after the initial plan for the CGOS/ILO merger had failed, a group of promoters worked to create a larger organization of opera interests, meant to receive government funding via the BBC and to satisfy the democratic intentions of that funding, thus solving the problems previously highlighted. This umbrella group intended to offer a mixture of elite opera and opera for all, which in effect meant opera in English and international opera. The problem was that the state subsidy was expected, unrealistically, to stretch to cover all opera groups. Other events overtook the plans of this group, so much so that they never worked satisfactorily together.

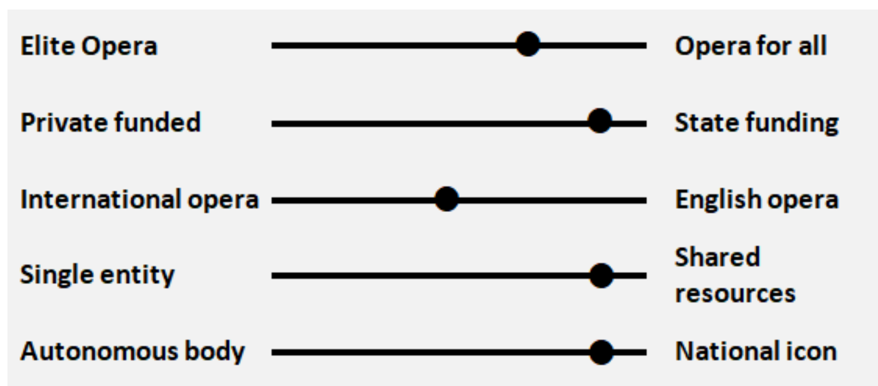

Figure 6.7: Five Dilemmas, National Opera Bodies Merged under BBC Subsidy Arrangements.

My final case study, that of John Christie at Glyndebourne, is considered in Chapter Five. The Glyndebourne model reveals a set of solutions to the opera dilemma that were, unlike all those that had preceded it, self-financing and stable. Christie's combination of elite international opera, privately funded, standing in isolation and not intended to represent the nation (except perhaps, by example) comprised a neat, well thought-out design. Indeed, from the table matrix of Christie's solutions, unlike all of the models that preceded his reveals a neat alignment.

Table 6.8: Five Dilemmas, Glyndebourne.

Christie's problem, though, was that his model was not scalable and therefore unable to become a true 'national treasure'. In this final chapter I also consider briefly the events leading to the foundation of the Arts Council in 1945/6. John Maynard Keynes's set of solutions, resulting in the creation of the Arts Council, were also in

impressive alignment, albeit diametrically opposite to that of the Christie model (see Table 6.9).[4] The Keynesian model, lauded as a wonderful solution to the country's cultural dilemma, paid little heed to the lessons of any of my other aspirants. He was perhaps guilty of letting his personal dislike of Christie cloud his judgement: Kenneth Clarke recollected that Keynes held a 'ancient implacable hatred for John Christie, which Christie returned with interest'.[5] Keynes certainly appeared to relish the fact that he, and not Christie, was successful in his endeavour.[6] Despite this neat alignment, his model was riddled was problems.

Figure 6.9: Five Dilemmas: John Maynard Keynes's Vision for the Arts Council.

Keynes's Arts Council

What happened to Keynes and the Arts Council is relevant to my thesis because it highlights the issues and problems surrounding the various funding models that preceded it. Keynes's vision of the Arts Council was much praised and used a model for many other national state endowment schemes.[7] Keynes was also a civil servant, a director of the Bank of England and a part of the Bloomsbury Group of intellectuals.

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[4] It is interesting to consider that if the English National Opera (ENO) model were put into this framework, the result would be identical – but experience has shown that the ENO financial model has acute problems.

[5] Frances Donaldson, *The Royal Opera House in the Twentieth Century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 46. See also Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Britain, 1937-46* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 286-99, esp. 297.

[6] 'What Christie Could Dream Keynes Could Achieve'; Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1995), 37, 45 and 59.

[7] Michael Straight, *Nancy Hanks: An Intimate Portrait: The Creation of a National Commitment to the Arts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988), 391.

When *Time* magazine included him among its 'Most Important People of the Century' in 1999, it suggested that 'his radical idea that governments should spend money they don't have may have saved capitalism'.[8] The *Economist* described Keynes as 'Britain's most famous 20th-century economist'.[9] He was, of course, central to the formation of the Arts Council after the war: he died before it was incorporated but during the four years of his involvement, he created what was to become the benchmark for state endowment of the arts (see Illustration 6.1).[10]

Central to my review of what happened next, and a critical step towards Keynes's Arts Council, was the creation in 1940 of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). CEMA was created during the war as a result of anxieties about the morale of the nation: it was initially funded by private donations from the Pilgrim Trust, funds that were immediately matched by the government.[11] CEMA's aims were to encourage amateur music making and active participation through arts education and also to widen the accessibility of music performed by professionals. These aims of wide regional availability were facilitated by the setting up of community artistic centres; inevitably, initial levels of funding for the regions were not maintained because Keynes prioritized his other central tenet, widening accessibility to concerts given by professionals.[12]

Keynes's vision for the Arts Council was developed over his time at CEMA: he was recruited to CEMA in 1942 by 'RAB' Butler (Elizabeth Courtauld's son-in-law), who was at that time president of the Board of Trade.[13] A letter to Butler from this time reveals some of Keynes's decision-making in relation to the dilemmas of state funding of the arts: whether the umbrella group should own and manage buildings or use facilities owned by others; whether they should be a grant distributing body or an operating body, with direct involvement in individual artistic endeavours; whether they should provide funds to loss-leading groups or restrict their activities to insuring

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[8] Robert Reich, 'The *Time* 100: John Maynard Keynes', *Time,* 29 March 1999.
[9] 'The IMF in Britain: Toothless Truth Tellers', *Economist,* 11 May 2013.
[10] Mary Glasgow, 'The Concept of the Arts Council', in *Essays on John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Milo Keynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 271.
[11] Richard Witts, *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council* (London: Little Brown, 1998), 55.
[12] Chris Bilton, 'Towards Cultural Democracy: Contradiction and Crisis in British and US Cultural Policy 1870-1990' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Warwick, 1998).
[13] Skidelsky, *Keynes: Fighting for Britain*, 286.

against losses of otherwise successful groups.[14] The fundamental elements of Keynes's vision for the Arts Council were not, however, entirely his own. As discussed in Chapter One, he had drawn heavily on the ideology of other members of the Bloomsbury group, especially those of Roger Fry, who advocated a limited but precise support for the arts from the state. Despite the general distrust of state intervention and bureaucracy displayed by members of the group, Fry wanted to find ways to reform public expenditure policy so that art could not be compromised by decisions made by those in charge.[15] And he certainly had knowledge of the efforts of those considered in this thesis, even though, at no point did he reference them.

The Arts Council was created on 12 June 1945: a press conference announcing its creation was given by Keynes and Sir John Anderson, then Chancellor of the Exchequer; 'The Arts Council, Its Policy and Hopes' was then broadcast on the BBC.[16] But despite critical acclaim, from the outset there were indications that not all was well. Keynes's words indicate his hesitance and caution about the endeavour:

> State patronage of the arts has crept in. It has happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way – half baked if you like. A semi-independent body is provided with modest funds to stimulate, comfort and support any societies or bodies brought together on a private or local initiative which are striving with serious purpose and a reasonable prospect of success to present for public enjoyment the arts of drama, music and painting.

The use of the terms 'half-baked', 'modest funds' and 'reasonable prospect' seem unduly pessimistic and somewhat out of line with subsequent assessments of the Arts

[14] Keynes, letter to R.A. Butler, Minister of Education, 2 March 1943, King's College, University of Cambridge, Unpublished Writings of John Maynard Keynes, copyright of the Provost and Scholars of King's College, Cambridge, 2003. See also Keynes, *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes Vol. 28*, ed. Donald Moggridge (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 368, and Anna Upchurch, 'John Maynard Keynes, the Bloomsbury Group and the Origins of the Arts Council Movement', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 10, 2 (2004), 203-17, esp. 213.

[15] Fry and the subject of 'pubic intellectuals' getting involved in the politics, production and consumption of art for a 'broad based elite' in society is covered more extensively in Crauford D.W. Goodwin, 'The Economics of Art through Art Critics Eyes', in *Economic Engagements with Art,* eds. Neil De Marchi and Craufurd D.W Goodwin (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 157-84. See also Roger Fry, 'Art and The State', *Nation*, 1924, reprinted in *Art and The Market: Roger Fry on Commerce in Art , Selected Writings*, ed. Craufurd D. Goodwin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 194-204.

[16] The transcript of the press conference was reprinted in the *Listener*, 12 July 1945; also in Appendix A to *The Arts Council of Great Britain: 1st Annual Report, 1945* available at https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20Arts%20Council%20of%20Great%20Britain%20-%201st%20Annual%20Report%201945_0.pdf.

Council. Despite his reservations, Keynes worked to set up a framework of subsidy located in the middle ground between state and marketplace: his principle of 'arm's length' investment meant that there was a buffer between the state and artists and thus (he hoped) that investment decisions would be taken without political bias. This guiding principle was different from that employed in mainland Europe, where there was no such shield. Keynes's plan was presented in his distinctive rhetoric and included several resonant couplets: 'raise and spread', 'excellence and access', 'best for the most' and 'decentralise and disperse'. These echo to a degree with my five dilemmas and demonstrate that he was fully aware of the issues. However, they also disguised the major contradictions in his hypothesis and the unrealistic ambition of his Arts Council.

Covent Garden was specifically mentioned in Keynes's manifesto: indeed, that theatre was immediately given special precedence. And there was a reason for this: part of Keynes's vision was that ballet should be accorded a national presence on a par with opera at Covent Garden. This was at least partially because Keynes had a special interest in ballet (he was married to a dancer). Indeed, the gala opening night at Covent Garden was a performance of ballet. The first Arts Council sponsored opera at Covent Garden was *Carmen*, which, in a dramatic alteration to tradition, was staged in English, another of the changes instigated by Keynes – and a decision that drew much criticism. Martin Cooper, writing in the *Spectator,* complained that the whole production was sad and that the residents of Seville were 'aggressively English'. He was outraged at the clumsy translation, particularly of the 'Habanera' ('Love resembles a wilful bird') and suggested that 'everyone [would] prefer perhaps unintelligible French to governess English'.[17] Contemporary commentators were also sceptical of Keynes's choice of an English *Carmen* – his decision raised the Arnoldian philistine hackles that there was some sort of conspiracy at play whereby politicians, aristocrats and the *haute bourgeoisie* were somehow directing the artistic values of the nation.[18] Almost immediately it was apparent that Keynes's decision to produce opera

[17] 'This British "Carmen" is All Wrong', *Evening News*, 15 January 1947; and Martin Cooper, *Spectator*, 17 January 1947, 76.
[18] Desmond Shawe-Taylor, 'The Opera Imbroglio', *New Statesman and Nation*, 31, 778 (19 January 1946), 44. The early Arts Council Annual reports chart the swift demise of English opera at Covent Garden.

exclusively in English was a mistake: the standard of translations was poor and the effect on performance unacceptably detrimental.[19] Even the high degree of nationalist fervour generated by the build-up to the 1951 Festival of Britain was not sufficient to change this perception; Keynes's policy of opera in English was short lived.[20]

Keynes's cultural policy was central to the orthodoxy of the welfare state. But the cautious introductory rhetoric in his broadcast and the poor reception of some of his central ideals were early indicators of problems that over time became more acute; other aspects of his initial vision proving unsustainable. He had intended to promote both regionality and excellence, art for all as well as artistic supremacy; but this proved impossible in the long run.[21] It was clear from the 1950/51 annual report, only five years after the initial broadcast, that his aspirations of decentralisation had failed. The motto 'few, but roses' triumphed over the previous, 'best for the most'; the regional offices were closed by 1956.

Twentieth-Century Cultural Economists

Keynes (see Illustration 6.1) died at Easter 1946, and left no record of his cultural ideology other than that discussed above. As a result, government sponsorship of the arts was left without documentary corroboration: although the Keynesian legacy of arts policy was highly valued, there was almost no documentary testament to his ideal.[22] This gap was, however, soon filled by other economists, if only because the subject of arts funding posed such a tantalizing conundrum – an economic problem that would not conform to economic theory. Even before the introduction of state subsidy, theatre was an economic oddity: it occupied its own 'politicized milieu' – so

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[19] The policy at Covent Garden from 1946 to 1958 was to 'maintain' a repertory of operas in English – but to present 'occasional' operas in the original language. This policy was criticized: see for example Isaiah Berlin, *Buildings: Letters 1960-1975* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2013), 210. Donaldson reflected that it was not only that the policy did not suit an international opera house, but it also put off the best singers, and resulted in bad occupancy figures': see Donaldson, *The Royal Opera House,* 109. See also Susan Howson, *Lionel Robbins (Historical Perceptions on Modern Economics)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 944.
[20] Nathaniel G. Lew, *Tonic to the Nation: Making English Music in the Festival of Britain* (London: Routledge, 2016). The Royal Opera House website refers to difficulties in finding good translations and that not all singers were prepared to learn their roles in English; see http://www.rohcollections.org.uk/ROHHistory.aspx.
[21] Robert Hutchison, *The Politics of the Arts Council* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1982) and Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics Since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995).
[22] Moggridge, 'Keynes, the Arts and the State', *History of Political Economy*, 37, 3 (2005), 535-55.

Illustration 6.1: Portrait of John Maynard Keynes by Roy de Maistre; <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/OA8.1969/>.

much so that it could not operate under normal commercial economies.[23] This sector of the economy has always therefore posed a challenge to commentators. Earlier philosophers such as Adam Smith and John Ruskin had engaged with the subject.[24] Certainly Smith's invisible hand is apparent in Keynes's insistence on the principle of arm's length. More recently some of the last century's most eminent economists have chosen to follow Keynes's example and occupy themselves with the subject; the list includes such as Kenneth Galbraith, Lionel Robbins, Alan Peacock and David Throsby.[25] Their work also serves as a commentary on how Keynesian cultural economics has been viewed since 1946. Opera also frequently forms an important part of the academic study of the economics of the arts. Early commentators (Robbins and Peacock) held positions within the arts community and were drawn to write about opera because it consumed such a large share of the Arts Council budget. Kate Guthrie has suggested they were also interested because: 'Covent Garden's position remains uncontested: seemingly the paradigm of elite culture, it offers an easy example at the far end of the spectrum.'[26]

Robbins's 'Art and the State' essay, written in 1963, is considered by many to be the earliest post-Keynsian review of state subsidy and encouragement of the arts in a liberal society; his essay deliberates whether such support is the best way to nurture excellence in culture. Robbins is considered to have laid the groundwork for the subsequent monograph by William Baumol and William Bowen, traditionally acknowledged as seminal to the discipline of 'cultural economics', a term that only came into use in the 1970s.[27] This book, written in 1966, posited the theory (known as

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[23] Tracy Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

[24] Written in 1776, Smith's treatise suggests that the 'exorbitant' rewards of opera singers were founded on two principles: 'the rarity and beauty of their talents, and the discredit of employing them in this manner…. There are some very agreeable and beautiful talents of which the possession commands a certain sort of admiration; but of which the exercise for the sake of gain is considered, whether from reason or prejudice, as a sort of public prostitution'; quoted in John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 115.

[25] David Throsby, 'The Production and Consumption of the Arts: A View of Cultural Economics', *Journal of Economic Literature,* 32 (March 1994), 1–29; Ruth Towse, 'In Memoriam: Alan Peacock: A Pioneer in Cultural Economics', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 39 (2005), 225-38; and Towse 'Alan Peacock and Cultural Economics', *The Economic Journal*, 155, 504, (June 2005), 262-76.

[26] Kate Guthrie, 'Music and Cultural Values in 1940's Britain (Ph.D. Thesis, King's College London, 2014), 125.

[27] Susan Howson, 'Lionel Robbins' "Art and the State"', *History of Political Economy*, 37, 3 (2005), 617-46, and Lionel Robbins, 'Art and the State', in Lionel Robbins, *Politics and Economics: Papers in Political*

the Law of Baumol or Baumol's Cost Disease) that the cost of art (for example, in music the performance of an opera or a string quartet) remained the same over time while the costs of other commodities would fall. Productivity growth was inevitable in all other areas except the arts – so production costs of everything except the arts would fall. As a result, the relative cost of culture would increase over time, thus eventually rendering it prohibitively expensive. Baumol and Bowen conclude that government grants were thus inevitable: their conclusion gives credence to the Keynsian vision of state funding.[28]

Peacock's pioneering critiques of cultural heritage policy found fault both with Robbins and Baumol and with Bowen: he decried the situation whereby more than half of Arts Council money went to music, and of the total music grant of £5.75m, £1.3m went to Covent Garden (at the time of his evaluation, more than 80% of the music budget went to London and was used as a means of lowering ticket prices, something he disapproved of).[29] Peacock suggested that the UK should consider emulating the American model; in the US tax regime private philanthropy of the arts is encouraged through tax breaks.[30] More recently, Ruth Towse has become the authoritative voice on the subject of arts funding; writing in 2003, Towse noted that the subsidy to opera was five times more than the amount of subsidy per attendance for other arts council supported ventures, while it was only attended by 7% of the population.[31] But a review of the more recent articles in the *Journal of Cultural Economics* would suggest that

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Economy (London: Macmillan, 1963), 53-72. William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966). The *Journal of Cultural Economics* was first published in 1977.

[28] *Baumol's Cost Disease: The Arts and Other Victims*, ed. Ruth Towse (Aldershot, NH: Edward Elgar, 1997).

[29] 'The benefits will accrue, via subsidized prices, largely to the upper income groups in the area with the highest per capita regional income'; Alan Peacock, 'Welfare Economics and Public Subsidies to the Arts', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 18, (1994) 151-61, esp. 158.

[30] Details of the US tax concessions, commonly known as '501 (c) (3)', are given in *Making The Non-Profit Sector in the United States,* ed. David C. Hammack (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 440-53. Hammack also includes a copy of the 1974 Filer report, which was the document that introduced the concession, 'The Filer Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs'.

[31] Ruth Towse, *A Handbook of Cultural Economics* (Aldershot, NH: Edward Elgar, 2003), 342. See also Towse, *Singers in the Marketplace* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); *Cultural Economics: the Arts, the Heritage and the Media Industries* (Aldershot, NH: Edward Elgar, 1997); *Creativity, Incentive, and Reward: An Economic Analysis of Copyright and Culture in the Information Age* (Aldershot, NH: Edward Elgar, 2001); and 'Quis Custodiet? or Managing the Management: the Case of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden', *International Journal of Arts Management*, 3, 3 (2001), 38–50.

most contemporary authors are wary of the subject of opera, instead focussing on the economics of film/cinema or popular music. Perhaps this is because opera has elusively refused to conform to formulaic approaches or perhaps it is because of opera's stubborn links to elitism.

Conclusion

My case studies significantly add to the knowledge base of opera funding: an area of arts funding previously neglected, as were the efforts of those individuals who form the basis of this thesis.[32] It is not customary to criticize someone like Keynes, whose contribution to the economic legacy of the UK is part of the national orthodoxy; but it is nevertheless the case that the Arts Council and its opera funding model had its foundations, sometimes not to its betterment, in the opera models of the preceding years. While my case studies have illustrated the relative benefits of state vs private funding, they need to be considered in a wider context: social reforms in the first half of the twentieth century in the field of welfare economics transformed the state into the economic agent responsible for the macroeconomic redistribution of wealth. Central to the creation of the welfare state in the UK were the nation's requirements for health, education, housing and unemployment needs. This post-war expansion of social security, in its widest sense, was fuelled by ambitions for national reconstruction that were set out in the 1942 publication of *The Beveridge Report*: William Beveridge had plans for the eradication of poverty through an integrated system of state support, health and education. Keynes was very much part of these developments, instrumental as economic advisor in the redirection of the welfare state in general. But, given that the fundamental aims of the welfare state were to provide for the

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[32] Janet Minihan, for example, finds no place for the efforts of Christie or of the various initiatives at Covent Garden described in my earlier chapters; she belittles their efforts to produce fine quality opera because they relied on foreign stars: 'the drawing power of foreign companies mattered far more to businessmen than any responsibilities to national culture'. Minihan also claims that the Covent Garden management offered little help to English opera, choosing as she does to ignore the fact that Blois took on the employees of the BNOC and funded regional tours in tandem with the International Seasons at Covent Garden. Minihan's description of post war opera at Covent Garden also perpetuates this somewhat myopic view: 'while foreign companies and artists were still invited to perform at Covent Garden, the British companies provided the backbone of the season's entertainment. The old system, under which the opera house served to accommodate brief visits by prestigious foreign companies, to the near total neglect of native talent, was at last thrown over': Janet Minihan, *The Nationalization of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 193 and 254.

urgent needs of the poor, the political rationale behind the inclusion of the state subsidy of the arts within it seemed inconsistent. Indeed, in the context of the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the decision appears even more contradictory. However, it was this very inclusion of a government arts policy within the welfare state that gave Keynes's vision the level of sophistication that made it something that other countries wanted to emulate. Further, seen in the context of other mainland European countries, where state funding of the arts had been considered essential for some time, it was a logical progression.

Keynes's insistence on the inclusion of a state subsidy for opera in the welfare state system had another effect: state funding served to propel opera into the public sphere and made it truly 'national' in a way that had eluded previous attempts. This was a welcome outcome but there was a detrimental effect as well. State funding created a sense of anxiety: that being under the supreme power of the state made it subject to more than just than market forces.[33] As a result, art was not considered entirely free from government intervention: Smith's invisible hand had become tainted by bureaucracy and politics. Keynes's arm's length policy then offered the prospect of political neutrality – but state subsidy itself served to cloud the impartiality of Arts Council. The history of this organisation is dogged by a succession of contradictions and unresolved struggles over the meaning of culture and aesthetic choices. A conclusion could be drawn that Keynes's vision was therefore flawed; indeed, the flaws were perhaps obvious from the outset because Keynes did not find satisfactory answers to my five critical questions raised above – he used two opposing cultural traditions, the Socialist view of culture that encouraged participation by all and the idealist view that high art should transcend all other for the common good. It could even be said that this contradiction has plagued arts funding ever since. Keynes failed to put opera on a firm footing largely because the lessons of those who had been running opera up until that point were ignored. His policy began with a compromise with the establishment and quickly became increasingly bureaucratic, focusing more on institutions than on artists, with policy decided by reference to government priorities. In many ways, the story illustrates the national dilemma of the UK – do we

[33] Paul Kildea, 'The Arts Council's Pursuit of "Grand Opera"', *Selling Britten: Music and the Market Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 117-47.

fit more comfortably with the USA, where tax breaks encourage private philanthropists to fund opera, or with Europeans, where a model of state funding predominates?[34]

A contemporary review of modern arts funding in the UK would suggest that the contradictions at the heart of the Keynsian model remain: certainly the irreconcilability of opera-for-all and opera produced at the highest of world standards plagued the models used in my case studies and still cause problems today. Many things have improved: over the last fifty years, funding of opera in London has changed; private and corporate funding have increased; more recently, lottery funding has significantly added to the amount that Arts Council England (ACE) can distribute to opera.[35] The latter is perceived as a less public source of funds and has been successfully used for less popular causes. But recent efforts by the Arts Council to address the fundamental Keynsian conflicts have had mixed success: the current ten-year goals try to span the problem of offering art for all at an excellent standard, those seemingly irreconcilable elements of any state funding.[36] In 2013, Peter Bazalgette, the Chairman of ACE until 2016, spelt out his ten-year vision in terms of five objectives: excellence is thriving and celebrated in the arts, museums and libraries; everyone has the opportunity to experience and to be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries; the arts, museums and libraries are resilient and environmentally sustainable; the leadership and workforce in the arts, museums and libraries are diverse and appropriately skilled; every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries. But Bazalgette was clear that the most fundamental of these were the joint goals of excellence and wide participation, the very same issues facing opera between the wars. Similarly, at Covent Garden, the mission statement has seven strategic priorities: repertory, programmes, relationships, involvement, culture, people and legacy. These too are edited down to a simpler set of three objects: excellence, theatricality and curiosity. Both examples demonstrate the conflict at the heart of the mission.

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[34] Oliver Bennett, 'Cultural Policy in the United Kingdom: Collapsing Rationales and the End of a Tradition', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 1, 2 (1995), 199-216.

[35] 31% box office, 18% ACE, plus 1% capital, 29% fundraising and 20% commercial and other income.

[36] Peter Bazalgette, 'Arts Council: Great Art and Culture for Everyone 2013: Ten Year Prospectus'. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download file/Great%20art%20and%20culture%20for%20everyone.pdf

My thesis also serves to tell a tale of female empowerment through philanthropy: Elizabeth Courtauld, Ethel Snowden and Emerald Cunard were all motivated to support opera, and each generated novel approaches. Courtauld's philanthropy was pioneering in that she created a new space in society, establishing her own identity as a contributor to civil society while also redefining the scope of female involvement. Her contribution was, of course, an early example of the commercial sponsorship of opera, something only considered appropriate much later in the century.[37] The fact that Courtauld published her comments in *Vogue* is indicative of the audience she was addressing: female and upper middle class.[38] Snowden also forged her own route towards support for opera, one based on her socialist idealism: her roles at CGOS and the BBC, and her series of talks accompanying opera tours, define her as significant in the development of government policy on arts funding. Cunard's efforts were less pioneering: she employed an old-school 'salon style' to lobby for support from the cultural elite; but her efforts were worthy and she found funding for all of Beecham's interwar opera ventures.

Since the formation of the Arts Council, subsidies to the arts have remained problematic, particularly subsidies to opera, which historically have consumed the largest portion of the Arts Council's funds. State funding of opera in the UK is well established but remains controversial: it comes under frequent scrutiny because opera is often not considered relevant to modern cultural democracy. The analysis of my five central dilemmas could be reduced into a much simpler set of questions: is it necessary for opera to represent the nation culturally? If the answer to this question is in the affirmative, then the corollary is that national opera has to be of the finest standard. And herein lies the irreconcilable problem: how can world class opera be made available to all within the limitations of state funding? My thesis, focussing as it does on how opera represented the nation in terms of cultural pride, has proved that, at least during the period under review, the level of demand for opera at the highest levels of artistic excellence remained strong. Despite its archaic roots and apparent

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[37] Kathleen D. McCarthy, 'Women and Political Culture', in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History,* ed. Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 179-98.

[38] Rachel Mensch, *Having it all in the Belle Epoque: How French Women's Magazines Invented the Modern Woman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 4 and 200.

lack of relevance to modern life, it continued to be capable of boosting national confidence.[39] The problem, then as now, was that the strength of that demand remained unstable. Perhaps this is simply because, in the UK, English operas are not as central to our heritage as in national opera in many other European countries. Without similar widely held views and acceptance of opera as significant in national cultural representation, state funding will always be controversial and a matter of continued debate.

[39] Robert T. Schatz and Howard Lavine, 'Waving the Flag: National Symbolism, Social Identity, and Political Engagement', *Political Psychology,* 28, 3 (June 2007), 329-55, esp. 352.

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