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Lying Down or Standing Up for Music: Hearing and Listening in Vernon Lee's *Music and its Lovers*

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My childhood experience of learning musical instruments was characterized by severity. Formal, impersonal teachers and a limited repertoire were the norm in 1970s and '80s music teaching, based, as it was, on passing the Associated Board exams. Frivolity was not encouraged, for I was meant to be producing what was then (and is now, to an extent) called 'serious' music.

'Seriousness' began with the body. When playing the piano one was told to sit upright, to be attentive to the music and to hold oneself throughout a performance with a posture that paid a certain *homage*. The standard manuals for learning the piano in those days, Dame Fanny Waterman and Marian Harewood's three-volume series *Piano Lessons*, gave posture a moral imperative. An illustration at the beginning of the first book showed three different pianists. The first was hunched and looking at his fingers on the keyboard. 'This is a bad pupil', said a caption. The second sat erect. 'This is a good pupil', said another. The third, however, was said to be a 'great pianist'. With an outwardly curved back and dramatically-held fingers as if submitting to but also commanding the music like a magician, this pianist was at one with his art.[1] This practical but moral necessity was also applied to my other instruments, including the violin and the bassoon. Granted it is hard to hunch with the latter, but the bassoon's almost comically prodigious appearance, which suggests far more than it ever seems to give, always had to be transcended through the seriousness with which one related to and clutched the instrument.[2]

These rules were not only for performers but also for listeners or the 'audience' – the etymology of which includes the idea of 'formal hearing' and 'attention'.[3] As a member of a concert hall audience, one is still bound (perhaps coercively) to rituals about the entrances of conductors, first violinists, and soloists, but also to ideas about clapping (essentially, when to show regimented emotion or not), as well as how to appear musically attentive. These ritualistic physical demands

on the audience create a structure for the performance. In a concert hall there is often a sense of delicacy surrounding music, or possibly in the music itself, which a misplaced cough might crack.

These postures and actions, which imply a policing of the body, have their origins in the nineteenth-century reception of music. They are the physical manifestation (perhaps a ghostly schematic) of a central debate in musical aesthetics of that era about the role of emotion and its release or control in music; the debate, in modified form, still goes on today. Vernon Lee's final book, *Music and its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotional and Imaginative Responses to Music* (1932), was her own exhaustive and exhausting contribution to this argument and is framed by a proposition that differentiates the actions of listening and hearing. The former she characterizes as a state of attention and bodily control, demanding a responsive posture. The latter, however, is a passive state of 'lounging' or 'not sitting up to music', to reference one of Lee's correspondents (whom she quotes approvingly), which evokes louche images of the decadent *salon*.[4] Lee regards the lounging state of hearing as a bad aesthetic posture, one that invites the self to take over and swamp the objective patterns of music. It causes less reception, not more, for it takes the hearer away from the appreciation of form.

Music and its Lovers matches the elusiveness of its subject matter. Written over twenty years, it was based on responses to questionnaires sent out in 1905, but the work initially floundered until what was to become its first chapter appeared as an article in the *North American Review* in 1917. Lee returned to the work after 1918, keen to publish the research as a whole, but she then found herself 'lost […] literally and materially, among these multifarious documents of all shapes and sizes […] in three languages (with the occasional Italian addition)'.[5] The book retains – happily I think – the scars of that process. Some sections are roughly cut, others fluid and composed, while responses to psychologists and digressions, postscripts, repetitions, and expansions of earlier passages are littered throughout. It also lacks a consistent, unifying voice and could be criticized for being a vocal blend or choir, although 'blend' is perhaps too mild a word. This is undoubtedly a result of the way the text was edited together from twenty years' worth of Lee's notes, but it is

also because of how she arranges the replies to her initial questionnaire.[6] Her correspondents are often denoted by first names, such as 'Bettina', 'Marcel', or 'Colonel Dick', who sound like characters in a melodrama. Sometimes, they are identified formally, such as M. Ernest ('amateur psychologist') or anonymously as 'American Musician', or purely by initials, such as 'C. A. T.', whom I take to be Clementina 'Kit' Anstruther-Thomson, Lee's sometime lover and collaborator. The replies are often wildly different, frequently forthright, dismissive, and even inadvertently funny. Many are given verbatim and at length, while others are reported or strung together in long, fragmented chains of quotation that obscure Lee's reactions. There are also chunks of quotation in untranslated languages, usually French, some with a sprinkling of German, while many responses are listed under headings such as 'Beethoven', 'Wagner', and 'Mozart', which are useful for gauging the interests and prejudices of the age towards musical performance.

Music and its Lovers is ultimately not fully formed. Its chapters and parts seem uncomfortable with each other, not quite content to be sharing the same cover. Its readers might also be forgiven for thinking themselves more like an audience, observant of the need 'to sit up' to Lee's argument and not quite able to take part in her performance, the result of which has clearly been decided well in advance, despite the wealth of evidence Lee claims she will sift through.[7] As such, the book forces the reader to play out the processes of listening and hearing that Lee investigates. Occasionally, having read yet another of Lee's digressions but then been jolted to attention by one of her frequently wry comments, you realize that you have only *heard* the words, not *listened* to them.

The lack of coherence in *Music and its Lovers* and the uncomfortable play between listening and hearing are linked. The disjointed text might be taken as a correlative of Lee's concerns about the body's role in musical production and aesthetics. Naturally, Lee centralizes the body in her discussions about what music does to audiences, for music effectively materializes itself in the bodies of its listeners. But in an argument reminiscent of Plato's concerns in *Laws* about the potentially corrupting nature of new music, Lee is anxious about the desires that music might

unleash, threatening to override and negate the intellect. While all music has this potential, especially for the bodies of the "'musically uneducated'", whose minds are apt to wander from the perfection of form, Lee suggests that certain kinds of music are more dangerous than others.[8] In this regard, Lee's chief villain is Richard Wagner.

Wagner as Orgasm: The Context of *Music and its Lovers*

> Wagner adds to his sound arrangements [which are] suggestive of the languors and orgasms within the human being, all the sound arrangements which can possibly suggest elemental storms and floods, sunlight irradiations, and also such dead calms as that in which the Ancient Mariner *saw the sea rot*.[9]

Lee was formidably well-read in musical aesthetics and she published numerous reviews and articles about music. But given its publication date near the end of her life, *Music and its Lovers* curates her opinions, but also those of her peers, as well as summarizing the state of early twentieth-century musical aesthetics.

Music and its Lovers is organized around the work of two musical personalities, theorist Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904) and the composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883). While it references Wagner continually and often disparagingly, Hanslick goes unmentioned, though, as I will show, Lee was deeply influenced by his work. Any discussion of *Music and its Lovers* needs to include awareness of this context, and so by way of my own digression, the history of nineteenth-century music is characterized by a battle between different opinions on how to capture the meaning, value, and purpose of music itself. The conflict was polarized around the terms 'programme music', advocated by Wagner and Franz Liszt (the term was Liszt's) and instrumental 'absolute music', advanced by Hanslick (the term 'absolute' was Wagner's originally, which he used pejoratively, with implications of aristocratic superiority).[10]

'Programme music' suggests a purpose other than music itself, and Wagner's purpose was revolutionary. Following the failure of the Dresden Uprising of May 1849, in which he was implicated, and having suffered rejection and ridicule for his political and musical ideas thereafter,

Wagner's ultimate goal was to create a national, continental music free from the constraints and observances of the concert halls which were then centred on an aristocratic elite. He believed that music should give voice to the common *volk* or 'folk', which necessitated a new form of opera or musical drama forged from a union of music with language, or more properly poetry, a process he saw as being analogous to political unification. The poetry of German Romantics such as Goethe and Schiller, had, Wagner thought, already captured a national, even European identity. According to this new Romantic language, music could now be *about* something, and this was to be the collective desires and demands of the common man.

The purpose of music was, according to Wagner, to evoke human emotions, and in his own work attention naturally fell to activating the bodies of his audiences. As he states in *Zukunftsmusik* [*The Music of the Future*] (1860) – a primer written in preparation for what became the disastrous 1861 Paris production of *Tannhäuser* (1845) – his own music speaks 'most clearly to the emotions' with the orchestra working with 'maximum effect on the audience's feelings' and their bodies.[11] In its expressiveness, Wagner's music was one of flesh and blood. Although hard to believe now, given that his operas are regarded by many as the peak of aesthetic elitism, by bringing music *down* to the level of the common human body, Wagner's objective was essentially populist. He was, in a sense, advocating an equality of the bodily senses or what Linda Dowling has called an 'aesthetic democracy'.[12]

Hanslick's plea for 'absolute music', on the other hand, articulated in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, or *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854), partly springs from concerns about this Wagnerian populism.[13] Hanslick states that music should not be made to speak or give voice to anyone (he forgets, perhaps, about those who commission and finance musical works). Neither should it generate emotions or describe them, for the goal of music and composers is not human representation, he claims, but the creation of an exclusive, conceptualized beauty. As music is contentless, unlike all other artforms, which are mimetic, this beauty is pure, unsullied by the human, and its audience (to whom it is indifferent) should aim to divest itself of any extraneous

thoughts or feelings in order to truly appreciate it, for musical beauty is 'independent and not in need of an external content' as it 'resides solely in the tones and their artistic connection'.[14] Hanslick admits this divesture is difficult, as anyone who has found themselves with a wandering mind in a concert hall can attest to, for it requires an intellectual 'listening', which means following and understanding the music's *rapports* (to borrow a word from Lee).[15] In this realm, an audience can perceive music's 'rightful sovereignty of beauty' (suggesting hierarchy, monarchy) and its transcendence to 'the absolute idea', for music 'has no model in nature'; it 'is truly "not of this world"'.[16] Absolute music, therefore, is a condition of taste, education, and class quality; it has nothing to do with the voice of a common *volk*. Not content with privileging music's intellectualism, Hanslick also ferociously attacks emotionally-laden music. Thinking of Wagner, he insists that it is pathological, hysterical, diseased. It annihilates objectivity by demanding a return to the self, and, indeed, such music is 'not really music at all'.[17]

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and well beyond it, Wagner was continually accused of degeneration, anti-intellectualism, of seeking to return humanity to a primordial darkness, as if he were a musical version of Darwin. His call for human kinship in music reached down to basic human concerns. The commonality of man, as he saw it, was found in love, and in concert with his opera's subject matter – which tended to be erotic love, such as in *Tannhäuser* or *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) – his music appeared to long for the emancipation of potentially forbidden desires.[18]

This accusation was correct. The intention of Wagner's music is indisputably erotic as his prose writings clarify. For example, in his 1852 polemic, *Oper und Drama* [*Opera and Drama*] (written during his political exile, just after his flight from Dresden), he presents the operatic union of music and poetry as sexual intercourse:

> *Music is a woman.*
>
> The nature of Woman *is love:* but this love is a *receiving* (empfangende), and in receival (*Empfängniss*) an unreservedly *surrendering*, love.

> Woman first gains her full individuality in the moment of surrender. She is the Undine who glides soulless through the waves of her native element, till she receives her soul through the love of a man.[19]

One might interpret these words as metaphorical, but Wagner's prose writings are often endowed with a visceral autoeroticism, which occasionally turns self-destructive, even Sapphic.[20] Take, for example, Wagner's description of the conception of *Tannhäuser*. While working out its music, he was thrown into a

> state of burning exaltation […] that held my blood and every nerve in fevered throbbing. My true nature […] had quite returned to me – now seized, as in a passionate embrace, the opposing channels of my being and disembouched them both into *one* stream: a longing for the highest form of Love. – With this work I penned my death-warrant […] I now could hope no more for life.[21]

In *Opera and Drama*, Wagner moves from music as woman to feminizing parts of the human body, with hearing fetishized as sexual penetration. 'The ear is no child', he states, but 'a staunch and loving woman, who in her love will make that man the blessedest who brings *in himself* the fullest matter for her bliss'.[22]

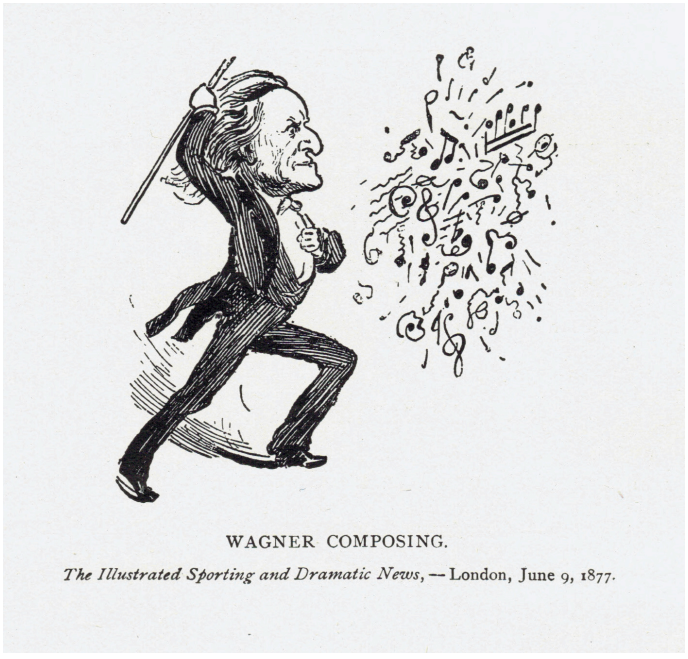


Fig. 1: 'Wagner Composing', from the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 9 June 1877, reprinted in Adolphe Jullien, *Richard Wagner: His Life and Works*, trans. by Florence Percival Hall, 2 vols (Boston: Knight & Millet, 1900), I, xx.

As Jean-Jacques Nattiez has discussed, Wagner's music is a feminizing process for male listeners and aspires to androgyny, which Wagner believed to be the future state of mankind.[23] Yet, despite this gender transgression or musical 'queerification', Wagner says nothing about a woman's reception of music or the possibility of female composers. One is left wondering if he views romantic music as possibly endangering women by an excess of feeling.[24]

Music is now embodied as a sexual ear and, in turn, the ear becomes a metonym for the passive action of hearing (see fig. 2). The ear receives the seminal words of language without resistance, an image recalling Suzanne G. Cusick's frank exploration of music's autoerotism and posture in her essay 'On a Lesbian Relationship with Music', where she wonders 'What if ears are sex organs? […] If music IS sex, what on earth is going on in a concert hall during, say, a piano recital? […] Are we observers of a sexual act? Are we its object? Why, exactly, are we in the dark?'[25]

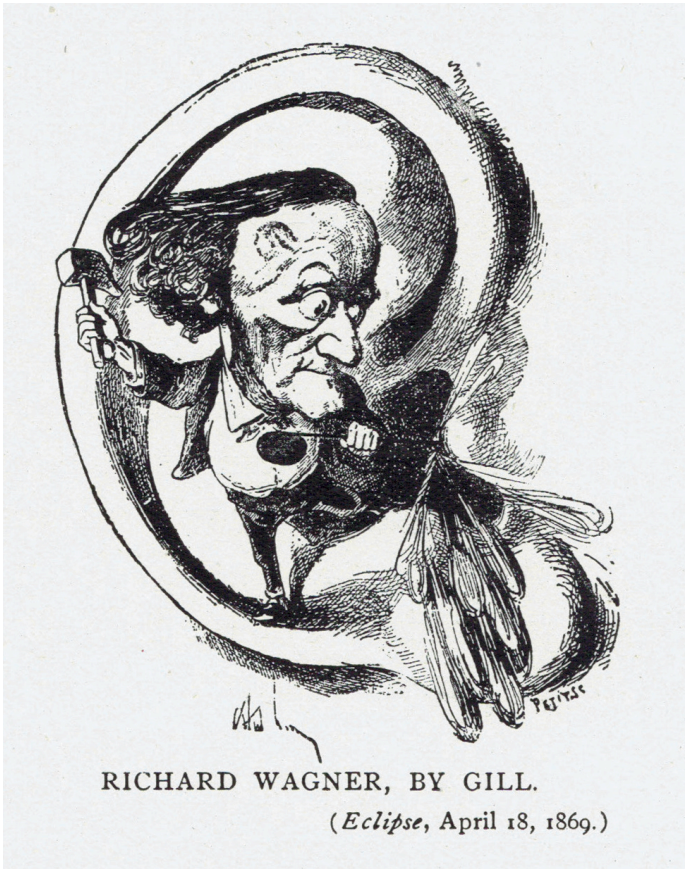


Fig. 2: André Gill, 'Richard Wagner', *L'Éclipse*, 18 April 1869, p. 1, reprinted in Jullien, *Richard Wagner: His Life and Works*, II, 235.

Wagner was one of the first composers to insist on the lights being turned off in opera auditoriums and several of Lee's respondents in *Music and its Lovers* were certainly aware of what he might have been up to in the dark.[26] 'Violet H.' (presumably Violet Hunt), for example, complains that 'Wagner is so physical that it's scarcely decent to talk about'. Another contributor, identified only as a 'Doctor of Philosophy of many universities', manages to suggest the composer's post-coital benefits, for his music '*arouses my emotions intensely*', she is 'intimately stirred', but 'she comes from hearing it not only optimistic but clear-headed and "ready for work"'. A puritan *coup de grâce* is provided by another 'anonymous', who declares 'Wagner has utterly debased music by his […] *Program Musik*' for 'in Wagner we have the first traces of pornographic art. The greatest art cannot and does not touch sexuality'.[27]

Wagner as abortion

As its title suggests, *Music and its Lovers* maintains a strong, even suggestive, relationship with the Wagnerian erotic. *Lovers* indicates promiscuity. The book might be accused of indulging this passion, given its multiple voices and in the way Lee's initial questionnaire invited its respondents to talk about how music affected their own bodies. However, Lee's use of the pronoun 'its' might also be a point of difference to the Wagnerian identification of music as feminine, suggesting a neutered form, for despite the implication of her title, Lee's aim is to resist music's erotic charms. The action of *Music and its Lovers* is one of intellectualization, of cleansing it of base promiscuity. Its intention is to demonstrate that music exists on an 'alleged "higher plane"' and its 'purification of human feelings are genuine and intelligible psychological facts, and indeed among the most important ones of all aesthetics'.[28]

Lee's starting point is the ear, which she calls that 'complex and mysterious faculty'.[29] Like Wagner, her argument is gendered, though its gendering is not dogmatic in its application, but transgressive. It shifts the contentious programme/absolute music argument by refusing to accept polarization, fusing the contrary positions of Hanslick and Wagner. The synthesis of *Music and its*

Lovers works by positioning Wagnerian emotionalism as a state we all find ourselves in but must reject before we can understand music on its own terms.

The general problem of sound is that it threatens to swamp or dissolve us. Unlike sight, which can be instantly blocked by the eyelid, sound is constant. It immerses us in a homogenous ambience which tends to activate general emotions. Lee gives an example from her own diary of walking into Westminster Abbey and being overwhelmed by impressions of size, enclosure, and the sound of the organ, and interestingly likens it to being plunged into a bath. She concedes the Abbey's ambience may well be positive, but this positivity wears off after '*a few minutes (or seconds?)* [as] *one begins to "look" and to "listen", and the state is broken, the charm gone*'.[30] However, habitual 'hearers' of music refuse to give up this initial stage, she claims. They indulge and embrace ambience as it changes in time. They lounge in it, letting their mind wander inwards to explore the effect on their bodies. The hearer does not

> want to listen or have anything to listen to. He does not grow impatient of passiveness because he is by nature musically passive and likes being 'played upon'. […] Mere hearers will sit happily through hours of concerts. […] He will continue immersed in that passive enjoyment which may perhaps be the greatest, indeed almost the only great enjoyment he ever receives directly from music. […] Buoying him up, stimulating and soothing; moreover shutting himself off from the ceaseless pursuing and being pursued of real life, music enables him to witness, nay enact, imaginary dreams, to re-live the past, foretaste the future; see visions, roam in day-dreams; moreover, music may sting and lash his perchance dulled sensibilities, intoxicate him in 'Dionysiac' pleasures, spiced, as Nietzsche says ('*Stachel der Unlust*') or drugged, with pain.[31]

The reference to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* [*The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*] (1872) is instructive. The philosopher wrote his work almost as a primer to the music of Wagner, a man he adored, possibly to the point of erotic obsession. In simple terms, Nietzsche's Dionysiac art refers to an undifferentiated, orgiastic music which overrides barriers, bringing hearers into communion with the force of a primitive rite. In contemporary musical terms, one might think (snobbishly even) of a rock concert, but Nietzsche was thinking of Wagner, placing the orgiastic melodies and harmonies of his opera *Tannhäuser*, for example, in contrast to an Apollonian art, which leads listeners in the opposite direction to an

appreciation of the '*bright god of intellectual beauty*', to quote one of Lee's respondents.[32] By invoking Nietzsche in her hedonistic description of musical hearing – which collapses pleasure and pain – Lee, too, is summoning Wagner, for she employs and develops the composer's metaphor of music as a sexual act. Indeed, her points about the musical listener (described as 'he' throughout the above quotation) are highly evocative of the feminized Wagner, 'longing for the highest form of Love' (see note 21) who enjoys being 'played upon'. But in a riposte to Wagner's aesthetics, Lee portrays this primordial sexual intercourse as sterile. The 'chaos' engendered by the indulgence of hearing bears what Lee shockingly calls a 'distressful abortion'.[33] Hearing causes music to remain as an unformed child, an embryo that cannot aspire to completed form and, thus, claim a life of its own.[34]

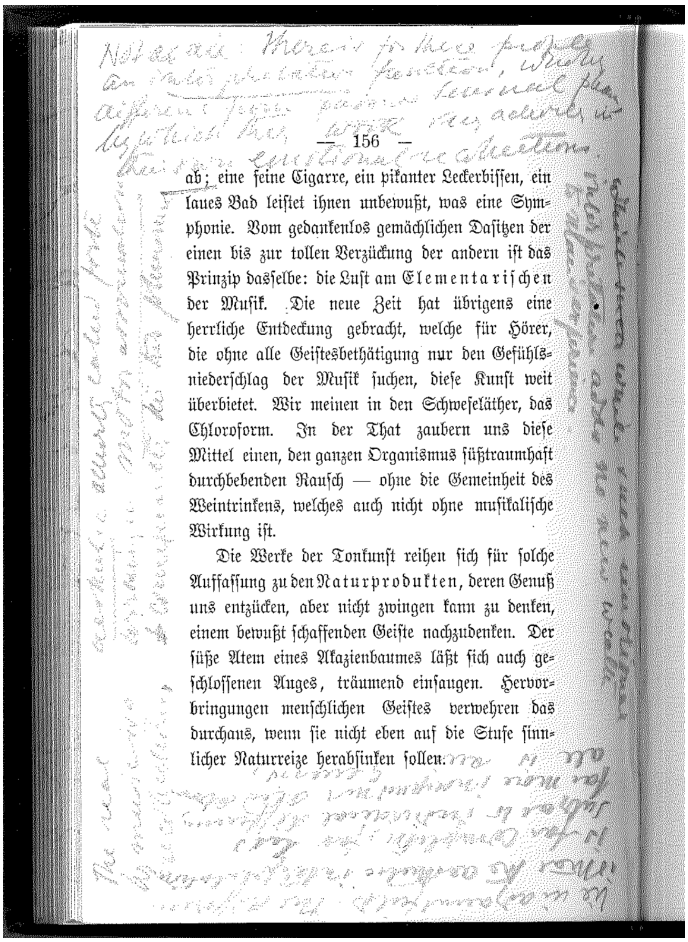
For Lee, Wagner's music is hearing music *par excellence*. It asks for nothing but hearing, for its audiences remain floating in its interminable sound patterns. What progress there is in this music, she claims, is only a means of enlarging this aural experience towards an ambient totalization that resists clarity in favour of a 'confused flux'. This 'imprisons the semi-musical', for 'half-attentive' hearers fall into 'lassitude' and are open to 'hypnotic susceptibility'.[35] Ultimately, Wagner is a Narcissus, leading his audiences through infantile confusion to a self-regarding titillation at the water's edge. His music disavows any possibility of new forms or identities, leaving its hearers immured in a relationship with themselves.[36]

Music as queer purgation

> […] there is that queer 'Dionysiac' possibility, the fact that some music can overwhelm some 'Hearers'; and what is more, stir, churn up, the inner seas of their being, open the invisible flood-gates and trouble their welling-up or stagnant pools.[37]

Lee owned an 1896 edition of Hanslick's *On the Musically Beautiful*, now kept in the library of the British Institute of Florence.[38] Its German gothic text is heavily annotated. On some pages, Lee's handwriting encloses the text in an outwardly-facing rectangle, almost as if she were trying to surround and capture Hanslick's words. At the beginning of the third chapter, for example, Lee

notes Hanslick's discussion of the immediacy of music's 'primal' or 'primordial' sound ('*Das Urelement der Musik ist Wohllaut*').[39] She has placed a heavy but affirming double stroke alongside another paragraph that stresses music's goal – a 'specifically musical beauty', while the following sentence, suspended between paragraphs – 'The content of music is *sonically moved forms*' – is also underlined, with a number of words and phrases subsequently picked out that discuss music in terms of 'contoured lines', curves and 'arabesques'. The word 'Lipps' is in large lettering, followed by two exclamation marks, which I take to be the philosopher of aesthetics, Theodor Lipps. On one of the following pages, Hanslick's comments about the ear and its undervaluation in aesthetics, are also highlighted.



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ab; eine feine Cigarre, ein pikanter Leckerbissen, ein laues Bad leistet ihnen unbewußt, was eine Symphonie. Vom gedankenlos gemächlichen Dasitzen der einen bis zur tollen Verzückung der andern ist das Prinzip dasselbe: die Lust am Elementarischen der Musik. Die neue Zeit hat übrigens eine herrliche Entdeckung gebracht, welche für Hörer, die ohne alle Geistesbethätigung nur den Gefühlsniederschlag der Musik suchen, diese Kunst weit überbietet. Wir meinen in den Schwefeläther, das Chloroform. In der That zaubern uns diese Mittel einen, den ganzen Organismus süßtraumhaft durchbebenden Rausch — ohne die Gemeinheit des Weintrinkens, welches auch nicht ohne musikalische Wirkung ist.

Die Werke der Tonkunst reihen sich für solche Auffassung zu den Naturprodukten, deren Genuß uns entzücken, aber nicht zwingen kann zu denken, einem bewußt schaffenden Geiste nachzudenken. Der süße Atem eines Akazienbaumes läßt sich auch geschlossenen Auges, träumend einsaugen. Hervorbringungen menschlichen Geistes verwehren das durchaus, wenn sie nicht eben auf die Stufe sinnlicher Naturreize herabsinken sollen.

Fig. 3: Lee's annotations of her 1896 edition of Eduard Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, with kind permission of the British Institute of Florence.

In Chapter Five, Hanslick discusses the difference between listening and hearing, and Lee has noted a paragraph which could be mistaken for one of her own in *Music and its Lovers*. Here Hanslick dismisses 'hearers', calling them loungers: 'Half awake, nestled into their armchairs, those enthusiasts let themselves be carried away and rocked by the vibrations of the tones, instead of contemplating them keenly'. He then describes the '*pathological*' pleasures of music as being like 'a warm bath' or the effect of a 'fine cigar'. Lee has heavily encircled the page on which these quotations appear with indistinct comments (see fig. 3). These comments may have inspired the comparison in *Music and its Lovers* of 'ambience' with bathing.[40]

Lee's copy of *On the Musically Beautiful* requires closer analysis if we are to see its full influence on *Music and its Lovers*, but we know she valued it greatly. A few years after reading it, she called the work that

> splendid essay […] in which he [Hanslick] demonstrated that, whatever its coincident powers of suggesting human emotion, the genius of the composer is manifested in the audible shapes, the musical movements which he builds up in the soul of the listener.[41]

As in Hanslick's text, the aesthetics of *Music and its Lovers* concern the process of listening as an intellectual pursuit. Immersed in music and sensing the Wagnerian siren song, a true listener turns away from the physical effect of the music on the body to activate their mind and contemplate the musical structure, 'a movement of more and more fullness and clearness […] of the present' which cleanses 'the mind from pollution'. From here listeners can take in

> all the relations of sequences and combinations of sounds as regards pitch, intervals, modulations, rhythms and intensities, holding them in the memory and coordinating them in a series of complex wholes, similar […] to that constituted by all the parts, large and small, of a piece of architecture [… and] these audible shapes made up of intervals, rhythms, harmonies and accents, themselves constitute the meaning of music to this class of listeners.[42]

On hearing a symphony for the first time, even the musically educated might only hear blocks of sound. There may be unresolved contours or a sense of different parts, harmonies, and melodies. It may take a third or a fourth listening before it can be fully comprehended. Reading like this is, of course, hard work and exhausting. It demands a 'sitting up to music', Lee states, reminding us

of Waterman and Harewood's illustrations in Piano Lessons, or a 'standing up', to paraphrase Franz, a 'highly trained musician', who appears to be worried about the intoxicating effects of Wagner on his libido. 'Sitting up' is defined as 'working one's brain hard to thoroughly grasp some difficult and complex piece' and is, therefore, a recognition of music's 'presence' as form through which a listener can experience the 'lucid joy of following and grasping, of becoming one with beautiful movements in pitch and time and with interwoven harmonic relations'.[43] It might be said that 'joy' and 'becoming one' is suggestive of emotion and sexual union, but Lee has an answer for this. 'Joy' is the reward for intellectual achievement; it is a 'pure joy' of contemplation, a joy of 'engrossing attention'. And it is a *sui generis* emotion, an objectified state born of liberation from the merely human.[44]

Emotions other than 'joy' are also found in music, but these are actually a complex form of original memory. To describe this, Lee employs the evidence of C. A. T. or Kit, who states that what hearers often confuse for real emotions are actually the 'ancestors' or the 'foundations of the emotions'.[45] Although one refers these emotional states to one's self, a hearer becomes entangled, unable to throw them away and moves inwards with them. Listeners, however, can hear them for what they are. In a more literary fashion, Lee describes these ancestors as the '*Infinitive* of the verb':

> '*Music is not interwoven with (one's) feelings as a human being. The feeling communicated to me by music is rather the ANCESTOR of those feelings* […]. *the foundations of the emotions* […]. *it calls up embryo emotions*' […]. She [Thomson] calls the common 'Ancestor' a Verb. And I, with less picturesqueness and more pedantic precision, should like to add: the *Infinitive* of the verb.[46]

Lee's listening is a process of bringing into the light that which is hidden, mediated by the body, but which then purifies, objectifies its product. These 'Ancestors' are a ghostly memory asking you to sit up and act. For it 'is remarkably like a ghost […] it is the ghost of numberless concretes. […] Like the Ghost in *Hamlet* it can talk about action; but it cannot itself act (morally or the reverse); it can only haunt'.[47] Sitting up, standing up, so that one doesn't 'lose the name of action', to quote *Hamlet*, and fall into reverie, is what listening is all about.

Lee's turning away from the human body in the comprehension of music may seem to contradict her earlier experiments in art galleries concerning the body's reaction to painting and sculpture. But unlike the subject of these experiments, who is in this case Thomson, the hearer submerges their body into a musical bath and effectively gives up the action of 'the perceiving body', which was for Lee, as Lene Østermark-Johansen describes, also a 'creative body'. The hearer loses an artform's trace of lines, curves, and shapes, and, therefore, a sense of action, movement, evolution in time and becoming.[48] By using music to look inwards rather than appreciating form, one loses the possibility of empathetic responses to art, an awareness of correspondences and relationships that enable the subjective experience to 'turn into the objective'.[49]

By suggesting that the hearer gives up the opportunity of empathy, Lee is also refuting Wagner's ideas about the *volk* and his supposedly democratic aesthetics. For Lee, a greater, more fulfilling and meaningful kinship is not to be found in Wagner's generalized, primitive emotions, but rather in intellectual community.

Coda

> O sweet art, in how many a grey hour,
> When I am caught in life's tempestuous
> round,
> Have you kindled my heart to loving warmth
> And borne me away to a better world.[50]

Lee's musical contemplation is a walled garden. She arrives at this image when discussing the action of Franz Schubert's song *An die Musik: Du holde Kunst* (1817), which leads its listeners to 'the sanctuary, the *hortus inclusus* which we might never attain unaided'.[51] Such a garden offers purity. One can enjoy its flowers freely in the knowledge that the realities of the outside world will not disturb.

Lee's endorsement of formalism was certainly timely, marking her out as a prescient thinker on music. As Mark Evan Bonds has discussed, the success of absolute music in the latter half of the twentieth century was partly a reaction to the co-opting of music for 'national, social,

and political ideologies to an unprecedented degree', or, in a sense, an excessive popularization of music, which would have been anathema to Lee's demands for private, intellectual contemplation.[52] But it is also possible to see something lurking behind Lee's formalism that is altogether more emotional. The flowers in her walled garden may be beautiful, but the same flowers also suggest fertility and sexuality.

For a book that aspires to describe a purely intellectual beauty, *Music and its Lovers* often betrays far more visceral emotions than that of the 'joy' of contemplation and its objective relations. Below its inquiring surface, Lee's attitude to musical emotionalism and sexuality is, at times, irritated, exasperated, even displaying an excessive defensiveness (which occasionally reaches Wagnerian proportions). In turning to formalism to silence musical sexuality, we can also, as Fraser Riddell states, see Lee stifling her own sexual emotions, for music threatens the 'disclosure of aspects of the self that would otherwise remain hidden', for in music she might have to 'painfully confront those queer aspects of the desiring self that she would rather repudiate'.[53] Lee's reactions to Wagner and her gendered sense that she was being 'husbanded by the claims of [its] music', for instance, are often highly suggestive of a fear of violation or a nervousness about the possibility of being uncovered.[54]

Music and its Lovers is certainly aware of the possibility of 'shameful listening'.[55] Responding to 'the case of that Answerer who discovered a pornographic element in Wagner', Lee states

> there may arise a shame-faced liking or a prudish indignation in connection with music. For human beings are capable of many more emotions than they enjoy having, also of some emotion which they can't enjoy without such a sense of remorse or *infra dig.* interfering with aesthetic contemplation.[56]

Completed at the end of Lee's life, it is possible to see *Music and its Lovers* as an attempt at textual cleansing, a shedding of excess, in a process akin to Lee's ideas about empathy, in which subjectivity, and all the problems this entails, are transmuted into the objective. The result, however, is not beautiful. In dealing with the sublime nature of music, it is almost as if *Music and its Lovers* has become its victim, fragmented and incomplete. Its words may well be bookishly

containing, but much leaks from its pages and this uncontained spillage seems in tension with the need for its readers to 'sit up' and not lounge. Perhaps this is why, despite the length and depth of its inquiry, *Music and its Lovers* still feels unfinished and inconclusive.[57]

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[1] I refer here to the 1967 imprint. The 2014 imprint has different captions to lessen the moral impact. These read 'Bad position', 'Good position' and so forth. In both the '67 and '14 versions, the 'bad' and 'good' pupils are apparently male, white, and wearing short trousers and long socks (despite the sex of the authors), while the male 'great pianist' is shown fully trousered, in tails and with a bowtie. This suggests adult masculinity is desired in piano performances (with a touch of the bohemian allowed, given the '67 pianist's 'Franz Liszt' hairstyle). See Fanny Waterman and Marian Harewood, *Piano Lessons Book One* (London: Faber Music Ltd, 1967, 2014), p. 6.

[2] All this was in stark contrast to my experience of pop music in the '70s and '80s, where slouching was apparently virtuous. The same was also true of some jazz. In a riposte to Dame Fanny, jazz pianists like my great uncle Leonard were always to be found hunched at their pianos, cigarette in mouth, irreverently banging out the music without regard for appearance, albeit with the same dedication and attention as that of a concert pianist performing Beethoven.

[3] See 'Audience, n.'. *OED Online*, Oxford University Press. <https://0-www-oed-com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/view/Entry/13022?redirectedFrom=audience> [accessed 14 September 2022].

[4] Lee here quotes 'Leo'. See Vernon Lee, *Music and its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotional and Imaginative Responses to Music* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932), pp. 46, 106 (afterwards, Lee, *Music*).

[5] Lee, *Music*, p. 16. The 'multifarious documents' included the questionnaires 'complicated by commentaries and extracts, but with the thread of connection broken and lost'.

[6] A reviewer called this questionnaire 'an interrogation'. A copy of the English questionnaire appears in the final pages of *Music* (pp. 563-67) and testifies to the reviewer's concern. See 'The Radiance of Eternity', *Saturday Review*, 12 November 1932, p. 515. Irene Cooper Willis assisted Lee in compiling and editing the book.

[7] As Fraser Riddell has discussed, Lee's views on 'musical aesthetics changed very little over the course of her long career'. See Fraser Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body in English Literature at the 'Fin de Siècle'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 43.

[8] Lee, *Music*, p. 540. See this page also for a wealth of anti-Wagner comments. On Plato and the corrupting nature of music, see *Laws* (7.802-3), trans. by A. E. Taylor, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 1225-517 (pp. 1373-74). Plato's concerns were often invoked in criticism of Wagner's music in the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially in terms of the possibility that his music might feminize male listeners, a process that Wagner – as we shall see – welcomed and enjoyed.

[9] Vernon Lee, 'The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner', *Fortnightly Review*, 89.533 (May 1911), 868-85 (p. 880). Spelling in context.

[10] This contextualization is necessarily simplified.

[11] Richard Wagner, *Three Wagner Essays*, trans. by Robert L. Jacobs (London: Eulenberg Books, 1979), p. 40. I call the essay *The Music of the Future* as this was how it was first known in English. For more on the French *Tannhäuser* of 1861, see Jeremy Coleman, *Richard Wagner in Paris: Translation, Identity, Modernity* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 137-68.

[12] Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), p. 50.

[13] On the social 'superiority' of absolute music, see Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 215-16.

[14] Eduard Hanslick, *'On the Musically Beautiful': A New Translation*, trans. by Lee Rothfarb and Christoph Landerer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 40.

[15] Lee, *Music*, p. 36.

[16] Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, pp. 63, 17, 43.

[17] Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music*, p. 9.

[18] On Wagner's music as sexual hysteria, see any section on Wagner in *Entartung* (1892; English trans. *Degeneration*, 1895) by Max Nordau, a follower of absolute music, who claimed Wagner was suffering from erotic madness. Even Wagner's supporters were happy to admit the sexual potential of his music. See Edward Dannreuther's article, 'The Musical Drama' (*Macmillan's Magazine*, 33.193 (November 1875), 80-86 (p. 81)), in which he states that Wagner's music is 'the very impulse of passion […] the spirit of music is orgiastic'.

[19] Wagner, 'Opera and Drama', in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (*RWPW*), trans. by William Ashton Ellis, 8 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892-1899), II, 111. I retain here and afterwards the inconsistent italicization and capitalization of Ellis' Wagner texts, unless otherwise stated; I also do this with quotations from Lee's *Music*.
[20] By 'Sapphic', I relate Wagner's experience to Fragment 31 of the sixth century BCE Greek poet's corpus, which portrays the erotic sublime as self-destructive. Anne Carson translates part of Sappho's Fragment 31 thus: 'fire is racing under skin […] and cold sweat holds me and shaking | grips me all, greener than grass | I am and dead – or almost | I seem to be'. Anne Carson, *If not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 63. Yopie Prins describes the impact of sapphic, erotic language 'in terms of masculine domination and feminine submission. […] Sappho is identified with the figurative feminization of the reader.' Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 39.
[21] Wagner, 'A Communication to my Friends', *RWPW*, I, 323. 'Highest' here is an inverse hierarchy to Hanslick's, i.e., an ennoblement of sexuality. For Wagner's sensual pleasure while composing music, see Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 133-42.
[22] *RWPW*, II, 271. The character of Senta in Wagner's opera *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), who throws herself from a cliff to fulfil herself sexually and spiritually to redeem the eponymous Dutchman, is a surely a Sapphic figure, and, given the androgenizing character of Wagner's art, needs investigation in these terms.
[23] In a letter to August Röckel of 1854, Wagner states 'The highest satisfaction of individual egoism is to be found in its total abandonment, and this is something that human beings can achieve only through love: but *the true human being is both man and woman*' (emphasis in original). Quoted in Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne: A Study in Interpretation*, trans. by Stewart Spencer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 78. See also note 8 on Plato and music's potential to feminize listeners.
[24] In one of the most extraordinary moments of *Opera and Drama*, Wagner says that Beethoven became androgynous through the sexual abandonment of wedding Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' to the music of his *Ninth Symphony* (*RWPW*, II, 107). For more on the fear of Romantic classical music feminizing men or on homosexuality and music, see, for example, Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body*, pp. 20-33, and David Deutsch, *British Literature and Classical Music: Cultural Contexts 1870-1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 139-84. On the dangers of musical desire threatening 'the autonomy of female characters, for whom it has potentially fatal consequences', see Emma Sutton, *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 31.
[25] See Suzanne G. Cusick, 'On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight', in *Queering the Pitch: A New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd edn, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary C. Thomas (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 67-82 (p. 79). For more on Wagner's sexual 'liquefaction of desire' in music, which also 'deconstructs gender', see Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 142, 146.
[26] On Wagner's need for the auditorium lights to be extinguished, see Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera: The Last 400 Years* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 31, and Ned A. Bowman, 'Investing a Theatrical Ideal: Wagner's Bayreuth *Festspielhaus*', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 18.4 (December 1966), 429-438 (p. 436).
[27] Lee, *Music*, pp. 540, 302-03, 305, 533. Other correspondents complain of Wagner making them ill. "'Wagner?'" claims 'Pictrix', "'My hair raises with rage. Many experiments have been tried to deceive me, but I always know and am physiologically ill'", p. 538.
[28] Lee, *Music*, p. 66.
[29] Lee, *Music*, p. 40.
[30] Lee, *Music*, p. 147. Italics in original.
[31] Lee, *Music*, p. 149.
[32] Lee, *Music*, p. 294. Italics in original. Although speaking generally, the respondent may be thinking of eighteenth-century Italian opera 'beloved' by Lee, to quote Riddell. Although this opera lacks "'poetical suggestion" (or "what the Germans call *Inhalt*"), [… it] succeeds instead on the grounds of its formal beauty' (Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body*, p. 42).
[33] Lee, *Music*, pp. 294, 155.
[34] Lee makes a relationship between music's power of emotional suggestion and infants and animals in her essay 'The Riddle of Music', *Quarterly Review*, 204 (January 1906), 207-27 (p. 213). This dramatically contrasts with Wagner's theory, for the result of this intercourse for the composer is the ever-fertile artwork of the future (or what he calls the *Gesamtkunstwerk*). See also note 23.
[35] Lee, 'The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner', pp. 875, 877.
[36] One of the most famous examples of Wagner's music inspiring narcissistic ownership is contained in a fan letter sent by the French poet Charles Baudelaire to the composer in 1860. 'At first it seemed to me that I knew your music already', he says. 'It seemed to me that the music was *my own*, and I recognized it, as any man recognizes those things he is destined to love'. See *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire: The Conquest of Solitude*, trans. by Rosemary Lloyd (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p. 145.
[37] Lee, *Music*, p. 300.
[38] Lee notes at the front in pencil 'finished reading [this] July 16 1901'. See Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen: ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 9th edn (Leipzig: Johann Ambrodius Barth, 1896), the British

Institute of Florence, the Vernon Lee Library, 787.17, CID 98542. My great thanks to Lucia Cappelli at the British Institute for giving me long-distance access to this book by scanning its pages.
[39] Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, p. 73.
[40] Eduard Hanslick, *'On the Musically Beautiful'*, pp. 40-41, 82, 83. In Lee's German edition, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, pp. 72-74, 153-54.
[41] Lee, 'The Riddle of Music', p. 209.
[42] Lee, *Music*, pp. 101, 103, 31.
[43] Lee, *Music*, pp. 46, 242, 46, 144. Franz states, flaccidly, that he '*can't stand up against Wagner. It is perhaps a kind of intoxication*', p. 242. Italics in original.
[44] If it is another form of sex, it is alien sex, 'not of this world', to quote Hanslick (see note 16) or one shorn of bodily realities. Lee quotes her correspondent 'Barbara', who talks about '*pure joy*' having nothing to do with human emotion, for music '*has no human emotional existence. It takes me out of myself*'. Lee, *Music,* p. 64. Italics in original.
[45] Lee, *Music*, p. 72.
[46] Lee, *Music*, pp. 71, 75. The italicized sentences in quotation marks are Thomson's words.
[47] Lee, *Music*, p. 71.
[48] Lene Østermark-Johansen, '"Life is movement": Vernon Lee and sculpture', *Word & Image*, 34.1 (2018), 64-72 (p. 71).
[49] I reference and quote here Carolyn Burdett's work on Lee and empathy. See Carolyn Burdett, '"The subjective inside us can turn into the objective outside": Vernon Lee's Psychological Aesthetics', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 12 (2011), https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.610 [accessed 13 September 2022].
[50] From *An die Musik, D. 547* (1817) by Franz Schubert, lyrics by Franz von Schober. Translation from *The Book of Lieder*, chosen, translated and introduced by Richard Stokes (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), p. 406.
[51] Lee, *Music*, p. 105.
[52] Bonds, *Absolute Music*, p. 297.
[53] Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body,* pp. 39, 44.
[54] Lee, 'The Religious and Moral Status of Wagner', p. 877.
[55] Riddell, *Music and the Queer Body,* p. 44.
[56] Lee, *Music*, pp. 519-20.
[57] Note the preface's opening paragraph, which is a disingenuous disclaimer as to what the book is about: 'It can teach no one whether any particular music happens to be good or bad'. Lee, *Music*, p. 13.