The origins of the concert agent in the social structure of concert life

William Weber

DOI: 10.4000/books.editionsmsh.6765
Publisher: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme
Place of publication: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme
Year of publication: 2002
Published on OpenEdition Books: 31 March 2017
Serie: Hors collection
Electronic ISBN: 9782735118168

Electronic reference

This text was automatically generated on 8 January 2019. It is the result of an OCR (optical character recognition) scanning.
The origins of the concert agent in the social structure of concert life

William Weber

1. The rise of the concert agent at the end of the nineteenth century was a major milestone in the development of European musical life. During the 1870s, figures such as Albert Gutmann in Vienna and Hermann Wolff in Berlin began serving as the managers of concert life and the arbiters of performers’ careers – and indeed of the opportunities of concert-goers. We today take for granted both the authority they exert and their responsibility for arranging the many details involved in a concert. In opening up this as yet little-studied subject, we need to remember that no such figures seem to have existed before about 1870, and that musicians had long acted as entrepreneurs in their own right. Indeed, the hallowed – in a certain sense canonic – image that has come to surround the leading musicians in the classical-music world since the late nineteenth century obscures the fact that many of these same figures did then, and in reality, still do play important roles in musical commerce. We shall indeed see how the ideology of this image emerged along with the concert agents themselves.

2. I will attempt here to map out what I see as the principal stages in the rise of concert agents. This article must necessarily be a sketch of a highly provisional nature, intended to suggest the kinds of problems we need to discuss if the subject is to be pursued on a more intensive basis. First we will discuss certain broad aspects, chiefly the nature of self-management as a process of exchange. Then we will look into a series of specific cases of musical management as a means by which to establish the stages of development in this area:

1. the tradition of self-management by performers, as seen in the concert tours of Louis Spohr and Johann Nepomuk Hummel;
2. the early use of the personal manager, in effect a kind of amanuensis, by Niccolo Paganini and Franz Liszt during the 1830s and 1840s;
3. the beginning of the professional concert agent as seen in the career of Albert Gutmann, the first major concert agent in Vienna, between 1873 and 1908;
4. the establishment of agents all across Europe by World War One, as seen in the management employed in European tours in 1913-16 by the American pianist, Richard Buhlig, and his relationship with the Hermann Wolff Agency in Berlin.

3 It would be a mistake simply to begin studying the early Sol Huroks in the field of concert agents. We need to start instead with the structure of musical life that pre-existed their appearance, the fabric of institutions, economy and social practices that had no need for independent managers. We need to ask why such people were not employed, indeed not needed, and how the structure of musical life and Western society changed in ways that stimulated their appearance.

4 During the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, musicians did business jointly within a system of exchange by which a whole host of mutual services were accomplished by musicians for one another. It perhaps denigrates this system of exchange to call it “petty capitalism”, but the term has a certain relevance. Musicians were involved in the rich economy of international élite culture that was governed from courts and increasingly the capital cities. While a great deal of money passed through the hands of highly placed people in the service industries, they were not accumulating capital and indeed did not aim chiefly at maximising profit. Their life revolved around processes of social exchange that were defined by professional needs, social hierarchies, and personal influence. Helping one another was not a matter of goodwill; it was part of the system by which the music profession functioned.

5 Musicians were by definition businessmen, but nonetheless were limited, by the character of their social exchange, in the extent to which they pursued speculative or large-scale enterprises. We shall see how the expansion of the music business in the first half of the nineteenth century began to replace social exchange in the ways by which some of the most prominent performers did business on tours. This expansion disturbed the sense of just price and proper intention that existed within the musical world, as in most communities of the time. But in the long run concert agents emerged as the main musical capitalists, and musicians adopted a more lofty professional definition independent of capitalistic intent. The establishment of morally defined musical canons during the middle of the century played a strong role in this transformation of roles and values.

6 The processes of exchange related closely to the demographic state of European society at the time. As I argue elsewhere, we need to define a period in élite culture between around 1700 and 1870 when wealthy and influential people were concentrated in the capital cities to a far higher degree than in previous centuries, but did not yet exist within a mass society. This meant that the beau monde, as it was often called, was much larger and less intimate than the courts of the sixteenth century, but enabled far more knowledge of one another than was possible after the middle of the nineteenth century. The whole demographic character of life in the capital cities changed when their populations rose by over a half million people, and railroads made access to city life even easier.

7 These changes encouraged the formation of new distinctions between amateur and professional, indeed created greater distance between such groups, and separated different professions that formerly had been one. New careers opened up as the society expanded demographically and the patterns of social interaction changed. Just as the concert agent evolved out of the multi-faceted work of the touring musician, so banking emerged as a separate economic field out of the high-capital wholesale businesses that
had formerly been the main base of banking operations in most countries. As we shall see below, agents emerged chiefly from the dynamic capitalistic leadership exerted by music publishers.

A concert tour was one of the basic elements in the career of a musician who aspired to an international reputation. The musician would usually be aiming to obtain a position in a suitable court or chapel, and his hosts would usually be looking for new talent by which to give their music programmes glory. Whether royal, aristocratic or bourgeois, patrons needed fresh talent just as much as they did regular personnel in their musical programmes; novelty was the watchword of musical fashion. The musician and the people on each site then interacted through conventions of social exchange by which the performer would enter into the local musical community quickly and perform in both public and private contexts. The musician would bring letters from his patrons and his musical mentor that would virtually guarantee that he be welcomed and given extensive assistance, which would aid in performing in different contexts.

Furnishing such assistance to visitors was seen as an obligation for both amateurs and professionals who participated in the musical world. While the visitor had a great deal of work to do himself, he would expect help in finding living quarters, a concert locale, a supporting ensemble, and the means by which to print programmes and draw audiences. Refusal of such assistance does not seem often to have occurred, since doing so would be to contradict some of the most basic principles of exchange that governed musical commerce. A similar process occurred in developing subscriptions for publication of music whereby one musician would obtain customers for another and be repaid eventually with a similar service. Klaus Hortschansky has found a few examples of the refusal of that service being condemned in the music column of periodicals.

A touring musician therefore had to acquire a whole host of social and economic skills. He had to direct a wide range of activities, not only musical performance but also the organisation of concerts in a complicated set of areas; most important of all, he had to develop a sense of how to balance costs and expected receipts. This was petty capitalism in its most basic form, a world where economic and social exchange worked closely together, where the main goal was not so much to maximise profit as to co-ordinate social circumstances in such a fashion as to maintain a satisfactory cash flow. Exerting personal control over all these aspects and the people involved in them was vital, since any disruption could lead to severe financial difficulties.

That is why, prior to around 1830, a musician would have been quite sceptical of engaging a manager, since he would have feared that such a person might very well either fail to fulfil what was needed, or simply cheat him.

**Spohr, Hummel, and traditional practices**

We can see the conventions of the concert tour particularly well in the autobiography of Louis Spohr. Spohr grew up in the court of the Duke of Brunswick and in his late teens was employed in the chamber ensemble. At an early date he took advantage of the option open to him of taking a leave of absence for a tour, especially since circumstances at court limited the need for music during a period of several months. He recalled proudly how, in the fall of 1804, he found himself “fully prepared for a fresh musical tour” in the German capitals. He described what happened at his first stop in Halberstadt:
I received great attention and assistance in getting up my concert, from the there resident Musicians, the brother Organists Muler and Holzmarketer, the Violinist Glockner, with whom I played my Duets, the Bassoonist Barnbeck and Clase, the Secretary and Musical Director of Count Wernigerode.

He “passed many pleasant days in Halberstadt” and was invited frequently to parties at homes of merchants and Criminal-Counsellors.

The system of exchange did, however, operate differently from place to place. He criticised the musical community in Leipzig for failing to help him in the expected ways: I had many difficulties to overcome for the arrangements of my concert. Engrossed in the business pursuits of this commercial city, people did not come forward to assist me with the readiness I had been hitherto accustomed to meet, and I had much to do before every obstacle was overcome. It annoyed me also that the wealthy merchants to whom I was recommended appeared as yet to know nothing of my artistic reputation, and that though politely, they received me coldly. I was therefore exceedingly desirous to be invited to some musical party, in order to attract notice to my capabilities.

By comparison, in Switzerland he found that in most cities the music societies did an unusual amount of his arrangements: “We had nothing more to do but to play”, he reported with surprise.

Berlin received him with the usual traditional sociability. A room was arranged beforehand by a former teacher who played in the court orchestra, and then was proud to introduce [...] the young Artiste as his former Pupil, procured for me the acquaintance of the most distinguished artistes of Berlin, and was also of great assistance to me in making arrangements for a concerts, which nevertheless owing to the great number of persons then giving concerts, was obliged to be postponed for some time. Meanwhile I delivered my letters of recommendation, and thereupon was invited to some Music parties.

Note that nothing save the room was arranged prior to Spohr’s arrival; rental of a theatre or performing space was usually possible only a few days before the event. In Vienna, however, he spent a couple of weeks scouting out the city before committing himself to the unpredictable contingencies of putting on a concert in so imposing a place.

A companion usually made a concert tour more bearable, but such a person was usually either a student or a close relative. In 1807 Spohr took a young man whom he described as the “orchestra-servant”, probably the person charged with watching after instruments and other matters. He also brought with him two of his students to lead the often quite unreliable ensembles that were pulled together for visitors.

Spohr did not complain about the stresses of these tours – his main worry was breakdowns on the road in bad weather, as happened quite often. Musicians indeed took a certain pride in their managerial skills. It is interesting that, for all that Mozart complained to his family about having to teach, he rarely had similar harsh words to say about the many duties he was required to perform to bring off a concert in one of Vienna’s major concert locales.

When we turn to the English tour of Johann Nepomuk Hummel in 1825 – about which Joel Sachs has written in such marvellous detail – we find the traditional practices but also some interesting new aspects of management. Hummel was, let us remember, the most important of the virtuosos of the generation that came to prominence at the turn of the century. He nonetheless managed the whole tour himself, even though he was the most...
important instrumentalist to appear in London in some years. He did, however, begin preparations long in advance, aided by both his publisher, Maurice Schlesinger, and the Erard piano firm. Schlesinger made sure that advertisements and announcements began appearing in magazines and newspapers in the October before Hummel’s arrival in March; he clearly made sure that Hummel would be eagerly anticipated by the time he stepped onto English soil.

The assistance that Schlesinger gave Hummel pointed ahead to what the full-scale concert agents were to do by the 1880s. Schlesinger was the most prominent of the various publishers who shifted the base of their firms from Berlin to Paris, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; he showed an imagination in working with musicians in the advancement of their careers that has historical significance. He and other publishers and piano manufacturers began, during the 1830s, to put on concerts themselves to promote music they were publishing. It is to be noted that Schlesinger did not have an office in London, but nonetheless was working for Hummel in planning the tour and the expansion of the performer’s reputation in that quite different country. During the first half of the nineteenth century, companies such as these began exploring ways by which they could assist leading performers on a broad plane, chiefly in regard to publicity. Their services were the foundation upon which the profession of the concert agent was built.

We must be careful, nevertheless, not to exaggerate the roles played by the media in that period. Sachs points out that the announcements probably only reinforced the much more basic network of contacts upon which Hummel drew through high connections, aided greatly by the community of Germans and Italians in London. Hummel wrote and circulated the advertisements himself and indeed sold many of the tickets from his rooms.

Hummel’s tour came at the very moment when musical life was becoming transformed by the burgeoning of the market for home music. While this development has yet to be studied in any detail, it is clear that the scale of the market expanded several times between about 1815 and 1850, as new techniques in both printing and marketing, together with the spread of pianos, made music a virtually universal phenomenon in the homes of better-off middle class and aristocratic families. Now people were involved in musical life who had been only marginal to it in 1750 rather as happened with the rise of rock music in the 1950s and 1960s – and that shook up the whole intellectual and cultural framework of that world. For the instrumental performer, this meant that a tour could be a means by which capital could be amassed, something that was far from the minds of their predecessors or traditionally minded figures such as Hummel. Travelling performers also began to take on new social presumption, the idea that they stood above the mundane duties that were involved in the traditional practices of self-management.

We can find related processes of professional exchange in the letters of the cellist, Adrien-François Servais, which Malou Haine analyses in her article in this volume. Simon McVeigh puts all this in a broad perspective, showing convincingly how late-English musicians held to this manner of doing business. We find, however, a new attitude toward the business aspects of touring in comments Ole Bull made on his tour of 1839. He complained to his wife that:

I must correspond with the directors of the theaters; must obtain information regarding the people with whom I am to deal; must make my appointments for concerts and rehearsals, have my music copied, correct the scores, compose, play
and travel nights. I am always cheated and in everlasting trouble. I reproach myself when everything does not turn out for the best, and am consumed with grief. I really believe I should succumb to all these demands and fatigues if it were not for my drinking cold water and bathing in it every morning and evening.

Early uses of managers on tour

Nicolò Paganini seems to have been the first virtuoso to have turned concert tours into a capital-building enterprise. He attempted to give far more concerts than was the norm, often daily appearances in opera halls, locales holding hundreds more people than the usual concert space. His efforts were immediately seen to violate the traditional assumptions of the just price and the just professional intention. François Fétis said as much in his book on Paganini, originally published in 1851:

The high prices of admission charged for his concerts drew down the reprobation of the English journals, as if the artist was not privileged to put what price he pleased upon his talent. [...] [The concerts] produced an enormous amount of money; this was a large fortune, to which he added considerably afterwards. [...] He has been reproached with having sold himself to an English speculator for a certain time and a definite sum: a system which many artists have since adopted, though it is repugnant both to art and the dignity of the artist. Yet the great care necessary for the organization of concerts, and the difficulties encountered by an artist in England, certainly offer some apology for its adoption.

Paganini hired a variety of men to help manage his tours. The history of his tours suggests that in England people were emerging who, for a fee helped arrange concerts and/or theater for visiting performers in a particular town. In London Pierre-François Laporte, the impresario of the King’s Theatre, made a contract with the violinist for twenty-two concerts in his theater in 1831. Alfred Pettet did the same in Norwich; he had emerged as the chief-person providing such services in that city. Some of Paganini’s managers came from outside music: one, named Freeman, for example, who organised the first two provincial tours, was a lawyer who had taken up arranging talent for provincial theatres.

The men who managed Paganini’s tours in more than one city were different from Laporte or Pettet in that none of them had a self-standing business. They indeed functioned as speculators whose activities had not acquired a professional legitimacy within the musical community, and serious problems broke out between Paganini and all of them, Freeman ended up suing the violinist for not fulfilling the contract. John Watson, Laporte’s main assistant, wheedled the famed violinist’s business away from Freeman; as a musician, he served as accompanist, and his daughter Charlotte, as singer and mistress for Paganini. Watson ended up in jail at least five times for nonpayment of creditors or musicians. Another provincial tour was run by Antoine Gaetan Pacini, a Neapolitan musician and impresario who had entered into the publishing business; in one instance he was called a “personal adviser”. A disagreement occurred between Pacini and Paganini during a tour in northern France, over division of the spoils, when Pacini claimed that he had not been given the third of the receipts promised him. These speculators tended to push the musician too hard, setting up more concert engagements than his health could tolerate.

Paganini also engaged in a speculation for a concert hall called the “casino” in 1839, which shows how much he came under the influence of big-money men in the
entertainment business. Modelled upon the promenade concerts of Adolphe Jullien, the project was designed as a place of general resort appropriate to the fashionable part of Paris in which a building was constructed. As Fétis described it, “some speculators induced him to lend the aid of his name and talent to establish a casino, of which music was the pretext, but gambling the real object.” While concerts were held there, the government denied it permission for gambling, and the enterprise collapsed shortly after Paganini’s death.

Concert tours within the United States emerged as the hoped-for ultimate money-maker. In 1834 Paganini negotiated for such a trip; his valet, Francisco Urbani, went to New York with Watson to negotiate for the project, but it never took place. Ole Bull did tour America several times, and he got into problems with his manager, the Hamburg publisher, Julius Schuberth, similar to those encountered by Paganini in his tours. Conflict indeed seemed inevitable in these early managed tours; because the whole framework was so untested and lacking in structure, both musician and manager had to improvise at every step.

The concert tours of Franz Liszt resembled those of Paganini in a crucial respect: they were managed by an individual who had no self-standing business and depended upon the composer. But in other respects, the tours point ahead to the subsequent practices of concert management. Liszt relied even more than Paganini upon his publishers, chiefly Maurice Schlesinger, for a great deal of advice and planning both for the tours and for his career generally. Schlesinger controlled his relations with the press closely, encouraging authors to write on him, pressing periodicals to publish the pieces, and keeping the fast-moving pianist informed as to the state of his reputation and the activities of rivals such as Thalberg.

In addition, Liszt exercised great care in selecting managers and maintaining relationships with them. His first tour, in 1839, made it clear that he could make significant amounts of money, but travelling alone posed too many problems. He tried a couple of secretaries, neither of whom proved effective, one allegedly stealing 3000 francs, from him. But in August 1840, Madame d’Agoult suggested to him the musician Gaëtano Belloni, whom she had met in Paris, and Belloni proceeded to manage Liszt’s triumphant tours between 1841 and 1847 with a remarkable professional intelligence.

Belloni was Liszt’s factotum in all respects, arranging everything from concert halls and pianos to writing biographical notices and tending to the lives of the composer’s children. Liszt went much farther than any other musician in the delegation of responsibility to a secretary; it is doubtful that any musician in this period assigned so many duties traditionally handled by a travelling performer. In this respect we can see arising a new role for the high-ranking performer that pointed ahead to the careers of the great soloists and conductors of the late nineteenth century. One can be sure that musicians took notice of this; they must have looked in awe upon Liszt rather as eighteenth-century musicians did upon Arcangelo Corelli for the openended role he played in the Ottoboni household in Rome.

Even more important, Belloni shaped relationships with Liszt and Madame d’Agoult that, as we shall see, resembled those of later concert agents with their principal clients. Belloni ingratiated himself with Liszt and d’Agoult quite completely; he recognised that, with a figure of such prominence, he could not play the speculator as some of Paganini’s secretaries had done. A certain fawning over a great performer was to become an important role of the concert agent.
But Belloni also made himself an astute professional advisor to Liszt in ways that also point ahead to later concert agents. In May 1843 he wrote from Moscow that they were to stay ten days in St Petersburg, longer than expected, because “Belloni has not gotten our receipts up to where he wants them, and lectures me without pity, though with a certain justice”\(^\text{17}\). In 1847 the word “capital” appeared in a letter regarding his manager’s plans:

> Belloni is delighted to see me learning to do business carefully, even saving some money. My originally tiny capital seems to have grown more than a hundred thousand francs since Odessa, and it’s possible that I will add several thousand more during the summer and the fall here in Russia\(^\text{18}\).

Liszt indeed learned how to bargain. Even before hiring Belloni, he reported to Madame d’Agoult his negotiation with a theatre manager in Lyons whereby he had got what he wanted by a series of comings and goings from the businessman’s office\(^\text{19}\). Here we can see how the traditional practices of social exchange were giving way to a self-consciously capitalistic mode of doing business.

Still, Belloni remained entirely dependent upon Liszt and in that respect had a quite different career from those of the subsequent concert agents. Contemporaries regarded Belloni as a kept man, not a professional. Heinrich Heine went so far as to call Belloni “Liszt’s poodle”\(^\text{20}\). \(\text{Le ménestrel}\), one of the Paris journals critical of Liszt, reported that, when he went to Constantinople, he had had Belloni dress up as a black to dance before the Sultan\(^\text{21}\). Therefore when Liszt ceased to perform in public, Belloni had no chance of becoming a general agent, and had to turn his talents to other things. He still earned a small fee from Liszt for occasional services in Paris, but the composer was callous enough later to remark that their final tour of 1847 was “Belloni’s Austerlitz”\(^\text{22}\).

Liszt also engaged a manager for his English tours of 1841-42. Louis Henry Lavenu was the second generation of one of the largest music publishing firms in London; he wrote songs and comic opera, and ended up taking up management of musical theater, chiefly as director of the opera house in Sydney\(^\text{23}\). He seems indeed to have approached Liszt, and the events on the tour were usually billed as “Mr. Lavenu’s Concert”, the pianist appearing only to perform a few pieces. But like Belloni, Lavenu served as a personal manager for Liszt. He hauled Liszt’s favourite Erard grand piano almost 4000 miles over England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, taking the railroad for only one short stretch. Even more than on Liszt’s tours on the Continent, here composer and manager moved from town to town much more rapidly than had been the convention. Because of this, they did not find much opportunity to consort with local musicians; they simply arrived, performed and left, which would usually have been regarded as quite impolite. They paid a price for this frenzied pace, however. Since they did so little to attract audiences, they drew small crowds in many places, and the total receipts failed to make up for the many changes of horses and the good hotels Liszt always wanted\(^\text{24}\).

We thus see how Belloni, Lavenu and Liszt departed from the tradition of social exchange practised by such traditional musicians as Louis Spohr and Johann Nepumuk Hummel. They defined the concert tour as a profit-oriented enterprise rather than one simply for professional advancement. On the English trips especially, Liszt and Lavenu established relations with local musicians in a brief, impersonal and commercial manner, entirely different from the relaxed, highly collegial ways of musicians on the traditional concert tour. In so doing they developed a relationship that in historical terms represents a transition between self-management and the independent concert agent. It is interesting as well to note that capitalistic schemes for long-range tours predated the railroad.
The rise of the independent concert agent

The burgeoning of the music market that began in the 1820s reached a point of relative stability and balance at the middle of the century. By the 1840s the vogue of virtuosos began to decline; concert life became much more sedate and less flamboyantly commercial. The press would have one believe that the public was becoming disillusioned with the manipulative ways by which they had stimulated taste. In my judgement, however, the people of limited musical interest who had been drawn to concerts by fads for virtuosi went to fewer public events, while still playing opera medleys at home. Musical commercialism now settled into a more solid and permanent routine. The free-wheeling entrepreneurship that had dominated the musical world for three decades gave way to firmer and less speculative structures.

Within both the music business and musical taste, new sources of authority opened up after mid-century which brought stability and legitimacy to the new order of commercialism that governed musical life. One such development was the growth of classical works within concert repertories. Programming did, of course, vary from country to country and from city to city; in London particularly, classical works were prominent by the early 1840s. But during the two decades just after the middle of the century, the classical repertory acquired a centrality and a significance within concert life far more than it had possessed before. The repertories built around works by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and a great number of other composers, became international in scope, as the early tendencies toward canon in eighteenth-century Britain and France had not been. While repertories did vary significantly from country to country, the cosmopolitan nature of the canon was a critically important aspect of its new authority. Moreover, a new generation of virtuosos – Joseph Joachim and Anton Rubinstein most prominently – often performed classical works, both in orchestral and chamber music concerts. Great performers were now in a certain sense canonised as well as great works, and the two processes were closely related with each other.

The rise of independent, highly empowered concert agents beginning in the 1870s functioned in ways similar to the increase in classical music within concert programmes. As core repertories of classical works grew within most types of concerts, so also agents emerged, not only as managers of concert activity, but also as sources of authority over performers and repertory. The two developments ended up mutually reinforcing their authority in the great period of concert life that ensued in the fifty years prior to the First World War.

In his valuable new work on the Philharmonic Society, Cyril Ehrlich suggests some important demarcations for the time period during which agents became established in London. He shows that Chappell & Co. dealt for performers in 1857, but also that agents were firmly established in control of concert arrangements by 1890. By that time few performers dealt with the Society directly, without an agent, and those who did tended to have unusual careers. Ehrlich makes an interesting argument that agents benefited both performers and musical life by their professionalism and by the coherence and stability they gave the economics of the concert world:

Far from battening upon music, inflating costs and taking their percentage, the majority of agents were crucial to the functioning and growth of a worldwide, volatile, high-risk industry. They articulated markets, providing information about
repertoire and artists, and matching one to the other; offering alternatives to buyer and seller, with wider perspectives and far more flexibility than ever in the past. They shared administrative burdens, risks and time-scales; providing audiences with wider choice and assisting the careers of musicians by increasing their freedom to work at music.

Albert Gutmann, whom I encountered in studying the Wagner-verein in Vienna, emerged as the most important concert agent in Vienna during the late 1870s. By origin a Munich music seller and publisher, he moved to Vienna in 1873, where he earned the denomination of “k. k. Hofmusikalienhändler” and opened a shop right next to the Opera, which became the “leading music shop in Vienna”, as Artur Schnabel said later. Similar to other big businessmen in the music world, he had a hand in almost every major area, selling music and pianos (the latter in a separate shop) as well as publishing and managing concerts. The agency tended to work only with the higher-ranking performers; the violinist, Carl Flesch, for example, said in his memoirs that the firm was “almost unchallenged”, managing the appearances of such major figures as Joachim and Rubinstein. Flesch was engaged by the lesser agency of Alexander Rosé for his first Viennese concert, in the early 1890s.

It is clear that a crucial factor behind the rapid consolidation of concert agents during this period was the railroad, for Gutmann seems to have made his name in large part by bringing whole orchestras to Vienna. In late 1884 he managed three concerts in Vienna by the Meiningen court orchestra, led by the renowned conductor, Hans von Bülow. The music critic, Eduard Hanslick, declared that “An itinerant orchestra, playing not dance music but the greatest works of the symphonic repertoire, is a novelty reserved for our railroad epoch. I even heard people asking one another; ‘Why a visiting orchestra in Vienna, and from Meiningen, of all places?’” In 1901 he likewise brought Richard Strauss to Vienna to perform with members of the Munich Court Orchestra and the new Vienna Konzert-Orchester, 120 musicians all told.

The importation of orchestras into Vienna had special significance in that city. Until the founding of the Konzert-Orchester in 1899, the supposedly most musical city in the West had only twelve concerts by professional orchestras, eight by the Philharmonic Orchestra and four by the Society of the Friends of Music. By contrast, Paris and London had between one and two hundred per year, most at prices affordable to the middle classes, and Leipzig, a city one tenth the size of Vienna, had at least fifty. During the mid-1880s Gutmann proposed the founding of a second orchestra, but the established interests of the two institutions prevented that from happening. It is likely that Gutmann played an important role in the founding of the new orchestra.

The highly tightly drawn, essentially monopolistic nature of the Viennese musical world made itself particularly suitable for the dominance of a skilful early concert agent. Gutmann developed his career as an agent in ways similar to those of the opera impresario, as a central authority over performers, musically as well as commercially. Prior to the nineteenth century it would have seemed nonsensical to speak of an impresario of concert life, since there was no institutional locus of authority over concerts as there was over opera, and since instrumental soloists did not have sufficient significance socially to warrant it. But by 1870 concerts were increasingly based in organisations and had achieved a prominence in musical life far greater then ever before. Most important of all, the rise of virtuosos as performers paid and revered on a par with...
opera singers opened the way for figures to develop in concert life comparable to impresarios of opera.

One could also say that agents such as Gutmann took on the role that wealthy connoisseurs had played as the judges of performers within concert life since the early eighteenth century. Alexandre Le Riche de la Poupinière had done that in Paris, and Baron von Alvensleben in London; in nineteenth-century Vienna a variety of connoisseurs held salons where young or visiting performers would be evaluated for engagements in public concerts. Gutmann held musical gatherings at his home that performed the same function, as Artur Schnabel described:

All the great musicians of the epoch kept personal contact with him, and the gatherings at his home, every Sunday afternoon, were internationally known as a “star parade”, as one would now call it. On each of these occasions some music was performed, most often contemporary, to promote some young composer. [...] When I was eight he arranged a private concert for me, to arouse interest in my talent.

Gutmann was typical of the full-fledged early concert agents in the highly public ways by which he did business. Gutmann regularly arranged concerts with Johannes Brahms, but even though he was one of the more important publishers in Vienna, he was long unable to obtain a contract of that sort with the dean of Vienna’s composers. In 1883 he went so far as to publish a letter to Brahms, in a Viennese music magazine, that offered the composer a high bid on rights to a new symphony. Brahms is said to have expressed annoyance at Gutmann for stuffing too many overtures in a programme they were preparing, uttering that he was “wholly enormous and bursting with good temper, as if he were playing Parsifal”.

Gutmann even engaged himself in the ideological politics of musical life of the time. He helped form the Vienna Academic Wagner-Verein, a society that put on concerts intended in part to offer music of Wagner, but also to fill the great demand for such events in Vienna. He identified himself closely with the cause of the Wagnerian movement, acting as its representative to the International Wagner Society between 1878 and 1888; he was cited in the Bayreuther Blatter numerous years for selling memberships. Yet he somehow managed to keep his taste – and all that implied in ideological terms – distinct from his business dealings. He managed many concerts for Brahms, the main opponent of the Wagnerians, and for other performers of that camp. His long delay in publishing any works by Anton Bruckner – the main living idol of the Wagnerians – may have been designed to indicate his professional independence from that faction.

We have seen how during the last three decades of the nineteenth century there was accomplished a major deepening of the canonic values that rested beneath the reputations of both the classics and the leading musicians who performed them. Simply the names we have cited here – Joachim, Rubinstein, Schnabel, Wagner, Brahms – suggest the formidable cultural process that took place during that time. Alfred Gutmann interacted closely in this process, for the authority that he obtained for his role as impresario worked closely with that given to the musicians and the music they performed. The removal of the highest-level performers from the mundane business activities so long thought integral to a musician’s life gave them a quite new place in European culture. The association of great musicians with great, “classical” music further deepened that role.

Gutmann established close relations with the elite musicians with whom he worked. We can see that in a comment that the pianist Alfred Grünfeld made to him, his “beloved
friend”, in 1892. At their last encounter, he reported “I played for you, as a farewell, the F-minor fantasy of Chopin; seeing you weep, I could not forget this impression for a long time.”

Gutmann indeed published a memoir of the great musicians with whom he worked: Aus dem Wiener Musikleben: Künstler-Erinnerungen, 1873-1908. The book is made up of short pieces on individuals, in some cases poetic eulogies, going from Wagner and Brahms to rising musicians such as Pablo de Sarasate and Richard Strauss. Here Gutmann celebrates the authority he had assumed as Vienna’s concert impresario and demonstrates how necessary he was to their work – and indeed how central the impresario became to the process of canonisation. In the preface he emphasises the veracity of the stories, especially the words, he claims to have written down after speaking with the figures; in so doing he established a kind of professional distance similar to the one he did as concert agent.

The international network of concert agents

An American pianist, named Richard Buhlig, left behind a set of papers that manifests with remarkable concreteness how fully established the international network of concert agents had become by 1914. What we find is not only that agents governed concert life in virtually every European city, but also that they did their business with a strict professionalism that probably did not exist until around 1880. The way that these businesses handled Buhlig’s concerts relates far more closely with practices today than with the very speculative or the very personal relationships between musicians and managers characteristic of the middle of the nineteenth century.

Hermann Wolff, who arranged Buhlig’s concerts in Berlin, was the Albert Gutmann of that city. A musician and a critic early in his career, Wolff started as a manager by rendering services to von Bülow and Rubinstein; in 1881 he opened his own concert agency in Berlin, running it personally until his death in 1902. Carl Flesch, who encountered him in 1897, remembered particularly how he brought the strict principles of German business to concert management:

It was the outcome of Wolff's idea of the politico-economic correspondence between artistic performances and agricultural or industrial products. Why shouldn’t a virtuoso be “ordered” and “despatched” in the same way as wheat or steel? It was simply a question of organization; the concert-giving societies had to become accustomed to “ordering” their artist’s through a central agency.

Flesch passed on the story that Wolff kept on his desk a picture of an unfortunate singer in décolleté with a little sign announcing that she had failed to pay her fees for services rendered. By the time of his death the business had become so firmly established as a major institution in the European musical world that it carried on securely.

The early career of Richard Buhlig illustrates how closely American musical life was linked with its European counterpart in some areas. Born to German parents in Chicago in 1880, Buhlig began studying piano with a student of the renowned Viennese teacher, Theodor Leschetitzky, in 1897 went to work with the master himself, but four years later moved on to Berlin out of a desire for a more modern and more independent career. He got off to a quick start, not only having numerous recitals in Berlin but also working closely with such figures as Artur Schnabel and Ferruccio Busoni. Disillusionment with the romantic style of performance taught by Leschtitzky led him in a new austere
interpretative direction; he began performing little-known Baroque and avant-garde contemporary works. A London critic said in 1907 that he was “too serious an artist to care for drawing-room popularity [...] Buhlig is probably the most highly educated and gentlemanly of any of the modern pianists”.

Success in the concerts he gave in London between 1905 and 1910 made it possible for Buhlig to put together a schedule of regular concert performances, sponsored chiefly by the Wolff agency, which took on only the most high-ranking performers. Buhlig performed important new pieces, offering premières of works by Busoni and Schoenberg (the Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11 in the latter’s case) and bringing compositions by Reger and Debussy to London. It is interesting that Buhlig’s avant-garde tastes did not seem to hold him back too much, at least at this point. Frequent all-Beethoven, historical programmes, and regular attention to works of César Franck must have kept his name alive within the mainstream of the concert world. In Los Angeles during the 1930s he served as the mentor of both John Cage and Henry Cowell.

The papers that have come down to us from Buhlig’s files offer a fascinating picture of how a performer dealt with concert agents. The Wolff Agency handled the many details that, several decades before, performers had seen to on their own. The Abrechnung sent to him after each concert cites the cost of such items: the placement of newspaper advertisements; the printing of posters, programmes, and tickets; rental of halls; pay for cashiers and attendants in the hall; the mailing of free tickets and announcements; the rental of instruments; payment of other performers and hall police; and the clipping and filing of reviews. The agency contracted out some items – chiefly the placement of advertisements and the printing of posters and programmes – but handled the whole process itself. By this time it is clear that agencies such as this one also exercised broad responsibility for promoting Buhlig for concerts or performances on a long-term basis. Several sheets of promotion material are to be found, as well as correspondence indicating how the agency kept files of reviews and worked in the interests of Buhlig.

The most influential agencies had already taken on an over-arching power within concert life, in large part because they controlled both the schedules of the leading concert halls and the careers of performers. Intense criticism grew up over this practice, a complaint that the agencies had become monopolies and thereby prejudiced the advance of artists’ careers. Among Buhlig’s papers is an invitation to attend a meeting, seemingly called by the lawyers of several agencies, to discuss a recent court decision that the agencies could not control both aspects. “This unfortunate judgement brings massive problems to our concert world”, said the letter, “which threaten the future positions of all concert soloists”. The decision seems not have had much effect, and the issue continued during the 1920s and 1930s.

Buhlig seems to have dealt with a concert agency in virtually every major town or city he visited. In most places the agency was also the central music shop. In Dresden, for example, the firm of Ferdinand Ries had the status of Königliche Hofmusikalische Handlung, as Gutmann had in Vienna; after his concert in March 1914, an officer of the business wrote to ask, “Should I go ahead and reserve a day for you about this time next year?” The usual fee amounted to a little more or less than one tenth of the total of all charges (more for Wolff, less for Ries). Though the Wolff agency directed Buhlig’s main concerts and his career as a whole, Buhlig also dealt with a variety of other agencies in Berlin, especially for his concerts in the less-prominent cities or concert locales. The Berlin-based Konzert-

Le concert et son public
Direction Leonard handled his Konigsberg engagement, for example, and the Konzert-Bureau Ludwig Loewenson ran Buhlig’s concert in the Berlin Singakademie.

By 1900 the schedule usually followed in arranging concerts had changed completely compared to fifty years before. While Spohr and Hummel usually had no contact with performing locales before they arrived in towns, and both Paganini and Liszt often had a hard time trying to arrange their schedule in advance, Buhlig and the Wolff agency began setting up out-of-town dates at least six months in advance, indeed often eight months. In early May 1913, for example, Buhlig wrote, the Wilhelm Hansen agency of Copenhagen about a concert there in November; the response indicated that a deposit of 250 Marks was due at least a month before the event, a standard rule of most agencies by this time. By 1925 the Konzert-Direction H.W. and Jules Sachs of Vienna had a page of rules that accompanied its original letter planning one of Buhlig’s concerts – with deposits of 500 Marks (in inflated post-war Marks, of course) in July and December for a January concert.

One limitation to the development of concert agencies at this point was that it does not seem that Wolff arranged most of Buhlig’s concerts in other cities. The complete international control of a concert tour by a single agency may not have become conventional until after the Second World War. But piano companies had become quite international by this time. There were branches of such firms as Erard, Steinway and Bechstein in many cities outside from Chicago, and it was possible to arrange the rental of performing instruments from any one of them. In 1913, for example, the Berlin branch of the Carl Bechstein piano firm signed Buhlig up for rentals at his recitals in Bremen, Königsberg, Stockholm, Brussels and Breslau.

So much of Buhlig’s papers seems relatively familiar to us today, while the letters about Liszt’s tours do not. Buhlig belonged to the Genossenschaft Deutscher Tonsetzer, the main German society for protection of musical copyright, since he was a composer as well as a performer. In November 1910 he paid 60 Marks for his membership rights between January 1907 and the end of 1910. He also belonged to the Verband der konzertierenden Künstler Deutschlands von Berlin, a non-profit organization that seems to have taken over some of the functions of the concert agents, such as press clipping and publicity.

We thus see a sweeping transformation in the process and the structures by which musicians conducted concert tours. What had been governed by a set of quite loose professional relationships was taken up by businesses run in impersonal ways with capitalistic goals. All this had taken place while the world of upper-class culture was shifting from a relatively small, though not wholly intimate, set of circles to a mass society whose much larger population and greater degree of segmentation created much more impersonal relationships in musical institutions. This is not to say, of course, that there were not important networks within the not overly large world of pianists; many of the people who went to Richard Buhlig’s concerts must have had some acquaintance with each other. What was different was that the casual, accommodating world of exchanged services that Louis Spohr describes for us so vividly had altogether vanished from the major cities of Europe, and was fast disappearing in the provinces.

The speed with which these changes occurred is remarkable. While one has reason to believe that local managers were establishing themselves in some English towns and provincial cities by 1850, there was still a world of difference between the simple services they provided and the lofty, international authority exerted by Albert Gutmann and Hermann Wolff by 1890. What characterizes the second half of the century in so many
ways – not just in musical life – was the firming up of new structures of authority that linked economic and cultural aspects of society. The agents and the canonic repertories their musicians performed were closely linked as a new system that was to rule musical life for roughly a century, from 1870 to 1970.

APPENDIXES

Résumé/Zusammenfassung

Les origines de l’agent de concert dans la structure sociale de la vie musicale

L’apparition de l’agent de concert à la fin du XIXe siècle constitue un jalon important dans le développement de la vie musicale en Europe. Dans les années 1870 des figures comme Albert Gutmann à Vienne et Hermann Wolff à Berlin commencèrent à jouer le rôle d’organisateurs de la vie de concert ainsi que d’arbitres de la carrière des musiciens et, ce faisant, des occasions pour le public d’aller au concert.

Cet article cherche à dégager les principales étapes qui conduisent à la montée en puissance de l’agent de concert. Il analyse d’abord les formes traditionnelles d’organisation de la vie musicale par les musiciens eux-mêmes, considérées comme un processus d’échange. Différentes études de cas permettent ensuite d’étudier la manière dont s’est progressivement établie l’institution de l’agent de concert: 1° les tournées de concerts entreprises par Louis Spohr et Johann Nepomuk Hummel illustrent la tradition d’auto-organisation des musiciens; 2° Nicolo Paganini et Franz Liszt, dans les années 1830-1840, sont les premiers exemples de musiciens utilisant des organisateurs de concert personnels sous la forme de secrétaires particuliers; 3° la carrière d’Albert Gutmann entre 1873 et 1908, le premier agent important à Vienne, permet de mieux cerner les débuts de l’agent de concert professionnel; 4° une coopération européenne entre agents de concert ne s’institutionnalise que peu avant la Première Guerre mondiale.

Des changements apparaissent peu à peu dans la façon dont les musiciens organisent et entreprennent leurs tournées de concerts. Les relations professionnelles entre musiciens, très libres jusqu’alors, tendent à se commercialiser et se transforment en relations d’affaires, impersonnelles, abstraites et à but capitaliste. Ces changements s’inscrivent dans l’évolution qui voit le monde relativement restreint de la culture des classes supérieures-structuré en un tissu, loin d’être toujours intime, de cercles-s’ouvrir à une société de masse dont l’étendue et la fragmentation croissantes entraînent des relations de plus en plus impersonnelles dans les institutions musicales. Les agents de concert et le répertoire «canonique» que jouent les musiciens sont très étroitement liés aux nouvelles structures qui forgeront la vie musicale entre 1870 et 1970.
Die Ursprünge des Konzertagenten in der Sozialstruktur des Konzertlebens


NOTES


4. Ibid.: 73.

5. Ibid.: 235.

6. Ibid.: 78.

7. Ibid.: 112.


19. Ibid., 1836, T. 1: 144f See also 22 July 1836, T. 1: 177, from Dijon, where he reported proudly getting 300 francs from the Philharmonic Society, which formerly had not gone over 100.


21. *Le ménestrel* 8 October 1847; I am indebted to Dana Gooley for this and other references, and for thoughtful comments on the subject.

22. *Correspondance*: 44, n. 20, 144, 200, 237. Liszt’s will of 1860 referred to him as “my faithful and devoted servant and friend”; *ibid.*: 562.


30. Hanslick. 70.


40. Published by his own house in 1914. He moved to Paris in 1908, still acting as concert manager and publisher; see Gutmann, A. 1914 [note 36]: 110f.

41. Buhlig Papers, Special Collections, University Library, California State University, Long Beach. These were given to Professor Clare Raynor and Ms Nancy Wolpert by a student of one of Buhlig’s students; I am very grateful to my colleagues for the work they did in amassing the collection. The papers include a moderate amount of correspondence from agents and other kinds of businesses, 1901–26, some from the US as well as Europe, and stray items from his years in California, from 1930 to his death there in 1952. Other papers of his are still in private hands.

42. Flesch, C. 1957 [note 28]: 133. For the rise of high capitalism in music, see also Hiller, F. 1880, *Künstlerleben*. Cologne.


I owe many debts for this paper, chiefly to Dana Gooley, Simon McVeigh, Martha Burns, Cyril Ehrlich, Nancy Wolpert, Clare Raynor, Anik Devriès, Chris French, and Irene Still-Meye.