

## Chapter 7

### Musical Entertainment and the British Empire, 1914–1918

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The subject of music and the British Empire, from the end of the nineteenth century to the period after the Second World War, has been the subject of a handful of histories in the last fifteen years.<sup>1</sup> In the midst of the war's centenary, historians are now carrying out detailed research into the various modes of musical entertainment {from or during?} the period of the First World War.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will provide an overview of the provision of musical entertainment for the troops of the British Empire during the conflict of 1914–1918. It will show how British composers, musicians and entertainers worked to take music of all kinds to those serving the British Empire, demonstrating how music was used to maintain the morale of servicemen on the fighting fronts. This chapter will also survey the work of the leading wartime organisation: the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), who saw the war as an opportunity to utilise their own brand of Christian philanthropic education, and of

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<sup>1</sup> See Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876–1953* (Manchester: MUP, 2001); and Nalini Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj: India in the English Musical Imagination, 1897–1947* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> This area was initially opened up by works such as J.G.Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); and Glenn Watkins, *Proof Through the Night: Music and the Great War* (London: University of California Press, 2003); but there have been more detailed studies by John Mullen, *The Show Must Go On! Popular Song in Britain During the First World War* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2015); Toby Thacker, *British Culture and the First World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Jason Wilson, *Soldiers of Song: The Dumbells and Other Canadian Concert Parties of the First World War* (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012).

the significant efforts they made to provide musical entertainment to soldiers wherever they were serving King and Country.

### **War, Music and Morale**

During the First World War musical entertainment was an important component in recruitment, fundraising and the maintenance of both civilian and military morale. The importance of music and all kinds of entertainments intensified during the course of the conflict, and in 1917, Lord Derby (Minister of War) said that '[t]he people's amusements ... should go on ... Let those who come home be met with cheerful faces. Let them feel that their leave from the trenches should be marked by amusements that will abstract them from all the anxieties and dangers'.<sup>3</sup> Historians are now recognising the power of music and its validity as an area of research in the years 1914–1918. The emotional potency of sound and melody surpasses the capabilities of visual images or written texts; it is an intrapersonal process, a social phenomenon, and a product of cultural influences and traditions. As John Mullen recently pointed out, 'songs and musical activities can give us a unique insight into popular attitudes during the Great War ... as documents of which one can analyse the content, the reception and the social meaning'.<sup>4</sup>

In Britain, and its imperial outposts, music was a staple of family and community life across the social spectrum. At a time before widespread gramophone ownership, people provided their own amusement and entertainments; singing and the playing of instruments was appreciated and there was an expectation that those who were capable should entertain.

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<sup>3</sup> Lord Derby (Minister of War from 1916) quoted in *The Era*, 31 January 1917; as cited in Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, p. 4.

Having a piano in the parlour was the mark of a cultured household. In 1914 there were 2–4 million pianos in Britain (1 for every 15 people), as well as the Pianola, an automatic piano, which never reached the level of popularity in Britain as it did in America. Musical performance was an established part of everyday life, and street singers were commonplace. The late Victorian years saw an expansion in choirs and brass bands, often subsidised by local employers. There were competitions from the 1880s, and repertoires included classical song and opera as well as music-hall hits. By 1900 there were more than thirty thousand brass bands in the UK.<sup>5</sup> In Britain the music hall was the most popular form of mass entertainment, and music hall stars such as Marie Lloyd, Vesta Tilley and Harry Lauder were the celebrities of their day; Tilley and Lauder would become deeply involved in the war effort. In 1914 a new style of music called ‘ragtime’ was only starting to get established and had not yet developed into jazz, and a dance called ‘the foxtrot’ became popular. Variety shows and revues performed twice a night in most towns and cities with a mixture of comic and sentimental songs.

The British Empire’s declaration of war against Germany on 4th August 1914 had an immediate impact on British musical life. It was an established practice for notable events to be commemorated with a song, so the search for a new hit soon started with a competition for new wartime songs run by Francis & Day publishers. This was won by ‘Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag’, a song that enjoyed great popularity in the earliest months of the war and is now emblematic of the period in our contemporary memory of 1914–18. Many musicians joined the forces, which left house orchestras in cinemas, music halls and concert venues short of players. On a more positive note, British piano manufacturers, who had been recovering ground against their German competitors, found buoyant opportunities with the

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<sup>5</sup> Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, p. 9.

removal of new German pianos from the market.’<sup>6</sup> The first of the annual Promenade Concerts organised by Sir Henry Wood {who is he?} was scheduled on Saturday 15 August 1914, and the work of Richard Strauss and all other ‘enemy’ composers was removed from the programme. The tradition of the following Monday’s concert being ‘Richard Wagner night’, the play list was re-programmed to feature French, Russian and British works including the *Nutcracker* suite and *L’Après-midi d’un faune*. However, after Chappell – the music publishing house who ran the Promenade concert series at the Queen’s Hall – announced that ‘[t]he greatest examples of Music and Art are world possessions and unassailable even by the prejudices and passions of the hour’ the works of Strauss, Wagner and other Germanic composers would feature in the remaining wartime Promenade concerts.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Empire and British Culture**

The elite musical scene in Britain became ever more internationalised as many Belgian musicians arrived in London – such as Joseph Jongen – in addition to artists from other nations including Pablo Casals, Karol Szymanowski and Vaslav Nijinsky. Music and musicians from the allies of the British Empire were welcomed and actively encouraged to perform in Britain, although the rising number of Belgian and French musicians moving into local house orchestras was a cause of some concern to musicians’ unions. The Japanese soprano Tamaki Miura did sing a Giuseppe Verdi aria in January 1915 but music from Britain’s other ally Russia was easier to programme, especially that by Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Prokofiev. From 1915 onwards travel was very difficult for foreign instrumentalists and no performers of German,

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Jacobs, *Henry J. Wood: Maker of the Proms* (London: Methuen, 1994), p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> Jacobs, *Henry J. Wood*, p. 149.

Austrian or Hungarian origin were allowed into Britain. While French music was already popular, in early 1916 a group of leading British composers formed a Russian Music Committee to promote the use of Russian music in Britain.

The nineteenth century had been the century of musical nationalism. Many countries developed a musical style that was seen to reflect their national identity, but here was considerable prejudice against English music in Britain; Italian music dominated opera, German composers led the orchestral field and French the operetta.<sup>8</sup> In 1914 *The Strad* magazine hoped that the war would serve to rectify this position, that the ‘easy-going Briton, with all his genius for colonizing and for government’, would be encouraged to develop a recognisably British elite musical style:

War, except so far as it crushes individual talent, is not in principle inimical to art. The present war is arousing the best and truest feelings of our race; and from such a condition an enhanced feeling for the beautiful and the true is likely to spring. A more earnest and profound view of life and its joys and sorrows cannot but be productive of a worthier conception of Art. We may hope to have a more really national music ... a better educated democracy will perhaps solve the problem of the establishment of a national opera.<sup>9</sup>

In 1914 the British Empire was at its height. In the earliest years of the twentieth century, one of Britain’s principal concerns was ‘the great show of empire’ where writers, travellers and

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<sup>8</sup> Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> F.A.Hadland, ‘Music and the Great War,’ *The Strad*, April 1916, p. 2.

artists ‘brought the sounds of tales of distant lands ever closer to home’.<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Richards has underlined that ‘[e]very aspect of popular culture contrived to instil pride in the British imperial achievement’ and that the empire ‘was Britain writ large ... the embodiment and expression of a British character comprising of individuality, stoicism, a sense of duty, a sense of humour and a sense of superiority; that Britain was in the Empire for the good of its native peoples.’<sup>11</sup> This sense of purpose can be seen in the work of the organisations, who worked with the British armed forces during the First World War. A ‘Music in War-Time Committee’ was established by leading composers of the day including Henry Wood, Ralph Vaughan-Williams and Henry Walford Davies.<sup>12</sup> The Committee organised a number of concerts, such as the performances for approximately eight thousand territorial soldiers on 15 December 1914 at White City Stadium. The Soldiers’ Entertainment Fund (SEF) was established in 1915 led by the writer and composer Lyell Johnston. The SEF had two aims: to entertain the troops and also to provide work for performers. Starting in hospitals in February 1915, by May 1919, 750 artistes had performed 2,000 concert parties in London and the surrounding area. The SEF sponsored one excursion to a naval base in Malta in 1916, followed by a visit to a large hospital garrison for those injured on the Eastern Front.<sup>13</sup>

During the early stages of the war efforts were made to ensure that soldier’s morale was maintained through the provision of a variety of entertainments, particularly in the form of concert parties. These gatherings performed the same vital functions as sports; they brought all ranks together in a spirit of community, gave rest from autonomy and obedience, and helped to displace anxiety. Several battalion officers recognised the value of concert parties

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<sup>10</sup> Nalini Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj: India in the English Musical Imagination, 1897–1947* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, pp. 2, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Collins, p. 81. {this book is not referenced above- can you provide full reference?}

<sup>13</sup> Collins, p. 82.

early on and groups evolved spontaneously among the soldiers at rest, in YMCA huts or around the established system of divisional canteens. The regular units of the British Army already had canteens as an established feature of service life, which helped soldier's pay go further by selling tobacco, beer, soft drinks, books, newspapers, candles, tinned food, biscuits and chocolates at cost prices. The Army acknowledged the need for canteens in all battalions in February 1915, and the Expeditionary Force Canteens (EFCs) was amalgamated as 'EFC Section ASC' (Army Service Corps) in July 1915.<sup>14</sup> The divisional canteens were supplemented by civilian organisations like the YMCA, the Church Army, the Salvation Army, the Dominion Comforts Fund, the Church of England Soldiers' Home, Army Scripture Readers, the Navy Mission Society and the British Soldiers Institute. Many Army divisions had their own troupe of entertainers and these groups held official brigade or divisional concert parties. The performances owed a large debt to the music hall with a combination of singing, reciting, conjuring, comedy, ventriloquism, and ensemble sketches. The light-hearted nature of these groups can be seen from the ensembles' names such as The Whizz Bangs (5th Division), The Cheerios (2/6th Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment), The Very Lights (12th Battalion) and High Tension Entertainers (Army Service Corps). A small admission fee was charged and the events were very well attended.

By the end of 1916 most Army divisions had an official concert party and by the end of 1917 they were universal.<sup>15</sup> British troops loved to sing and this was very much encouraged by the Army because 'singing connotes belonging'.<sup>16</sup> The composer Henry Walford Davies had long been involved in the provision of music and singing amongst the troops, and in 1918 he was appointed as the first Director of Music in the newly formed

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Young, *Army Service Corps 1902–1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 2000), pp. 86–7.

<sup>15</sup> Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, p. 6.

Royal Air Force, his primary task being to organise choral singing which he believed reinforced the team spirit of fighting men:

A brass band is all very well in its way, but it does not come near the male voice choir in the production of the best music ... Get the men to do something together and you have started an *esprit de corps* among them which will have a tremendous influence for good, and will do more than any of us imagine to make life in camp, in barrack, or billet, or in the outpost more tolerable.<sup>17</sup>

## **The YMCA**

The YMCA quickly became the largest and most far-reaching organisation whose red triangle emblem illustrated their mission to nourish for the minds, bodies and spirits of the men fighting for Britain's Empire, wherever they may be. Public appeals were also launched to fund the building of large wooden huts wherever soldiers were stationed which could hold up to five hundred soldiers.<sup>18</sup> These huts provided a space for soldiers to rest and listen to musical talks and recitals, as well as for their own music-making, such as informal sing-songs around one of the pianos which were provided for exactly that purpose. YMCA huts quickly became known as places that would provide soldiers with food and a wholesome place to rest on the frontline or at home in military camps and railway stations. A widespread education programme for soldiers was started, which became the Army Education Corps in 1920. By October 1914 the charity had erected 400 large marquees in Britain. The British Army invited

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<sup>17</sup> Major H. Walford Davies, 'Music and Arms,' vol. 1, *The Red Triangle*, September 1917–August 1918, YMCA/K/6/1, Cadbury Special Collections, p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Collins, p. 82.



the YMCA to establish base camps in Le Havre and along the lines of communication down to the Mediterranean. Expansion to the Eastern Front and other areas of the British Empire was swift: YMCA facilities would be found wherever the soldiers were sent.

Music was an integral component of YMCA programmes, as ‘in the Army of each of our Allies the same thing is found. The need for music is universal’.<sup>19</sup> The organisation distributed 20,000 copies of a selection of popular songs for in-hut entertainment, and in the autumn of 1914 the YMCA established its own Music Department, which carried the motto ‘Whatever Cheers the Warrior Helps to Win the War’.<sup>20</sup> Led by the composer Percy Scholes, those involved with the department identified a ‘tremendous awakening of interest ... in music ... both from the point of view of performance and appreciation’.<sup>21</sup> It was thought that it was the organisation’s duty to do this work, and that ‘an Association which has no sign of such activity should question itself very seriously as to whether it is being left behind and becoming hopelessly old-fashioned’. The YMCA Music Department was very well resourced. Among its activities was the ability to organise speakers for talks on composers and on subjects such as: ‘how to form an orchestra’, providing a list of musicians, lecturers and entertainers available, maintaining a music library, and the sale of instruments at reduced prices through deals with suppliers. The Music Department also started a ‘Competition Festival Movement’ because they ‘afford excellent opportunities for the neighbourly exchange of ideas and for the testing and improving of local standards’.<sup>22</sup> The value of

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<sup>19</sup> Percy A. Scholes, ‘Music and the Fighting Man,’ *The Red Triangle*, vol. 2, September 1917–August 1918, YMCA/K/6/1, p. 192.

<sup>20</sup> ‘The Music Department and its Resources,’ *The Red Triangle*, vol. 6, September 1917–August 1918, YMCA/K/6/1, p. 207.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Percy A. Scholes, ‘Music and the Fighting Man,’ *The Red Triangle*, vol. 2, September 1917–August 1918, YMCA/K/6/1, p.192.

morale-boosting music in wartime was seen as central to the YMCA Music Department's activities. Scholes wrote in 1917 that:

“Will music help us to beat the Boche?” The University Extension lecturer was just beginning his talk on ‘The Story of British Music’, when that question was hurled at him. He looked round the crowd of men squatting around on the floor of the marquee, men just out of the trenches the day before, and replied: “The first hundred thousand crossed the Channel singing ‘Tipperary’. How much did their good spirit and courage owe to that tune? Then came the period of the mouth organ, and one musical paper alone sent a thousand pounds’ worth as the gift of its readers. Then followed ‘Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag’ – a song that has been worth six divisions to the British Army. After that gramophones in their thousands, Miss Ashwell’s concert parties, visits to the front of crack Army bands, and now University Extension lectures on Music. Are these things helping you ‘to beat the Boche?’” And every man shouted “Yes”.<sup>23</sup>

### **‘Every camp its own theatre’**

The Music Department was keen to encourage Tommy Atkins to appreciate classical music, and saw the war as an opportunity to civilise men who, if not for the war, would have little exposure to the grand masters. However, it was the popular actress-manager Lena Ashwell who first approached the YMCA to suggest that performers should be utilised to help boost soldier’s morale by putting on concert parties for soldiers whose divisions were

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<sup>23</sup> Scholes, ‘Music and the Fighting Man,’ p.192.

yet to organise their own ensembles, in wherever part of the empire they were fighting. In October 1914 Ashwell made every effort 'to get the entertainment of troops put on national lines, and was interviewed several times on the scheme of "every camp its own theatre", and the organising of work by professional actors, but there was little interest shown'.<sup>24</sup> Ashwell led the formation of a Representative Committee, a gathering of noted musicians and actors 'with representatives of the Church as a guarantee of respectability and good faith' and an appeal was formulated and sent to the War Office that 'recreation should be organised, that the movement should be national, as national as the Red Cross' but their offer was refused.<sup>25</sup> Somewhat 'sad and disheartened', Ashwell continued her work with the Women's Emergency Corps which was extending their operations from London to Bristol and Newcastle, running fifteen branches by March 1915. Then,

on one never-to-be-forgotten day, when I had quite lost hope of the drama and music of the country being regarded as anything but useless, Lady Rodney called on behalf of the Women's Auxiliary Committee of the YMCA. She had returned from France, and came from Her Highness Princess Helena Victoria, Committee Chairman, to ask if it was possible for a concert party to go to Le Havre.<sup>26</sup>

These royal connections helped smooth the way with the War Office, and Ashwell arranged to cover the expenses privately. It was argued that 'owing to the very suffering state of men at Base Camps who had passed through a very difficult period of fighting, and were to be at

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<sup>24</sup> Lena Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours* (London: Gyldendal, 1922), p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Ashwell, p. 5.

Base for rest and further training, this experiment of sending recreation should be made.’<sup>27</sup>

Those involved understood this to be a one-off arrangement. Conditions were put in place that there should be no advertising and that the performers would not use the event to increase their professional popularity. A further stipulation was that all members of the concert party had to be known to Ashwell and become known to Her Highness as the latter was to be responsible for their persons and conduct:

They were to work with the YMCA, who would look after the billeting arrangements in France, and places, times, etc, for the concerts ... There were grave doubts on behalf of the YMCA ... I think some expected us to land in France in tights, with peroxide hair, and altogether to be a difficult thing for a religious organisation to camouflage. Some good things did come to us through the war, and one of them was the breaking down of barriers due to misunderstanding.<sup>28</sup>

Ashwell became a leader of concert parties, the first of which was held at No.15 Camp, Harfleur Valley, on 18 February 1915. The company set the pattern for soldiers’ concerts that would follow throughout the war: a soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone/bass, instrumentalist and entertainer. The success of the venture led the YMCA to appoint a committee to oversee Ashwell appointing other artists, promoting the concerts and also raising money to continue putting them on. By the summer of 1916 it was reported that Ashwell’s groups had put on around two thousand concerts in hospitals or YMCA huts. A party had been dispatched to

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<sup>27</sup> Ashwell, *Modern Troubadours*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

entertain British troops in Malta, and many concerts were being put on for the Royal Navy as ‘sailors perhaps need it more than any other people, seeing that they have far fewer chances of recreation and entertainment’.<sup>29</sup> Described as ‘one of the greatest assets of the YMCA at this time’, Ashwell was praised for ‘affording the men diversion and recreation when they might be tempted to spend their time unprofitably were there no concerts ... thus exerting a strong and noble influence over the thought and life of the men’.<sup>30</sup>

Ashwell was a formidable fundraiser. In one article she gave her address and wrote ‘I want you to give me your new hat, your new carpet, your new teacups, everything you thought you were going to buy next week, and to give it to me for the sake of the boys at the front and the boys in the Navy’.<sup>31</sup> The YMCA concert party tour of Malta, coordinated by Ashwell, began on 23 February 1916. The party was very popular, particularly with the YMCA representatives who ‘have had the joy of knowing that everything the party did was done in the most perfect taste and to the honour of the ideals for which the YMCA stands’.<sup>32</sup> By early May ninety nine concerts had been performed in convalescent camps, hospitals, hospital ships and some small outlying forts. It was reported that:

These concerts were a real mission of mercy. In the early days of the tour the party had the privilege of singing to men broken in health by arduous months on the Gallipoli Peninsula. No one, except those who have themselves gone through the experience, can fully appreciate what such concerts mean to men who heard

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Have You Given Your New Hat?: A Suggestion by Miss Lena Ashwell,’ *The YM*, 30 June 1916, p. 602.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> ‘On Tour in the Mediterranean,’ *The YM*, 9 June 1916, p. 519.

little music save the sounds of the guns during these months of hardship and suffering.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, the positive reception and effect on the soldiers in Malta led the YMCA to suggest that concert parties be put on the troop transport ships which passed the Island. Several concerts were arranged and to great effect, and ‘the reader’s imagination can perhaps realise the unique circumstances of a concert given on thronged decks to men for whom, after a rough passage in an over-crowded boat, a good entertainment was a veritable God-send’.<sup>34</sup>

The reception the Navy gave to the concert parties led the YMCA to suggest further entertainments should be provided on board, helped by Lady Limpus, the wife of the Admiral Superintendent, who was a principal YMCA liaison in Malta. Thursdays were devoted to concerts in the naval hospitals or the large naval canteen for men serving on warships or the Merchant Navy.

Those of us who have carefully watched the progress of the Lena Ashwell party are trying to make up our minds as to which of the two services supply the most enthusiastic audiences. The body of opinion favours the Navy, though the reason may not be, not that the men of the Navy are of higher musical taste than the Army, but that so much less is done by way of entertaining them.<sup>35</sup>

Concert parties were also given for the survivors of torpedoed or mined vessels, including the *Simla*, the *Minneapolis*, and later *HMS Russell*. These were for the performers ‘happy and sad

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<sup>33</sup>‘On Tour in the Mediterranean,’ *The YM*, 9 June 1916, p. 519.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

events – happy because the gladdened faces of the men made their programme so obviously a mission of mercy, and sad because thoughts of the men who had lost their lives inevitably came to their minds’.<sup>36</sup>

### **A Club for Servicemen of the British Empire**

Once the *Lena Ashwells* were established as touring companies, the actress helped the YMCA’s next venture: to provide a centre of respectable musical entertainment for soldiers of the empire in central London. In the spring of 1917 the management of *Ciro’s* restaurant offered their premises in Orange Street, Central London, to the YMCA, free of rent until the end of the war. It was felt that the concert parties had been so successful that the YMCA’S Emergency War Committee awarded a further £100 to Ashwell’s funds and a sum of £350 for equipment at the venue.<sup>37</sup> The YMCA announced its tenancy of the restaurant in May 1917. Under the headline ‘What We Are Doing at *Ciro’s*’ the Hon. Mrs Stuart-Wortley reported that the premises ‘will open its doors to the men of H.M.’s Forces and their lady friends’:

This means that a man can take his mother, his wife, or his sweetheart to these luxurious reception rooms for recreation and refreshment. He can meet his friends of either sex and enjoy with them a cup of tea while listening to music under the most ideal conditions ... It has been a reproach to London that hitherto the stranger – the man who has come thousands of miles from his home across the seas – within its gates, unless well provided with funds and connections who will

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the Finance and War Emergency Committee, 24 April 1917 and 22 May 1917, YMCA/K/1/8/31.

introduce him, has found so few opportunities of a social kind; that a soldier back for a few days' leave from the trenches may wander forlornly round the town and never get the chance of happy friendly intercourse with the class he would like to meet ... just the things a man misses so poignantly in the existence to which the war condemns him remorselessly for so many months on end.<sup>38</sup>

Ciro's proved to be a huge success. It was reported in June 1917 that in twelve days the premises were used by 1,780 men and 300 women.<sup>39</sup> The composer John Foulds was also in residence at Ciro's and the YMCA funded his salary.<sup>40</sup> Foulds had fallen short of Army fitness requirements and he served as Musical Director of the Central YMCA during the latter stages of the war.<sup>41</sup> Foulds dedicated a large part of his time to the musical activities of the Central YMCA in London from 1917 until 1923, where he had a leading role which he is said to have carried out with an 'altruistic spirit'.<sup>42</sup> His mission was:

to create and sustain an interest in the highest walks of the musical art where none was previously existent, to men who in the main must be considered as non-musical. ... this branch of the Association is now known throughout London, not

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<sup>38</sup> Hon. Mrs Stuart-Wortley, 'What We Are Doing at Ciro's', *The Red Triangle*, 25 May 1917, p. 467.

<sup>39</sup> *The Red Triangle*, 15 June 1917, YMCA/K/6/1.

<sup>40</sup> Minutes of the Finance and War Emergency Committee, 1 October 1918, YMCA/K/1/8/31.

<sup>41</sup> Borthwick: MacCarthy-Foulds, Box 9: Letter from Maud to her mother, 3 May 1918, ACC 51/2008. This was written on YMCA 'HM Forces of Active Service' headed notepaper.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Frank Carter, general secretary of London Central Y.M.C.A., to the principal of Cape Town University, 2 March 1921, 56482, British Library Manuscripts (BLM).



to mention the provinces, as being the keenest musical centre of any in the whole kingdom.<sup>43</sup>

Foulds was one of many composers who worked for the YMCA. Another notable example is the composer Gustav Holst who went to organise musical entertainment and education to British and Imperial troops on the Eastern Front on behalf of the YMCA's Music Department. Like Foulds, Holst had tried to enlist during the first months of the war but he was rejected as unfit for military service. In 1918, as the war neared its end, Holst responded to the YMCA's Music Department request for volunteers to work with British troops stationed in Europe awaiting demobilisation.<sup>44</sup> Holst enjoyed his time in Salonica, from where he was able to visit Athens, which greatly impressed him.<sup>45</sup> His musical duties were wide-ranging, and even obliged him on occasion to play the violin in the local orchestra.<sup>46</sup> Holst returned to England in June 1919. Both Foulds and Holst are examples of the many British composers who, from around 1910, had been deriving a great deal of inspiration from the empire, particularly India. After a lecture-recital to the newly-founded India Society in 1910, Holst contacted the pioneering musician Maud MacCarthy for guidance on Indian scales.<sup>47</sup> Nalini Ghuman has underlined that while a great deal of Holst's music, notably the pieces of military band, the choral folk songs, and suites for strings undeniably has deep roots in English traditions, 'it was through his intense engagement with Indian culture that his

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<sup>43</sup> Letter from Frank Carter, general secretary of London Central YMCA. to the principal of Cape Town University, 2 March 1921, 56482, BLM.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Short, *Gustav Holst: The Man and his Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 159.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Ghuman, pp. 123–5.

modernist, highly personal voice took shape'.<sup>48</sup> Of Holst's best-known work *The Planets*, which he composed 1914–16: 'Once the words "I vow to thee my country" had been attached to the *andante maestoso* of "Jupiter" it quickly began to vie with "Land of Hope and Glory" for the place of a second national anthem with which to hymn imperial England.'<sup>49</sup>

The YMCA spent around £18 million in today's money on supporting the troops of the British Empire through the provision of free stationery, games, sports, concerts, educational work and lectures, and hospitality to relatives of the wounded. In total the YMCA's wartime expenditure was equivalent to £5.1 billion today, the majority raised by charitable subscriptions and donations. A total of £166,672 [£7.2 million] was spent on free concerts and entertainments, in addition to £45,000 [£1.95 million] supported work for Indians in France and £75,696 [£3.3 million] for men serving the British Empire in India and Mesopotamia.<sup>50</sup> By the early 1900s the YMCA had branches in many countries all over the world. This naturally included India, which at the time was still perceived as the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. At the YMCA tent in Nowshera, in 1910 – the camp farthest north in India – typical facilities were provided such as games, papers, magazines, also references to tennis and badminton, as well as debates, music and the bioscope [cinema].<sup>51</sup>

### **The YMCA in India**

The YMCA had started working with the British Army in India shortly before outbreak of war. In the Indian Army in 1914 there were approximately two hundred and forty thousand

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.139.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Green Book No.5, Photographs Illustrating the emergency war work of the YMCA (Germany, Holland, India, Italy), YMCA/K/1/7.

<sup>51</sup> Green Book No.5: Photograph of YMCA tent in Nowshera, 1910, YMCA/K/1/7.

serving officers and men. By the end of the war India had deployed over one million men overseas in both combat and supporting roles. The majority of the Indian Army had been recruited from the North and in Nepal for Gurkha units; but the manpower shortages during the war meant that recruits increasingly came from groups once thought unsuitable for military service. India's largest campaign was in Mesopotamia, where over six hundred and fifty seven men served. One hundred and forty four thousand were sent to Egypt and Palestine. One hundred and thirty eight thousand fought in France and Belgium and smaller numbers were sent to Aden, East Africa, Gallipoli and Salonika. In August 1914 there were three YMCA centres for the British Army in India. Mostly due to the arrival of British Territorial regiments in India by January 1915, there were 10 centres, but despite scarce resources in May 1919 there were 82 Army centres in India run by the YMCA, managed by 40 British and American and 34 Indian secretaries.

In Calcutta, the eleven YMCA workers who arrived in India at the end of 1915 were said to have had,

a very trying time at the start, in an atmosphere of suspicion very naturally, but the work once established soon dispelled all difficulties by its very obvious worth, and as for its popularity one only needed the sight of the sports gathering on Christmas Day to convince one that this unprecedented departure for the Indian Army had been there since the Mutiny, so much were the men at home.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> J.G.Harley (Calcutta), 'With the Indian Troops in Travel,' Reports, Work of the YMCA for British and Indian Troops in India, 1914–1919, 16 January 1916, YMCA/K/2/7.

The YMCA's mission in India, for both British and Indian troops, was the same as it was nearer home: the red triangle emblem symbolising that they aimed to care for a mens' minds, bodies and spirits. It is important to note that despite the Christian nature of the organisation it stated from the outset that 'no religious work or proselytising of any kind is done'.<sup>53</sup> Indian YMCA work was based in rented houses, tents supplied by the Army and specially erected buildings. Subsidies from national funds included the salary of the 'Secretary of Secretaries in Charge' but funds were also obtained by fundraising for example, subscriptions, donations, supper clubs and concerts.<sup>54</sup>

As on the Western and Home Fronts, musical entertainments were always provided in military hospitals and convalescent camps. In Bombay the YMCA funded the appointment of a 'Special Entertainment Secretary' to ensure that 'extensive entertainment work is carried on several British and Indian hospitals at the Alexandra Docks, Brigade Office and Mechanical Transport Centre'.<sup>55</sup> At the Dadar Labour Corps War Hospital and Convalescent Camp a full-time Indian Secretary was in charge of a 'Special Recreation Hut' that would house musical entertainments and cinema shows.<sup>56</sup> An illustration from a YMCA publication is particularly atmospheric and serves to demonstrate that the organisation was acting to maintain Indian musical culture by providing suitable instruments:

The Indian YMCA: On the banks of the Tigris at Amarah this YMCA hut built of mud with palm trees growing through the roof, making part of the superstructure, is picturesque enough. Here Indian regiments of various creeds enjoy their

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<sup>53</sup> Reports, Work of the YMCA for British and Indian Troops in India, 1914–1919, YMCA/K/2/7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Reports, YMCA/K/2/7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

evenings in their own fashion. Here they have their tamashas, tom-toms and reed musical instruments being supplied by the YMCA who cater to all tastes, and a man can always be sure of a good hot meal well turned out.<sup>57</sup>

India sent over one hundred and forty thousand men to the Western Front: ninety thousand served in the infantry and cavalry, and fifty thousand as non-combatant labourers. They came from the length and breadth of India and represented a very diverse range of religious, linguistic, and ethnic cultures. The officer corps was mainly composed from men of European descent. All armies depend on a number of essential support units and the work of the labour corps, particularly those made up of men from China and India, were vital to keep the war effort going and releasing men for front line service. By the last stages of the war there were 54 labour corps each made up of 1,150 men, and 6 syce (grooms) companies of 210 men served on the Western Front.<sup>58</sup> Indian porters were also indispensable in Mesopotamia where the lack of transport infrastructure was a serious threat to the British war effort. Conditions on the Western Front were very hard for all concerned, but particularly so for the labourers who were serving in a land so different from their own. To ensure that these men were kept reasonably content, Indian music would be played on gramophones and cinema shows would be provided.<sup>59</sup>

The war brought together a wide variety of musical cultures from around the British Empire and beyond. The experience of hearing and seeing the music and instruments of other

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<sup>57</sup> Green Book No.5, Photographs Illustrating the emergency war work of the YMCA (Germany, Holland, India, Italy), YMCA/K/1/7.

<sup>58</sup> Gateways to the First World War, 'Indians in the British Army,' exhibition by Professor Mark Connelly, Spring 2015.

<sup>59</sup> YMCA War Work in France, 1915-18 – Work for Indians in France, YMCA K/2/4.

cultures captivated Percy Scholes. On YMCA business at a French port in 1917 he recalled that:

Dieppe is the place where the greatest mixture of races is to be seen. There I have noticed an Algerian, sitting at an open window of one of the big hotels, now used as a hospital, and playing on a flute the same little phrase over and over again. Not much of a tune, perhaps, but it brought to the windows all the brother Algerians, who stood or sat, quietly listening so long as the playing continued. Then, in the same place I have seen a group of coal-black Senegalese walking through the streets to the sound of a one-stringed instrument with a parchment body and a plectrum consisting of the tooth of some animal fastened to the finger of the performer on a leather loop. I stopped them, and examined the instrument, and should have liked to buy it, but it would have been cruel to deprive these men, so far from their home, of the tones and tunes that remind them of it, and took them in memory back to their inland swamps or the silver sands of their Atlantic shore. How often, too, have I watched our Chinamen at work to music about the docks at Dieppe, with their blue costumes and their little round brown caps. The foreman gives the order by a little phrase and the coolies respond by rhythmic movements, in lifting or pulling, or whatever the task may be, singing as they do so.<sup>60</sup>

Musical entertainments and the other services provided by the YMCA were greatly appreciated by all troops of the British Empire. A private soldier from Kent serving in India

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<sup>60</sup> Percy A. Scholes, 'Music and the Fighting Man,' *The Red Triangle*, vol.2, September 1917–August 1918, YMCA/K/6/1, p. 192.

wrote that '[w]e are also running a good concert party which has made a great name, "The Shara-Bandits". The[y] are probably going to Bagdad at the end of next week and should make a hit there. Our sports include the "Buffs Race Meeting" on Boxing Day and they should provide some good racing.'<sup>61</sup> Another conveyed that:

We are looked after very well here we have games here namely the good old English game cricket – croquet and Bammington [*sic*] & we also have a band come on the grounds & play music. Bombay ladies & also YMCA men come round every Tuesday & Thursday & bring writing material – cards – papers, books & post-cards ... they put the only shop near as out of bounds, so we have to be satisfied with the things they give us.<sup>62</sup>

While many British soldiers serving in India had to stay within their own camps, some servicemen could venture into nearby towns. One private soldier serving in the 'Near East' reported that they could 'get into the town of an evening. Theres [*sic.*] plenty of amusements, the Divisional Pantomine, picture palaces and a circus. So you see we're having a fairly good time'.<sup>63</sup> Many British soldiers serving in hotter climes recognised that they were 'fortunate in having the sand & not mud & are correspondingly grateful. But we sigh for the green fields of home as we can put up with the elements better there'.<sup>64</sup> The sense of home-sickness is palpable the millions of soldiers' letters home, but their duty to the empire regularly shines through: 'How proud we are to know that so many have left our own small village to serve

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<sup>61</sup> Letter from Private Charles V Byford, India, 9 July 1915, Great Chart Papers, Kent History and Library Centre (KHLC).

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Private Douglas Skinner, Bombay, 3 October 1916, Great Chart Papers, KHLC.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Private Arthur Cramp, Near East, 26 January [no year given] , Great Chart Papers, KHLC.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Corporal Samuel Brunger, Egypt, 30 December 1916, Great Chart Papers, KHLC.

with the forces in some capacity or other. ... what little we are able to do here to keep the Empire still bound in the same bond of unity'.<sup>65</sup> Another soldier wrote that:

The consolation of knowing that my serving out here, is part & parcel, as one might roughly term it, of the defence of the Empire & thus indirectly showing a little gratitude in helping to defend you, & the dear old home, of course. ... we are still posted on the sandy desert, & civilization seems a thing of the past.<sup>66</sup>

One soldier put his fond thoughts of home into verse:

There's a village in the Homeland that to many a lad is dear,  
It dwells in all our memories each day throughout the year.  
We know we're not forgotten by the true kind friends at home,  
And that thought uplifts and cheers us wherever we may roam.

There are laddies in the trenches, Salonika and the West,  
On the Tigris and in Palestine giving of their best;  
In all the various Fronts, Great Chart Men are called to fight,  
Soon we hope will come the ending – God will show that Right is Might.

Then our Boys are on the Ocean, keeping clear the wide North Sea,  
Some in far off India busy, doing well what is duty,  
And like a magnet drawing comes the thought to every heart:

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from Company Sergeant-Major William Brunger, India, 8 July 1915, Great Chart Papers, KHLC.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from Corporal Samuel Brunger, 2/5th Suffolk Rgt., 12 August 1916, Great Chart Papers, KHLC.



“They’re thinking of me there at home, the dear Friends of Great Chart”.<sup>67</sup>

Music was often found to be a way in which soldiers could reconnect with fond memories of home and family. This was particularly marked at times of intense fighting when men, the majority of whom were aged between 18 and 30 years old, felt in need of comfort. One young soldier wrote to his parents that physical danger ‘is but one part of the trial of war. Quite as bad, to many a man, is the boredom of the Base’:

There is no Y.M. hut here, and nowhere to go and nothing to do. Yesterday I felt in despair, and the others were just as bad. Then I caught sight of a box lying on the ground in the middle of the camp, and some impulse made me jump on it and begin singing, “There’s a land, a dear land.” Everyone gathered round and cheered at the end. *After that we all felt better...*<sup>68</sup>

The existence of instruments, particularly the piano, was widely known to help provide a relaxing atmosphere in the rest areas. Scholes recalled that in some huts ‘the piano is hardly ever silent. ... The piano and the gramophone have done great service to *morale* in this war.’<sup>69</sup> The ‘cellist Helen Mott was one of many musicians who went to play and teach troops with the YMCA. Of the servicemen she encountered she wrote that her

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<sup>67</sup> Poem written by Rifleman Sydney H. Bates, 30 July 1917, Great Chart Papers, KHLIC.

<sup>68</sup> Percy A. Scholes, ‘Music and the Fighting Man,’ *The Red Triangle*, vol.2, September 1917–August 1918, YMCA/K/6/1, p. 192. Emphasis in original.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

they used to come up afterwards and ask questions – or tell us that they liked so-and-so (usually Beethoven), because their mothers or sisters used to play it; or could we oblige next time we came by playing Grieg’s *Peer Gynt* Suite (or generally something classical), as it was such a long time since they had heard it. Always they spoke of the *peace* and *rest* it gave them to hear good music, and those who were not quite so accustomed to it evidently found plenty of interest and enjoy [*sic.*], for they came more than once, and our audiences grew rapidly.<sup>70</sup>

The musical entertainments that accompanied the troops wherever they were posted show that the emotional link with the home they were fighting for was a constant theme. This expanded to the existing dominant narrative of British imperial achievement, which certainly applied to musical activities on the Home Front. The composer Charles Villiers Stanford had written in 1916 that during a national emergency as dire as war that music’s most potent role was that of a rallying cry.<sup>71</sup> This is particularly pertinent to the work of the composer Edward Elgar, who in 1924 the critic and composer Cecil Gray would call ‘the self-appointed Musician Laureate of the British Empire’.<sup>72</sup> Elgar was actively involved in composing music that supported the British war effort. Jeremy Crump has said that ‘the years from 1914 until the beginning of 1918 ... saw him as much involved in performance and composition as at any time and enjoying an unrivalled position in English musical life’.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the *Sheffield*

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<sup>70</sup> Helen Mott, ‘Good Music and the Soldier,’ *The Red Triangle*, vol.1, September 1917–August 1918, YMCA/K/6/1, pp. 367–8.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Villiers Stanford, ‘Music and the War,’ *Interludes, Records and Reflections* (London: Murray, 1922), pp.102–03.

<sup>72</sup> Cecil Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary Music* (London: OUP, 1924), pp. 78–9.

<sup>73</sup> Jeremy Crump, ‘Identity of English Music: The Reception of Elgar 1898-1935,’ eds Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 171.

*Daily Post* commented that '[w]hen the history of the Great War comes to be written the name of Edward Elgar will stand out as the one native composer whose music truly expressed the spirit of our people.'<sup>74</sup>

Elgar's wartime compositions included *Polonia*, which he dedicated to the Polish pianist Paderewski; *Carillon: Une Voix dans le Desert* and *Le Drapeau Belge* as a response to events after the invasion of Belgium; *The Fringes of the Fleet*, a setting of four Kipling poems which toured Oswald Stoll's music hall circuit; and *The Saguine Fan*, a ballet composed for charity. His most well-known work up to this point – *Land of Hope and Glory* – was a staple of wartime concerts. Although Elgar's music was even at that time perceived as rather dated, his music was still popular with mass audiences for its ability to convey a sense of English identity. As Crump underlined, apart from large-scale orchestral performances Elgar's music was played by ensembles such as the Black Dyke Mills Band who played over forty engagements with brass band arrangements of Elgar's symphonies.<sup>75</sup> Elgar emphasised that the Great War was an imperial war – underlined when he conducted a peace pageant at the Coliseum Theatre in July 1919 – *Land of Hope and Glory* and the *Imperial March* were played with Britannia seen to acknowledge the colonies and dependencies.<sup>76</sup>

As far as popular music is concerned sentimentality was a more powerful force than nationalism, and humour was very important. As L.J.Collins has observed, patriotism 'had to be done with humour rather than with solemn seriousness. This was the way they did it in the music hall and this was where the common soldier went for his entertainment.'<sup>77</sup> Some in the

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<sup>74</sup> *Sheffield Daily Post* quoted in Crump, 'Identity of English Music,' p. 175.

<sup>75</sup> Crump, 'Identity of English Music,' p. 175.

<sup>76</sup> Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, pp. 71–2.

<sup>77</sup> L.J.Collins, *Theatre at War 1914–18* (Oldham: Jade, 2004), p. 10.

upper echelons of the music industry were concerned about the baser nature of popular music. The composer Sir Charles Villiers Stanford tried to get military bands to play old folk songs such as *Lillibulero* – a song made popular during the Marlborough Wars, and the Oxford University Press published six patriotic *Songs of War*, all of which, according to *The Times* ‘ought to have a sure place in every camp repertory’.<sup>78</sup> However, the most popular musicals performed on the stages of the West End tell us a great deal about the mood of wartime audiences comprised military personnel and civilians. Fantastical productions such as *Maid of the Mountains*, *A Little Bit of Fluff* and the oriental spectacular *Chu Chin Chow* each ran for more than one thousand performances in the war years. What the majority of audiences wanted was colour:

an antidote to the dreariness of brown mud and khaki uniforms ... a temporary release from the agonies of war; and for this escape they looked, on the whole, to musical comedy and to the music hall with its songs, farcical one act-act sketches and revues ... for reasons which were both psychological and practical.<sup>79</sup>

Popular music, in addition to the theatre and music hall, were too powerful not be made relevant and purposeful. Music was soon utilised for the purposes of recruitment, propaganda, fundraising, and the need for servicemen to protect the interests of the British Empire would feature strongly. The fashion for warlike songs at the start of the war in 1914 has reignited a long-standing debate about the nature and extent of popular support for British imperialism. Andrew Thompson’s study of the popular impact of imperialism has underlined the difficulties in ascertaining public attitudes towards the empire, and he has rightly stated

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Collins, *Theatre at War*, p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> L.J.Collins, *Theatre at War*, pp. 2–3.

that ‘what the Empire meant to the masses cannot simply be read from the words of a music hall song’.<sup>80</sup> It is however important to underline that Britain’s annual celebration of Empire Day from 1904, and of the imperial connotations of organisations such as the Scout Movement founded in 1907, are evidence of continued public imperialist discourse which led to frequent demonstrations of patriotic sentiment. John Mullen’s survey of 1,143 songs published in Britain during the First World War identified seven songs, which referenced ‘Empire’ in their title:

*The Empire’s Rally* (1914)

*John Bull’s Empire* (1914)

*For Empire and For England* (1915)

*Sons of the Empire* (1915)

*The Song of Empire* (1915)

*Our Empire* (1916)

*Tommy Atkins Saved His Empire From the Hun* (1917)<sup>81</sup>

The relatively low proportion (0.6 per cent) of songs about the empire suggests that the general reputation of the British wartime music hall as warlike and imperialistic is not entirely justified as the most popular songs ‘sang more about mother than the empire, and far more about Tommy than Kitchener’.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, as a corrective to a mythologized vision

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<sup>80</sup> Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth-Century* (London: Pearson, 2005), p. 39.

<sup>81</sup> The author wishes to thank John Mullen for his assistance with this list of titles. Copies of the music and lyrics are available in the British Library.

<sup>82</sup> Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, p. 89.

of the chirpy British Tommy going singing to his death, wartime sources such as regimental journals provide genuine insights into the music and mentality of British servicemen:

Don't believe these stories that he's [*sic.*] always singing "Tipperary" and that he's always ready for a fight or a frolic. There's no frolic about it and very little music. His frolic and his music is awaiting him at his castle somewhere in the Empire, if he ever sees it again. He came out here to fight, and he's in dead and serious earnest. He wasn't always singing "Tipperary" while he was doing his day's duties in peace times or while he was commuting to and from work; no more does he do it now ... the frolic and the music may come after the job is done.<sup>83</sup>

The Royal Engineers Band was one of the most active military ensembles during the war. They played at a number of high profile concerts, for example on 25 November 1914 at the Queen's Hall, London, in front of Queen Alexandra for the Royal Engineers' Comforts Fund. They would later play at the memorial service for the Minister of War, Lord Kitchener, after his death at sea in 1916. The programme on that occasion was traditionally classical featuring many works by Tchaikovsky, and the concert ended with the national anthems of the Allied Nations: Belgium, Japan, Serbia, Russia and France.<sup>84</sup> Other flagship military bands included the Royal Artillery and a number of Guards regiments who gave thousands of concerts at home and abroad during the war. For example, the Band of the 1/5th Battalion, East Surrey Regiment gave regular performances while on active service in India, and in the archive of

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<sup>83</sup> William G. Shepherd, 'At the Front: An American Opinion of Us,' *The Sapper*, June 1915, Royal Engineers Museum, p. 301.

<sup>84</sup> 'Concert at the Queen's Hall', *The Sapper*, December 2014, REM, p. 111.

the National Army Museum there are a good number of concert programmes from Cawnpore, Nowshera as well as sports events, which were held under the auspices of YMCA. Concerts took place at the Garrison Theatre, Nowshera where a ‘selection of songs, dances, illusions, recitations, imitations, sketches and caricatures’ were given, in January 1917. Other programmes can be seen from events held at Robert’s Memorial Institute at Cawnpore – one on 12 May 1917 says it is ‘in part aid of the YMCA huts in France’. The Nomads concert party of the 1/5th Batt East Surrey Regiment also appeared in addition to The Aerials and The Darktown Coons.<sup>85</sup>

What we can see from these programmes is that the musical entertainments on offer are identical to those performed on the Western Front. The songs listed are largely either sentimental ballads, or humorous and rather raucous tunes with lyrics full of in-jokes and *double-entendre*, which most soldiers would join in to sing. Many programmes are put together in a style that parodies the British local newspaper, echoing the humour of the now well-known British trench publication *The Wiper’s Times*. An illustrated programme for a Grand Fête in aid of the Artists’ Rifles’ VAD hospital in June 1917 features an advert for The Caffir Craawl:

Come and see the untrained man and his squaw-d ... Marvellous Mikers from  
Mashonoland! Wild Narks from Nyassa! The Show That Made Kiralfi Kry!  
Tommies and Tom-toms  
The donkeys may be rode easy, but this is Rhodesia.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Programme for concert at The Garrison Theatre, Nowshera, 20 January 1917, 8411-103, National Army Museum.

<sup>86</sup> Programme for Grand Fête in aid of the Artists’ Rifles’ VAD hospital at Hare Hall camp, 2 June 1917, NAM: 9512-170-3.

That the fighting fronts were full of music and humour may come as a surprise. However, in the midst of so much fear and death there was a great deal of life amongst the servicemen of the British Empire. Music of all kinds prompted the emotional remembrances of home by linking back to the sound worlds of comfort and family. Whether it was a bawdy music hall tune, the strains of a Chopin piano piece, or the sound of their own native instruments, soldiers were reminded of the home – and empire – they were fighting for. The power of music to console, educate and inspire was particularly effective when the work of individual musicians and performers combined with the logistical might of the YMCA, who were able to generate the resources to take musical entertainment to soldiers of the British Empire wherever in the world they were fighting. Music was truly one of the most powerful weapons in the armoury of the British Empire during the First World War.