Frieda Hempel and the Historical Imagination

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In 1928, concert manager and promoter Lionel Powell celebrated fifty years in business with a specially illustrated program for his Sunday afternoon concert series at the Royal Albert Hall (Fig. 1). The couple in the top corner represents his early audiences, filtered through the Regency graphic style popular during the interwar period, with long hair, top hat, and full skirts. By contrast, the later audience has its hair short and slicked back: he sporting a monocle, she wrapped in little more than a knee-length fur coat. Transport has changed too: carriage and horses have become a motorcar. Yet the coachman and chauffeur suggest very much the same “type” of patrons. Powell’s concerts, the illustration implies, continued to attract the best layers of society.

Historical continuity was further emphasized through the artists presented in Powell’s series, one of whom was soprano Frieda Hempel. Born in 1885, Hempel was thought to bridge pre- and postwar cultural practice, serving as a reminder for some latter-day listeners that the prima-donna recital was not simply “a relic of the deplorable taste of the unmusical Victorian era,” as a 1935 critic pointed out. After an operatic debut at Berlin’s Königliche Oper in 1905, she first appeared at Covent Garden in 1907 and at the Metropolitan Opera at the end of 1912. From 1914 until shortly before her death in 1955, she was based in the United States; her last recital, at New York’s Town Hall, was in 1951. There were several musicians who had similarly lengthy careers. However, history came to play an unusual role in determining how Hempel presented herself to the public after World War I. In many ways she was a modern celebrity, who wore the latest fashions, had a transatlantic reputation, and took full advantage of publicity available through new media. But her

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1. The Jubilee celebrated fifty years of the business itself. Powell had joined the venture when its original owner, German Alfred Schulz-Curtius, was interned as an enemy alien during World War I. Powell gained a reputation for bringing international stars to Britain, featuring them both in his Sunday afternoon “celebrity” concerts at the Royal Albert Hall and on “celebrity” tours. “Obituary: Lionel John Manning Powell.”


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most successful American and British tours of the 1920s were recreations of an 1850 concert by “Swedish nightingale” Jenny Lind, events in which Hempel encouraged audiences to imagine they had reentered the past.

The example of Hempel’s Lind concerts illuminates a number of issues surrounding the status of singers and vocal recitals in the first decades of the twentieth century. War politics threatened to curtail the German singer’s career but, by emulating Lind, Hempel managed successfully to craft a more

Figure 1  Program cover for Lionel Powell Concert, Royal Albert Hall, London, 30 September 1928. Courtesy of the Royal Albert Hall Archive, London, UK. Ref No. RAHE/1/1928/55.
palatable, cosmopolitan image for Anglo-American audiences, proving both her artistry and commercial savvy. Although the spread of mass media during the interwar period is generally seen to broaden the reach of classical music, as the critical reception of Hempel’s Lind project demonstrates, there was heated debate over the relative merits of high-, middle-, and lowbrow repertoire. Access to gramophone recordings further rewrote the ways in which historical voices—Lind’s and, as time passed, Hempel’s—were imagined.

Histories of America and Britain in the 1920s tend to stress the new: the age of modernism, of jazz and its bright young things. Yet many artists, in the immediate aftermath of the war, turned to the past. As Alexandra Harris and Terry Castle have recently pointed out (and is evident in the “early” fashions of Figure 1), there was a fascination in Britain with Georgianism and the rococo. Wearing wigs and fancy frocks was perhaps a means to escape the horrors of the previous decade: in musical terms a return to the “nostalgic kitsch” of Richard Strauss’s Der Rosenkavalier; or, more radically, an Anglophone cousin to French neoclassicism. Hempel was Berlin’s and New York’s first Marschallin. She was thus already associated with antique sartorial display (Fig. 2) and, no less importantly, with a character acutely aware of time passing. By offering an escapist interlude of decorous women and tuneful repertoire, her recreation of Lind’s concert might, then, convey a similar historical disengagement.

But it is necessary to distinguish here between creative responses to the past through new compositions and re-creative ones through performance. The modernist roots of historically informed performance practices are routinely recognized. Less often acknowledged are the critical negotiations between continuing traditions and their often only gradual transformation in response to aesthetic and technological developments. As the example of Hempel’s Lind concerts demonstrates, many performers (perhaps especially singers) were keen to maintain links with earlier, but not too distant, generations: a “golden age” representing a “grand tradition” on which modern performers could draw for validation.9

5. The Berlin premiere of Der Rosenkavalier took place on 4 April 1911, the Met’s on 9 December 1913 (Hempel joined the cast at Covent Garden in 1914).
6. For an overview of historicism in Der Rosenkavalier, see Zywietz, “Strauss, der Fortschriftlische”; and Hart, “Strauss and Hofmannsthal’s Accidental Heroine.”
7. On the modernist ideology of historically informed performance, see Taruskin, “Pastness of the Present.”
8. For more on this, see Edgerton, Shock of the Old.
9. See Potter, Vocal Authority, 62–64.
Hempel’s historical status was further reinforced by her singing coloratura roles—a voice type facing “impending extinction”—in what were considered “archaic” operas by Donizetti and Meyerbeer.\(^{10}\) Her recital programs also seemed outdated: while critics praised Hempel’s versatility, they argued over

\(^{10}\) Quotations from a review of Hempel’s performance in the Metropolitan Opera’s *La fille du Régiment*: “Donizetti Military Opera Is Revived,” 12.
the virtues of mixing Italian opera, German lieder, and English-language popular song in one concert. Such criticism reflected a trend, in the interwar period, away from the nineteenth-century hybrid recital toward an increasing homogeneity of repertoire. Symphonic and chamber music were already typically presented in dedicated programs and a handful of vocalists—Lilli Lehmann, Lillian Nordica, Ernestine Schumann-Heink, and Marcella Sembrich—began to offer recitals which excluded opera arias. Singers such as Elena Gerhardt devoted themselves to lieder, and national schools of “art song” were nurtured, particularly after the war. Yet the status of song remained ambiguous in social and aesthetic terms: this small-scale genre maintained an almost unique ability to slip between popular and classical spheres—increasingly contested territories in an era of rapidly expanding mass media.

Critical responses to Hempel’s Jenny Lind concerts invoked notions of both “high-” and “lowbrow” cultures, drawing in also a newly coined term: “middlebrow.” Said by Punch to have been discovered by the BBC (the “betwixt and between company,” according to Virginia Woolf), the “middlebrow” were those people “hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff that they ought to like.” The popularity of Hempel’s Lind concerts, the singer and her supporters argued, made them ideal vehicles to introduce audiences not only to a slice of music history in general, but also to “highbrow” repertoire such as the songs of Schubert and Schumann—repertoire shunned in Britain and America during wartime, but now regaining its status. Hempel’s recordings similarly shifted between “higher” and “lower” song types. Her discography from the 1920s ranged from “My Old Kentucky Home” to Handel’s “O! Had I Jubal’s Lyre,” the “Shadow Song” from Meyerbeer’s Dinorah, Mendelssohn’s “Auf Flügeln des Gesanges” (in German and English), and Brahms’s “Sapphische Ode.” Again, some critics expressed discomfort at her pursuing popular repertoire. The spread of recordings (and, to an even greater extent, radio) during the interwar period was considered an important means by which to enhance the accessibility of

12. See Potter and Sorrell, History of Singing, 197.
13. According to Levine, the term “highbrow” gained currency in the United States in the 1880s, with “lowbrow” following some twenty years later. See his Highbrow/Lowbrow, 121–25.
15. Hempel recorded a wider variety of music for the American Edison Company; for the German label Polydor and the British Gramophone Company her recordings were mostly classical. See Moran, “The Recorded Legacy of Frieda Hempel,” in Hempel, My Golden Age of Singing, 391–429.
classical music. At the same time, however, articles in newly founded specialist magazines such as *The Gramophone* perpetuated, for certain kinds of music, an ideal of attentive listening that deliberately separated the highbrows from the *hoi polloi*.

The ability to hear Hempel on the gramophone also underscored the ways in which sound recording could transform perceptions of music history. Recorded voices seemed less in danger of being lost, as Lind’s had been. Instead they could be repeated at will on the gramophone (at least for as long as the discs survived). But while the hooped skirts of the Lind concerts may have encouraged spectators to imagine themselves as going back in time, as many reviewers noted, the sounds they heard were very much of the present. This was partly because Hempel’s vocal technique was contemporary: although square pianos were wheeled on stage, she made little effort to replicate Lind’s singing style. Hempel’s Lind concerts were thus dramatically different from most manifestations of the early-music movement of the 1920s even though—like the clavichord recitals of Arnold Dolmetsch—they raised thorny issues about historical “authenticity.” Reviewers often tried to distinguish between Hempel singing as herself and Hempel singing as Lind; and between hearing Hempel on stage and hearing her on the gramophone. In so doing they revealed much about changing attitudes toward both the ontology of performance and toward music history in the age of mechanical reproduction.

**Before Lind: Hempel’s Transatlantic Career**

The significance of the Lind project becomes clearer when considered within the context of a life shaped, as so many were in the early twentieth century, by major aesthetic, technological, and political change. Hempel’s international career seems unremarkable, until the complex cultural negotiations that underpinned it are taken in account. Her German identity was vital in establishing her credentials as a serious musician in the United States, but proved problematic during World War I; the cosmopolitanism she adopted in response—which would be heightened by her association with Lind—helped to maintain a transatlantic reputation, but one that had to be constantly renegotiated according to place and venue. Hempel also managed to slip between highbrow and lowbrow, by leaving the opera house for the concert hall, by extending her repertoire beyond standard classical works, and by using, with varying degrees of success, publicity to further her celebrity.


18. A parallel might be drawn here to a figure such as Sarah Bernhardt, although Hempel said she resisted critics’ attempts to label her the “singing Bernhardt”; *My Golden Age of Singing*, 225. On Bernhardt’s cultivation of cosmopolitan celebrity, see Glenn, *Female Spectacle*.
Hempel made her name as a coloratura soprano. She was a famous Queen of the Night; in Berlin she sang Gilda and Lucia opposite Caruso; at the Met her roles included Marguerite in *Les Huguenots* (again with Caruso), Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Olympia in the American premiere of *Les contes d’Hoffmann*, and Violetta in *La traviata*. She also sang heavier roles: her Covent Garden debut (against her better judgment) was as Eva in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and, as mentioned, she was Berlin’s and New York’s first Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*.

As well as appearing in opera, Hempel gave concert recitals. While at her first appearance at Berlin’s Beethovensaal (in 1905, alongside child prodigy violinist Mischa Elman) she included some Schubert songs, her early programs primarily played to her strengths in coloratura: at the Beethovensaal she sang a Queen of the Night aria and what would become one of her party pieces, Heinrich Proch’s *Theme and Variations*, “Deh! torna mio bene.” Such repertoire may have pleased her admirers from the opera house. Some concert reviewers, though, were snooty, noting the music’s—and sometimes the singer’s—limitations. “It is always regretted that the musical literature for a display of this particular vocal endowment is so terribly limited, and so terribly poor in quality,” commented a writer in *The Observer* of a Hempel recital later, in 1914.19

There was also increasing discomfort at singers mixing genres, as Hempel did at her first Carnegie Hall recital on 15 February 1916. The program (Table 1) carefully balanced familiar operatic arias with material designed to suggest Hempel’s stylistic range. “Divinités du Styx” was known to New York audiences as a common insertion to Gluck’s *Orfeo*, although the *New York Times* reviewer was puzzled why Hempel decided to sing it in German.20 Leo Blech’s arrangement of Strauss’s “Blue Danube Waltz,” sung in Italian with elaborate vocal ornamentation, had already been heard sung by Hempel earlier that season, as had “The Last Rose of Summer” from Friedrich von Flotow’s *Martha*.21 Her lieder were thought successful “within a certain range of expression”—Wolf’s “vivacious” “Elfenlied” had to be repeated.22 A word about encores: it was standard practice, at this time, for singers to sing particularly well-received numbers again, and for encores to be added to groups of songs (as can be seen in square brackets on the Carnegie Hall program).

20. On the history and practice of aria insertions, see Poriss, *Changing the Score*.
21. W. J. Henderson, writing for the *Sun*, thought the “perfumed sentiment” of Hempel’s “The Last Rose” was overshadowed by Caruso in a performance on 27 December 1915. The following season he commented of her “brilliant” performance (25 December 1916): “She of course had to repeat ‘Qui Sola Vergin rosa’, and in observance of custom she sang the encore in English, as ‘The Last Rose of Summer.’” http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm, accessed 5 June 2012.
22. “Miss Hempel’s Recital: Songs and Arias Delightfully Sung in Carnegie Hall.”
Although critics complained about this throughout the 1920s, the habit lingered longer on the recital stage than it did in the opera house.23 Hempel’s Carnegie Hall concert was well received, but a similar selection the following year (which included the Old Swedish “When I was Seventeen,” noted as having been made famous by Jenny Lind), was declared “not of impeccable taste” by the New York Times. Neither the Bellini nor the Strauss waltz, according to the critic, “belong[ed] on such a program.”24 “Such a program,” presumably, meant a song recital. There were two ruling paradigms. Songs would either be interspersed with instrumental numbers by “assisting artists” (such as Elman in Berlin) or were presented in groups arranged by composer, period, or genre—the template familiar today and increasingly the norm in New York. Opera was sometimes included, but it was typically “early,” meaning up to Rossini. More to the point, while Hempel “may find and doubtless has found outside New York, in cities where the operas themselves are not sung, a sharper appetite for this sort of mixed pickles,” here the

23. According to Poriss, in opera houses, including the Met, “encores were largely banned in the 1920s and 1930s”; see her “Introduction: Italian Opera’s Fashion and Legacies,” in Marvin and Poriss, eds., Fashions and Legacies, 1. Critics complained about excessive applause at celebrity recitals in particular; for example, see Toye, “Studies in Music Heresy IV: The Desirability of Applause.” According to Musical America, Hempel had to repeat Farley’s “The Night Wind” four times at the Royal Albert Hall, “before the audience would permit her to proceed with the program.” Musical America 56 (19 August 1922): 4; quoted in Hempel, Golden Age, 353.
24. “Frieda Hempel’s Recital.”

Table 1  The program for Frieda Hempel’s first Carnegie Hall recital, which took place in the Main Hall on 15 February 1916, accompanied by Coenraad V. Bos. Courtesy of the Carnegie Hall archive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christoph W. Gluck</td>
<td>“Divinités du Styx,” from Alceste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George F. Handel</td>
<td>“Oh! Had I Jubal’s Lyre,” from Joshua</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Schumann</td>
<td>“Der Nussbaum,” from Myrthen, Op. 25, No. 1, and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Widmung,” from Myrthen, Op. 25, No. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Franz Schubert</td>
<td>“Die Forelle,” D. 550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart</td>
<td>“Männer suchen stets zu naschen” (“Warnung”), K. 433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannes Brahms</td>
<td>“Vergebliebendes Ständchen,” from Romanzen und Lieder, Op. 84, No. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>“Das Vielchen,” K. 476 [Encore]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giuseppe Verdi</td>
<td>“Ernani! Ernani, involami,” from Ernani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folksong (Irish)</td>
<td>“The Last Rose of Summer” [Encore]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtland Palmer</td>
<td>“Song of the Nile”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folksong</td>
<td>“Phyllis has such charming graces”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Arne</td>
<td>“The lass with the delicate air”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugo Wolf</td>
<td>“Elfenlied,” from Lieder nach Gedichten von Eduard Mörike, No. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans Pfitzner</td>
<td>“Gretel,” from Fünf Lieder, Op. 11, No. 5</td>
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smörgåsbord approach was considered distasteful. Specialization was the order of the day: if not necessarily between types of song (art and folk were often presented side by side) then certainly between opera and song. Critics and musicians distinguished the “singer of songs,” as the concert singer was sometimes known, by repertoire and performance style, raising numerous questions about the aesthetic standing of particular repertoires and listening practices.

Hempel was recognized as being “one of those who, while they win admiration at the Metropolitan Opera House for their performances in opera, have a longing for admiration also in the more difficult and recondite art of song singing.” Yet,

Prima donnas rarely have the intellectual concentration, the penetration and the imagination to move their listeners in the confines of the concert room where they are bound to curtail their usual means of expression, and light sopranos, like Miss Hempel, whose emotional scope is naturally restricted, have special difficulties to contend with in holding the attention of their auditors. Critical disapproval of the prima donna as an artistic personality has an extended and much-discussed history that need not be rehearsed here. The qualities ascribed to successful concert performance, though, are worth pausing over. Crucially, emphasis is placed on holding the attention of auditors, of listeners. It is not simply that the prima donna is thought to lack the intellectual ability to deal with a particular repertoire. It is also that within “the confines of the concert room” the singers are denied the physical trappings—costume, gestures, maybe even full voice—that usually helped them to create an impression, to “move” their audience. There was, it is true, a continuing tradition of “costume recitals,” at which performers wore historically or ethnically appropriate dress. It is also evident from remarks in reviews and from images that concert performers were still fairly free with their gestures and movements on stage. A transition was under way, though, toward a less theatrical approach, made apparent through responses to Hempel, who was seen as swimming against the tide.

From 1916 onward, Hempel sang only half seasons with the Met. She gave what would prove to be her last performance there on 10 February 1919, as Annetta in Luigi and Federico Ricci’s Crispino e la comare. A brief stint in Chicago aside, she subsequently eschewed, as one critic put it, the opera house’s “aviary for the concert field’s harvest.” It was a pragmatic move for a

25. “Frieda Hempel Sings. Large Audience Applauds Soprano in Her Varied Program.”
27. Quoted in Hempel, My Golden Age of Singing, 156.
28. For more see Rutherford, Prima Donna and Opera.
29. Schumann-Heink had explained: “As a concert singer you stand alone, aided only by the piano.” “In the Field of Music,” Philharmonic, 187.
maturing voice. She also claimed it was an opportunity for her to prove herself artistically. It was also—perhaps surprisingly—financially advantageous. When she had asked for a raise at the Met, the manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza explained that the most he had ever paid for an operatic appearance was $2,500, for Caruso. At that time Hempel could command $1,500 for a recital; what is more, she could give as many as four concerts a week on tour. Under her new managers, the Wolfsohn Bureau, however, she enjoyed a leisurely twenty-five engagements over three months. The benefit of not having worn out her voice by also giving operatic performances was noticed by reviewers, who thought she sounded fresher than usual.

Hempel’s decision to dedicate her time to concertizing was complicated by contemporary politics. Austrian and German music and musicians had dominated opera houses and concert halls in North America before World War I, but their occupying rights began to be queried with the outbreak of hostilities in Europe.31 Hempel’s itinerary and attitude during this period drew censure from both sides of the Atlantic. Her decision to summer in Berlin in 1915 and 1916, where she gave benefit concerts for wounded German soldiers, was seen as suspicious by the allies, while in Germany her return to New York was taken as evidence that all she heeded was the “call from Dollarland.”32 (She recalled a German cartoon entitled “The Ungratefuls” that showed one-time Berlin stars Emmy Destinn, Caruso, and Hempel singing together on stage—as they did at the Met’s 1914–15 season. “Down with Germany, long live Czecho-Slovakia,” was the caption under Destinn; “Down with Germany, long live Italy,” was under Caruso; for Hempel it read “Down with Germany, long live the dollar.”33)

Hempel relates several anecdotes about her wartime reception in her memoirs, and while—as with all such volumes—they are rather one-sided, reading them in tandem with press coverage of the time illustrates the complexity of her situation. Still, Hempel’s comments during wartime were rarely politically astute. Her newly decorated apartment overlooking Central Park was featured in photo spreads in fashion magazines: “Madame de Pompadour herself had no lovelier boudoir,” commented *Vogue*.34 In 1916 she reported that because of the war German women were thinner and so, in her view, more elegant (in her memoir she explained that “the wear and tear of anxiety and privation were removing the superfluous fat, and the women were reaping the reward of sleepless nights, bleak days, and awful suspense”35). *Musical America* para-

32. “Echoes of Music Abroad.”
33. Hempel, *My Golden Age of Singing*, 189. Hempel kept scrapbooks of her reviews throughout her career; unfortunately her memoir is largely unfootnoted and some sources are hard to verify. The clippings file for the singer held by the New York Public Library is similarly poorly referenced.
died: “Elephantiasis of the ankle, like typhus, is conquered by the rigorous treatment of war. There is a new cure for plural chin, as well as for gangrene. Mme Hempel has somehow made the world seem brighter.”36 (Hempel defended herself, in her memoir, by explaining that she was concerned about her expanding waist-line.37) Meanwhile a French magazine alleged that Hempel had criticized the style of American women—and journalists on both sides of the Atlantic leapt to their defense.38

Hempel’s political gaffes were not limited to fashion. On 14 November 1917, as Maria in the act 2 lesson scene of Donizetti’s _La fille du régiment_ (sung in Italian at the Met), Hempel followed her typical substitution of the regimental song, the Proch variations, with an encore of “Keep the home fires burning.”39 To the consternation of some critics, she also replaced the expression “Porco di bacco!” with “Gee whiz!”40 Pitts Sanborn, of the _Commercial Advertiser_, noted that the French tricolor “always drew from the house a salvo of applause and once, from Miss Hempel, a kiss.”41 A report of the production in the conservative _Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung_ caused outrage in Germany.42 After an aborted trip in 1921—when details of her wartime Donizetti performance were revived in the press—she did not perform in Berlin for another six years.43

Hempel attempted to quell Stateside rumors about her political allegiances by announcing her engagement to Ohio silk merchant William B. Kahn in early 1916; their marriage granted her citizenship, which meant she was one of the only German-born musicians whose contract was not terminated by the Metropolitan Opera House when America joined the War. Her colleagues Marguerite Ober, Johanna Gadski, and Otto Goritz were dismissed because they were now enemy aliens. At least in theory, they could be replaced with

37. Ibid., 170.
38. Reported in “Mephisto’s Musings.”
39. According to the _Herald_: “The audience greeted the song with a veritable ovation of applause which did not subside until Mr. Papi started his musicians playing it a second time for a repetition by Miss Hempel.” http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm, accessed 5 June 2012.
42. Hempel blamed Margarete Ober and Putzi Hanfštängel for spreading rumors about her anti-German conduct; see ibid., 187–89.
43. On her return, Berlin critics “seemed willing to forgive her trespasses if only she had not sung”: her voice was thought to have lost its sheen, and one reviewer commented that her reliance on pantomime (rarely mentioned otherwise) seemed curiously old-fashioned. “New Productions in Germany.”
musicians of different nationalities. But the German language was also censored, and this had a greater impact on repertoire. Like many singers, Hempel altered her concert programs during wartime to assuage the concerns of town mayors and concert managers. She also had difficulty circulating her recordings.\footnote{The Edison recording company received a customer complaint about an advertisement (3 July 1918) that ran: “This German Hempel . . . has given us insult upon insult. . . . Feature American singers. We’ve had enough of the Hun for all time.” Moran, “An Informal and Selected Chronology,” in Hempel, \textit{My Golden Age of Singing}, 346.} She omitted German repertoire when asked and included English-language favorites such as “Dixie,” “The Long, Long Trail,” “Annie Laurie,” and “Home, Sweet Home” (the latter, along with the “Blue Danube Waltz,” apparently without irony became her standard closing number—perhaps encouraging association with other singers popular with American audiences, including Adelina Patti and, of course, Lind). By February 1918, German was described as “a language almost as rare in concert as in opera now”\footnote{Performances of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at concerts and public meetings, and its official adoption by the military during wartime contributed toward it becoming the national anthem in 1931: see Delaplaine, \textit{John Philip Sousa}, 70–83, and Watkins, \textit{Proof Through the Night}, 281. The \textit{Observer} reported in 1918, via the Wireless Press, that Hempel had been criticized by the \textit{Cologne Gazette} for writing, in English, to a New York-based paper denying that she had ever refused to sing “The Star-Spangled Banner.” “‘Offences’ of German Prime Donne.”} by November of that year (the month an Armistice was declared), Hempel sang the \textit{de facto} American anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” at every concert.\footnote{“No Longer Can We Ignore Songs in English, Say These Artists [Herbert Witherspoon, Hempel, Reinhard Werrenrath, Amparito Farrar, Florence Hinkle and Henrietta Strauss],” 3.} Liberty Bonds in support of the war effort were sold at concert intervals, and she frequently performed at benefits and for American troops. At a gala drive at Carnegie Hall, one woman paid $1,000 to hear Hempel sing “There’s a Long, Long Trail.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Hempel put her name behind campaigns to improve the available Anglophone repertoire. She explained that “many singers on beginning their concert career formerly omitted English songs from their program, fearing that the critics would not consider the program classic,” and that it was up to great singers—such as herself—to set a precedent.\footnote{A full list of her recordings is provided by Moran, “The Recorded Legacy of Frieda Hempel,” in Hempel, \textit{My Golden Age of Singing}, 391–429.} Increasing the number of English and American songs on programs would, she predicted, “assure better audiences and better attention at all concerts.”\footnote{Ibid.} It was rhetoric familiar from contemporary discussions of performance in translation and the promotion of music appreciation.

Yet there was a dichotomy here between Hempel’s live and recorded repertoire, for she did not record any lieder, and very little German-language opera, until after World War I.\footnote{This content downloaded from 130.88.63.7 on Mon, 24 Mar 2014 05:24:39 AM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions}
sisted instead of translations of Italian opera arias; her first American record-
ings (1914 on) were of the same repertoire, sometimes in Italian or English, and of some English-language songs. She recorded a couple of Schubert and Strauss songs for Polydor Berlin in the early 1920s and then, between 1922 and 1924, did some Schubert and Schumann for the English Gramophone Company. The absence of lieder from Hempel's early discography might have been because she was simply better known as an Italian opera singer, and that “fireworks” sold well; however, it also indicates the relative attractiveness, in commercial terms, of different types of repertoire.51

Hempel was keen to stress the artistic benefits of the adaptations to her repertoire: concerts, she claimed, were a “far greater outlet for my artistry” than opera:

I had greater freedom in interpretation and in expression. There were so many nationalities represented in the various audiences, and as a concert singer I could please French, Italians, Germans, and Americans by properly constructing my programs. I made these programs very cosmopolitan, and therefore I became popular with the public.52

Her claim that cosmopolitanism lead to greater popularity echoes wartime discussions about how best to integrate German-speaking immigrant communities.53 “To be American means to be cosmopolitan,” it was claimed: “There are no hyphenated citizens. There are citizens and no citizens.”54 Declaring her cosmopolitanism was also a way to skirt the problem that, as the columnist “Mephisto” in Musical America pointed out, no nation really wished to claim Hempel as their own: “It is . . . humorous to reflect that while in this country she was unjustly attacked for her German sympathies, in Germany she was attacked for her American sympathies and in France attacked for having slurred the Americans.”55 Given the complexities of her situation, particularly her need to divert attention from the complications of her national-political identity, the appeal, for Hempel, of reinventing herself as a Swedish singer who, seventy years earlier, had won over the hearts of American and European audiences alike was obvious.

**Hempel as Lind**

At Carnegie Hall on 6 October 1920—the centenary of Jenny Lind’s birthday—Hempel unveiled her recreation of the first American concert given

51. Very few recordings of lieder—particularly in German—were available in the Anglophone world until Polydor recordings began to be more widely distributed in the 1920s; a limitation that partly reflected postwar politics.
53. German musical life in New York is explored in Horowitz, *Moral Fire*.
55. “Mephisto’s Musings.”
by the “Swedish Nightingale,” which had taken place on 11 September 1850 at Castle Garden (by now the New York Aquarium). The idea for the concert apparently came from the Swedish Society, who wanted to raise funds for a Jenny Lind statue in Stockholm. Hempel was approached, they explained, because she seemed to be the soprano closest in style and quality to Lind. She had, of course, already sung some of Lind’s repertoire (such as “When I Was Seventeen”). Initially Hempel was reluctant, claiming that she did not want to be compared to so great a reputation. Although, as mentioned, “costume” recitals were fairly common, she thought audiences would find a Jenny Lind concert little more than a historical curiosity. However, on reading through the literature sent by the Society she decided that such a concert would be artistically acceptable. Adopting aspects of Lind’s public persona also enabled Hempel to negotiate the tricky postwar waters.

Lind’s arrival into New York had been stage-managed by P. T. Barnum with his usual aplomb. Her ship was greeted with a cannon salute, the landing wharf decorated with flowers “and an evergreen arch decorated with the flags of all nations within whose boundaries Jenny Lind had sung.” Also in flowers were spelt out “Welcome, Jenny Lind,” “Welcome to America!” along with the flag of Sweden, and the Stars and Stripes. Lind was reported by one eyewitness to have “dressed with taste, but simply,” accompanied by a traveling companion and a lapdog presented to her by Queen Victoria: “Lind was gazing around on what can really be called a landscape of humanity, with glances of interest, wonder and curiosity, and well she might, for thirty or forty thousand people were there to greet her.” There was much for Hempel to envy here: the flags from all nations signaled both Lind’s international celebrity and her cosmopolitan appeal; she was appreciated by royalty and by the masses; she dressed tastefully.

Hempel set out deliberately to emulate Lind. She claimed to have studied her “bow, her walk, her gestures, and her posture.” She described how “As I sang, I held in my hand the sheet of music that Jenny Lind habitually held, or rather a copy of the sheet.” Callot Soeurs made a gown that replicated one of Lind’s and Hempel adopted her coiffure, powdering her hair to make it suitably blonde (Fig. 3). But that was not the end of it. All the other musicians were also in period costume. In the lobby young women in hooped skirts sold facsimiles of Lind’s Castle Garden program; red-clad and helmeted firemen guarded the period tin-shielded candles that lit the hall; and the usherettes

56. In 1922, a banquet hosted by the Jenny Lind Association at the Hotel Astor began a campaign to erect a statue of Lind in Manhattan’s Battery Park; Hempel sent a radiogram from Paris promising to give a benefit concert to raise funds. “Honor to Jenny Lind.”
57. See Hempel, My Golden Age of Singing, 229–49.
59. Ibid.
60. Hempel, My Golden Age of Singing, 232.
were in crinolines and carried shepherd’s crooks. The stage was decorated with American and Swedish flags and a banner proclaiming, “Welcome, sweet warbler.” Nineteenth-century square pianos (one bearing Lind’s signature) were used even though, as one reviewer pointed out, by 1850 the grand piano was well established in the United States. Barnum was impersonated by Thomas A. Wise; Lind’s baritone Signor Beletti was represented by Arthur Middleton; Julius Benedict’s place as conductor was taken by Ole Windingstal, and as

Figure 3  Portrait of Hempel as Jenny Lind, Carnegie Hall program. Courtesy of Carnegie Hall, New York City.
pianist by (a bewigged) Coenraad V. Bos; and Daniel Wolf substituted for pianist Richard Hoffman.

Hempel copied Lind’s program almost exactly. It included two overtures, Weber’s Oberon and Benedict’s The Crusaders. Hempel sang “Casta diva” and the trio for soprano and two flutes Meyerbeer wrote for Lind in Ein Feldlager in Schlesien (later reworked as L’étoile du Nord). When she sang “The Herdsman’s Song” she copied Lind by accompanying herself, singing the final echoes without the piano then playing the last note to prove she had stayed at pitch. There were two baritone arias by Rossini: “Largo al Factotum” from Il barbiere di Siviglia and “Sorgete” from Maometto Secondo, and a duet for soprano and baritone, “Pei piacere alla Signore” from Il turco in Italia. Benedict’s setting of Bayard Taylor’s prize poem The Greeting to America, composed at Barnum’s instigation for the concert, was included, but Benedict’s piano duet could not be found, and Thalberg’s Fantasia on airs from Bellini’s Norma was replaced by Carl Reinecke’s improvisation on a Gavotte by Gluck. Hempel’s one addition to the program was the familiar encore, “Home, Sweet Home.”

The hall was packed; both audience and critics were enthusiastic. Hempel announced that she would give the proceeds to the same charity to which Lind had dedicated her concert.⁶¹ Richard Aldrich, of The New York Times, described Hempel as “a golden-haired vision, very like a Swedish nightingale, in white satin crinoline, garlanded with morning glories.”⁶² The overall effect was described as “quaint” and “altogether picturesque,” terms which suggest that the concert was seen as a throwback to an earlier age. “[L]overs of the fine art of song may be comforted and reflect that the art has not yet entirely disappeared,” commented Aldrich, while Henrietta Straus found that Tom Wise’s “inconsequential, but delightful speech” as Barnum “left his auditors with the suspicion that their ancestors were not quite so indiscriminating in their enthusiasms, after all.”⁶³ Fay Stevenson, writing for the “yellow” paper, the Evening World, also invoked—slightly more mischievously—the spirit of old New York:

Father Knickerbocker, shut your eyes after you have seen the seventy frilled-shirt members of the orchestra, the debutante society girl ushers, among them Miss Polly Damrosch, Miss Greta Hoving and Miss Eugenia Fuller, glance over a copy of the original Jenny Lind programme with its wood cuts and advertisements for dysppsia [sic] bitters—simply shut your eyes and see if the spirit of the little Swedish Nightingale will return for one night.⁶⁴

⁶¹. While announced as if unplanned, an interview with Hempel’s secretary prior to the concert reveals that the donation was always intended, as a further emulation of Lind; Stevenson, “Spirit of Jenny Lind.”
⁶². Aldrich, “Jenny Lind’s 100th Birthday Is Kept.”
⁶³. Aldrich quoted in Hempel, My Golden Age of Singing, 243. See also Straus, “Makers of Music,” 144.
The precious language and teasing tone acknowledges that this is not quite the genteel world of Knickerbocker society (nor the newspaper for it); the names singled out from the debutantes were ones with artistic inclinations or, worse yet, associations.65 Yet if the old guard diverted their attention from the vulgarity of the visual show, it is implied, they might still regain access to times and tastes past.

The success of the first Lind concert encouraged Hempel to stage a second, which attracted a 5,000-strong audience at New York’s Hippodrome Theater, and then to tour it around the United States.66 The size of the audience at the Hippodrome might seem surprising, but was in keeping with contemporary appearances by other star vocalists such as John McCormack, Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Amelita Galli-Curci, Alma Gluck, and Luisa Tetrazzini (and was comparable to their sold-out performances at London’s Royal Albert Hall).67 The popularity of the Lind concerts can also be gauged from Hempel’s schedule. Of the sixty-nine concerts she gave in the 1921–22 season, fifteen were as Lind; the next season, almost three times as many of the latter were scheduled.68 She could ask as much as $3,000 for a Lind concert, double what she earned for a “straight” recital. Hempel’s attention to historical detail and the charmed responses to the repertoire performed, not to mention the size of the events, suggest that the Lind concerts might have had a similar appeal to American historical pageants (the popularity of which, after a wartime peak, was beginning to wane). David Glassberg has argued that pageants were valued as a means to bring together the scholarly and the social: the research that went into them strengthened claims of authenticity, while the large numbers involved brought communities together.69 On tour, Hempel solicited participation in concerts by an unusual marketing strategy: before she arrived in town a department store would exhibit a mannequin wearing a copy of one of her Lind dresses and a placard with the initials “J. L.”, which would be followed by an announcement of the concert in the local newspapers. (The example shown in Figure 4 is more explicit: a portrait of Hempel dressed as Lind is hung in the window of the Edison shop, alongside notice

65. Polly (Leopoldine Blaine) Damrosch (1901–1964) was the daughter of Walter Damrosch, the long-time New York Symphony Orchestra conductor, and became playwright Sidney Howard’s second wife in 1931; shortly after the Lind concert she was lampooned in a syndicated article “Why This Year’s Theatre Programs Read Like a Social Register.” Swede Greta Hoving had eloped with a guano entrepreneur aged sixteen; according to her nephew she was a member of the “avant-garde artsy crowd” and claimed to have had an affair with Paul Robeson. Hoving, Artful Tom. Fuller seems more conventional; of the three women, only her family was listed in the Social Register, and she married a Captain in 1923.

66. The New York World reported that the “Hippodrome was full of people and enthusiasm”; quoted in “Hempel Tickets Are Going Fast.”


68. See Hempel, My Golden Age of Singing, 235, 236, 241. Apparently Barnum promised Lind $1,000 for each concert she gave on their planned 150-date tour; she resigned from the tour after ninety-five concerts to get married.

69. Glassberg, American Historical Pageantry, 117.
of her forthcoming appearances.) Society girls were then recruited to act as usherettes, which encouraged attendance by their family and friends. Such community events were thus potentially important mediators of taste for those who wanted to conserve genteel traditions and, no less importantly, for those who wanted to upturn them. As will be seen through the reception of the Lind concerts, the concept of “bringing the past alive” increasingly came under attack as the worst kind of middlebrow popular history.70

The 1850 program was adapted for the road. The costumes were retained—as was the velvet banner “Welcome, sweet warbler” (Fig. 5)—but as Hempel was traveling with only her pianist Bos and the flautist Louis P. Fritze, numbers with other instruments and the baritone were dropped. In their place Hempel introduced songs by Schubert and Schumann, explaining that because Lind had sung them the choice was not entirely anachronistic. As a result, the authenticity of the Lind project came under increasing scrutiny: not only, as we might expect, because it further undermined claims about the concerts’ historical accuracy, but also because of the questions Hempel’s perfor-

70. For a discussion of its literary equivalent in England see Collini, *Common Reading*, 185.
mances raised about embodiment and the relative status of different musical genres.

In 1923, Hempel took the tour to Britain. Hempel had given recitals in London before the war and in June and October 1922; her first Lind concerts there took place on 27 May and 31 October 1923, and were managed by Lionel Powell.

With a canny eye for publicity, on tour Hempel advertised free tickets for people who had heard Lind: in Nebraska, the local radio station broadcast her concert directly to the bed-ridden ninety-one-year-old Mrs. Fannie Dinsmore (who had heard Lind in Cincinnati seventy-four years previously). “Offer to Any Who Heard Jenny Lind: Frieda Hempel Would Have Them as Her Guests.”

A snippet of the film “A Jenny Lind Tea Party,” made on 17 November 1924, can be accessed via the JISC Media Hub: http://jiscmediashub.ac.uk/record/display/031-00031439

Figure 5 Hempel's Lind tour in Arcadia Theater, Detroit, undated. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Used by permission.
autograph; *The Daily Mirror* published a photograph of her presenting one of her records to a Chelsea pensioner, “for use on the [army veterans’] hospital gramophone.”74 As well as the four pensioners who recalled hearing Lind, other guests included Mrs. Frank Gibson (née Eugénie Joachim), “who often heard the great artist at the home of her uncle [violinist Joseph Joachim],” and two of Lind’s students from the Royal College, Frederica Robisho [*sic*] and Amanda Ira Aldridge.75

Yet while Hempel’s concerts remained popular with the public and certain critics for the next few years, others—including Lind’s daughter, Mrs. Raymond Maude—thought them a threat to the earlier singer’s reputation as an “eminent Victorian.”76 *The Musical Times* dismissed the tea party as nothing more than a publicity stunt, describing Hempel’s “appropriation of the fame of a deceased singer” as an “effrontery” and an example of “cheap overseas showmanship”: “she ‘impersonated’ in a manner which on this side of the Atlantic is more usual in the music-hall than in the concert room.”77 Klein’s anxiety about the encroachment of popular and American culture (they were not altogether the same thing) was typical of many British critics, who felt that the lowbrow was gaining the greater part of public interest and were keen to protect highbrow endeavors.78 Thus *The Guardian* described the notion of a “Jenny Lind” recital as “not a little unfair to the dead” and “manifestly more or less of an affectation in the living.”79 Even the more middlebrow *Daily Mail* was circumspect, referring to Hempel’s “so-called” Jenny Lind concert.80 In other words, the parts of Lind’s career serious-minded British listeners preferred to remember were not her early, operatic roles and the com-

74. “‘Jenny Lind’ Party.”
75. “Heard Jenny Lind Sing: Octogenarians at ‘Memory’ Tea Party. Robisho [*sic*] and Aldridge joined the Royal College of Music in 1883; Lind retired from teaching there the following year. It seems likely that Robisho was Frederica Robiolio (1866–1936), who was remembered as a classmate—spelt Fredericka Robiolio—by Aldridge in her conversation with Edward Scobie, “Jenny Lind Taught Me Singing.” The mother of Aldridge (1866–1956) was Swedish soprano Paulina Erickson Brandt and her father African-American Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge; she went on to teach singing and was also known as a composer of light music under the pseudonym Montague Ring.
76. Maude made no mention of Hempel in her book, *The Life of Jenny Lind*. Hempel claimed in her memoir that she made a public statement concerning remarks made by Lind’s family about her project: Mrs. Maude denied that Lind had ever worn a crinoline or that there were any “lost” songs; see her letter to the editor of the *Observer*, “Jenny Lind’s Songs”; and Hempel, *My Golden Age of Singing*, 263.
77. H. J. K. [probably Hermann Klein], “Some Singers of the Month” (1924), 1124; final quotation from idem, “Some Singers of the Month” (1923), 867.
78. A similar sentiment was expressed in Lambert’s chapter “The Disappearing Middlebrow” (*Music Ho!*, 195–99). On later manifestations of the great divide see Chowrimootoo, “Bourgeois Opera.”
79. S. L. [Samuel Langford], “Brand Lane Concerts: Frieda Hempel’s Recital” (1923), 11.
commercial hysteria they inspired in London, or the Barnum-sponsored tour America experienced, but her later appearances in concerts and oratorio.81 Critics referred back to reviews of Lind herself in their attempt to gauge the success of Hempel’s impersonation. They were struck by nineteenth-century critics’ emphasis on the singer’s morality.82 In 1888, George William Curtis had stressed the “simplicity and purity” of Lind’s appearance in *La sonambula*, going on to praise her “charming maidenhood . . . the essential womanliness of the whole impression . . . Certainly no public singer was ever more invested with a halo of domestic purity.”83 However, while Lind might have been morally superior to the present generation, she was not necessarily musically so. There was a danger in confusing the vocalist, “who gave so much money to hospitals and bore a character almost oppressive in its rectitude,” with her audiences, whose “sobs and sighs . . . were a manifestation of the moral rather than the musical sense.”84 Only “the few delighted in her art,” cautioned an arch review of Maude’s biography: “the crowd idolised her as an incarnation of the contemporary ideal of womanhood.”85

The *Musical Times* may have been referring only to Hempel’s manner on stage when advising her to remember that the woman she was impersonating “was herself the most modest of all the famous singers . . . a rare and precious characteristic,” but the comparison was telling.86 Hempel’s career was not untouched by scandal, both personal and financial.87 However, her appearance as Lind was praised for its sweetness: she was said to look like “a Dresden china doll” and “a Valentine,” and to be “demurely charming”; “Note the modest throat and ‘no feet’ effect,” instructed the New York *Evening World*.88 H. T. Parker’s description of her as “graciousness, in a modern version,” though, hints at the constructions lurking behind the costume.89 Hempel claimed that she adopted a “bobbed” hairstyle not simply to be fashionable but in order to make it easy for her to use wigs for her Lind concerts rather than messy and time-consuming powder. She also related in her memoirs—feigning

81. “New York never forgot,” declared Stevenson in “Jenny Lind Lives Again.” “Our mothers and our grandmothers, our fathers and our grandfathers, our aunts and our uncles, all told the same story: ‘It was wonderful! Her notes were like a bird’s!’ ”

82. More recent accounts of Lind’s American reception are provided in Caswell, “Jenny Lind’s Tour of America”; and Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 33–34.


84. “Those Victorians Again.”

85. C., “*Life of Jenny Lind* by Mrs. Raymond Maude,” 1100.


embarrassment—that her hooped skirt had once become hooked on the piano stool when she sat to perform the “Echo Song”: had she, like Lind, worn pantaloons the gentlemen in the first rows would have been saved an eyeful of ankles and stockings. At the same time, Hempel courted female followers by playing old and new woman against each other: a 1925 American Laundry advertisement, which featured an illustration of an aproned woman with washing basket looking yearningly through a barred window at blue skies outside, was accompanied by an interview with the singer during the intermission of a Lind concert. “Nightingale or canary?” the tagline read: “A plea for more freedom for women.”

In an uncharacteristic interview with the Evening Independent of St. Petersburg, Florida, Hempel was reported to have found that her “Jenny Lind disguise” helped her to lose her self-consciousness when appearing on the concert stage: when playing operatic roles, she explained, “the Hempel part of me was missing. But on the concert stage I seem to be all Hempel.” The question of the performer’s “true” identity lay at the heart of critical responses to the Lind project and provides some insight into perceptions of the vocal recitalist’s stage persona, as well as the ways in which certain repertoire was thought to come closer to genuine expression.

Many reviewers felt the need to disentangle Hempel’s appearance from her vocal performance. At the first concert, the New York Times had explained that “the voice was the voice of Hempel, with its charm of brightness and agility, but the songs were songs that Jenny Lind sang.” Yet Herbert F. Peyser confessed that, while the audience was enthusiastic, “she has sung much better as Frieda Hempel than as Jenny Lind.” Later critics—particularly in Britain—were less reticent: according to The Musical Times, Hempel was “a charmer” who “ravished the ear,” but her appearance “in fancy dress” at the Royal Albert Hall was no “‘Jenny Lind concert’ . . . it was a Frieda Hempel concert.” Still, Hempel’s costume helped some reviewers to overcome their objections to her program. The Times struggled to understand how Lind, supposedly a “great artist . . . could ever have succeeded in captivating musicians . . . by a performance of anything so trivial” as L’etoile du Nord. Others, however, found that Hempel could be excused indulging in musical ornament while dressed as Lind: “In no ordinary way do we want to hear Bellini’s ‘Casta

92. “Frieda Hempel Is Yet Shy.” Stevenson reported the following exchange (in “Jenny Lind Lives Again”): “Do I really look like Jenny Lind?” “Exactly, and don’t you FEEL like her?” . . . “Quite as much as I do like Frieda Hempel.”  
93. “Frieda Hempel Again Sings as Jenny Lind.”  
96. “Week-end Concerts: Miss Frieda Hempel.”
Diva’ or renew acquaintance with Meyerbeer’s ‘L’Étoile du Nord,’ but wafted back by ocular illusion to the days when such things were admired, one does,” it was commented.97 Richard Capell of The Daily Mail concurred that only with “the palliation of the 1850 costume” could her repertoire be heard with the “toleration of historical perspective.”98 Such dependence on visual crutches became more pronounced once Hempel began to present only half of her concerts in costume. She made little distinction in terms of programming, but reviewers continued to claim a preference for hearing Hempel as herself, rather than “as” Lind, noting when she appeared “in her own clothes.”99 The British critics’ determination to distinguish between singer and costume demonstrate the deep roots of more recent theoretical discussions about voice and authenticity. Their comments also might be taken to indicate that anxiety about disembodiment, typically ascribed to hearing voices on recordings, extended to this modern recreation of the past onstage.

The Daily Mail declared Hempel’s decision to appear “as ‘herself’ . . . is sensible, for an artist with her gifts is not dependent on representing a great vocalist of bygone days.”100 Few had been convinced by Hempel’s somewhat half-hearted attempts at historical performance practice. Apparently Lind had simply turned her face from the audience when singing the famous “Echo Song,” appearing “to listen to the echo as being thrown back from the rear wall”; “Hempel was not content with the nuance; she rose from her chair, sang the coda and touched the final chord standing.”101 Guardian critic Samuel Langford felt unable to judge whether her attempts at “a shake” were a valid “simulation of the high Victorian manner”; or whether her decision to land on the tonic on the penultimate rather than the final note of “All Through the Night” followed “a Jenny Lind tradition.”102 He objected still more strongly to Hempel’s embellishment of Schubert’s “Du bist die Ruh’”: “a diverted form of the melody which we have seen printed, but never before heard sung. . . . Whether these features are supposed to be in accordance with the singing of Jenny Lind or no we cannot say, but they are to our judgement unacceptable.”103 Objections to what may be a historical mode of singing here

97. Quoted in Hempel, My Golden Age of Singing, 249.
99. “Music in Scotland,” 67; and H. J. K., “London Concerts,” 1025. A typical example of Hempel’s recital programs was the Powell concert she gave at the Royal Albert Hall in 1928, which also featured flautist Gaston Blanquart and pianist Arpad Sandor: it opened with a Sonata in E flat, followed by a Schubert group, a Wolf group, Bellini’s “Come per me sereno” from La sonnambula, Lorillet’s Gavotte and Aria, and a Strimer arrangement of “Flight of the Bumblebee.” It ended with three English songs, “Der Zeisig,” and Julius Benedict’s “The Gypsy and the Bird.”
100. In “Today’s Gossip: Tired of ‘Jenny Lind.’ ”
102. S. L., “Brand Lane Concerts: Frieda Hempel’s Recital” (1923); and idem, “Brand Lane Concerts” (1924).
combine with distaste for the performance habits of the coloratura prima donna.

Great opera, so far as most interwar critics were concerned, meant Wagner, who “has sophisticated our innocence . . . . It is with difficulty that anyone will admit, without a blush for his bad taste, to a liking for coloratura singing.”104 Worse still: “Into our modern opera Wagner and Strauss have unloosed spirits of unrest and tribulation. The virtuous young ladies who died noble but stuffy deaths in Italian opera tend now to provoke wide yawns.”105 It was not only coloratura singing that was now found boring and distasteful: postwar critics were also intent to distance themselves from Victorian sentimentality. Neville Cardus, in a facetious article commemorating Jenny Lind in 1920, had already claimed that “in this year of our Richard Strauss” Lind would “strike us rather as a creature much too bright and good for human nature’s daily food,” comparing the “sexless purity” of her art unfavorably to Strauss’s Salome, a “beautiful animal of a woman.”106 Another Guardian review complained that Haynes Bayley’s “I’d Be a Butterfly,” added by Hempel to a Lind concert by request: “represents perhaps the extreme point of that pellucid art which aped purity in the middle of the last century. It may serve to illustrate the truth that when a feeling for the virtuous becomes too nice an absolute vacuity sets in and human nature passes out altogether.”107 Or, as Capell put it: not all the repertoire Hempel sang as Lind was “vapid . . . [but] most of the songs said little for mid-Victorian musical taste.”108 In the hierarchy of musical genres, the ballad sat beneath even grand opera.109

An exception was made for the lieder of Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. Here, Hempel’s versatility was praised. According to the Birmingham Post: “A singer who can give us Wolf so finely, and in the same programme win us with a ‘Mad Song’ of Bellini is a vocalist beyond ordinary. Not often do we get the ‘Jekyll’ of ‘Lied’ and the ‘Hyde’ of the ‘Coloratura’ embodied in a single personality.”110 Tellingly, a reporter from Dublin opined that while Hempel sang coloratura well, he thought—hoped—he detected her “real artistic self” in the “lyrical simplicity” of Brahms’s “Sandmännchen”; Dyneley Hussey concurred, writing that for Hempel to sing Brahms’s “miniature . . . in such a way that it came addressed personally to each one of us in that vast auditorium is a feat of great art.”111 The association between genuine artistry and lieder was

105. Cardus, “Jenny Lind.”
106. Ibid.
109. Hempel was said to be following Daniel Webster’s advice to Lind, after hearing her virtuoso fireworks: “That’s beautiful, but now sing something simple”; Stevenson, “Spirit of Jenny Lind.”
110. Quoted in Hempel, My Golden Age of Singing, 280.
111. Quoted in ibid., 279. See also Hussey, “Music.”
expressed repeatedly in reviews of Hempel’s output: Schubert’s songs were “worth a great many operatic airs” and critics agreed that she “sang . . . German songs well-nigh to perfection”; lowering the tone only by also offering to “the altar of pop-pop-popularity” some “feeble ballads.” The Times distinguished her rendition of Schubert’s “Die Forelle” and Schumann’s “Der Nussbaum” from the “bad taste” of the rest of her Lind program, but “felt inclined to reserve our admiration until such time as we are given a ‘Frieda Hempel’ concert.”

Critics here seem to endow certain repertoire—namely lieder—with a higher level of personal and artistic expression. In part this had to do with language: Hempel was one of the few native German speakers to sing lieder in London in the early 1920s, a fact of which many listeners were appreciative. It also reflected the trend toward more specialized programming, with lieder recitals representing “classic” song repertoire. Hempel was aware of this preference for her “Dr Jekyll” side. She argued that she did not sing only for critics:

I could arouse the layman to wild applause with these acrobatics and these exciting high trills; the long scales and the high notes thrilled him. But he could not understand the subtlety of my German lieder. These were for the real music lovers who understood the human expressions embodied in these songs and lived them with me. I sang these songs with all the deep, genuine feeling required, and apparently I made the music lovers jealous of the time spent on “meaningless” music.

“Unfortunate as it may seem,” Hempel continued, “the box office is important, and even today a long trill on a high note will ‘get’ the audience more than ‘Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer’ of Brahms.” The question of how to “get” audiences became more urgent through the 1920s, and not simply for prime donne with “a diseased and morbid fondness for vast audiences,” as the composer Kaikhosru Sorabji put it. In Britain, the newly formed BBC had a mandate to nurture interest in classical music and targeted those audiences Hempel titillated with her high notes. The aim was not simply to let the “genuine music lovers” have their portion of the program, but to convert a freshly labeled demographic of “middlebrow” listeners to the joys of “highbrow” repertoire; to hope that eventually they too would come to understand the subtleties of German lieder.

113. “Week-end Concerts: Miss Frieda Hempel.”
115. Sorabji, “Galli-Curci and Hempel.”
116. On the BBC’s early programming policies see Scannell and Cardiff, Social History of Broadcasting; and Doctor, BBC and Ultra-Modern Music.
Hempel and the “Battle of the Brows”

A debate about the merits of Hempel’s programming that took place in the pages of another new musical institution, The Gramophone magazine, is worth a digression here. It offers a slightly different perspective on the question of audiences for classical music, and modes of listening. It also shows the early adoption of the term “middlebrow” and how confidently writers distinguished between “middle-” and “highbrow” culture. The debate was prompted by a 1924 review by “J.” of one of Hempel’s London concerts:

The Albert Hall certainly resembles a circus, but rarely does such an exhibition of bad taste degrade the circus ring as did Madam Hempel’s concert. This singer, ravishing to behold, equipped with a beautiful voice and astonishing techniques, is capable of singing the finest lieder, [but] was content to give a wearying exhibition of platform histrionics and to display her great gifts in an ill-chosen programme of songs of very varying merit. The last encore, too generously contributed, I heard her give was Dixieland! Shades of Brahms, two of whose songs she had previously sung exquisitely . . . I came away more in sorrow than in anger determined to seek the consolation of my gramophone.117

More troubling than Hempel wasting her abilities on poor-quality songs and her “histrionic” manner, it seemed, was her combination of popular numbers with lieder. Increasingly, it was the mix of high and lower types that was found objectionable. Recordings were thus promoted as a sanctuary from such horrors: on the gramophone Hempel’s “exquisite” Brahms might be heard again, without the distraction of “Dixie” or audience. The pleasures of solitary, attentive listening were repeatedly attested to by early contributors to The Gramophone and, of course, have been reiterated in discussions of recorded music. Its purpose was not simply to entrain a particular interpretative approach, nor to “domesticate” classical music, as Mark Katz has it.118 Listening, alone, to the gramophone was also a means to retreat from the hurly-burly of modern life.

The diatribe against Hempel’s Royal Albert Hall concert (and criticism elsewhere of her Italian colleague Galli-Curci) prompted a letter to the editor of The Gramophone from James Rainford:

When an audience consists (as most audiences do) of about 10 percent high-brow, 40 percent middle-brow and about 50 percent low-brow, surely the low-brows are entitled to something for their money, and if ‘J.’ is outraged by


listening to what suits them, let him reflect that it is nothing to what they suffer listening to what suits him. I presume Miss Hempel would not have sung Dixieland if she had not good grounds for knowing that it would be popular with a large section of her audience, and if by singing the frankly popular she also, by her better songs, teaches them something more worthwhile, does not the end justify the means in such a case?

Rainford concluded: “The great point is not to kill enthusiasts but to encourage them to something better. The low-brows may (and probably will) become middle-brows, though I hope never high-brows.”

In response, “J.” asked Rainford for a “decision about the terminology of ‘brows,’ ” complaining that highbrow seems to be a derogatory term. To be middlebrow, however, was in the original author’s opinion to sit on the fence: “Music is not a material nor a commercial growth, not a soothing syrup nor a pleasant digestive, not a titillating sentimentality, but (with a full recognition of the joys of good light music) a vehicle of the noblest thoughts of man—a spiritual entity.” Rainford replied:

Mr High-brow . . . apparently imagines that he is quite alone in the concert-room, and that no one should be studied but himself, his outlook usually being one of absolute intolerance of all opinions but his own. . . . It takes a much greater person to come down in sympathy with others in order to help them up, than it does to sit on a pedestal above one’s fellow-men, even musically. So that Mr Middle-brow, so far from running with the hare and hunting with the hounds, is imbued with a much better and very sympathetic outlook. In fact he really is ‘the middle-classes’, that very solid backbone of most things, holding those above him in great respect and having a deep sympathy for those below.

When a cease-fire was called by the editor, Rainford was given the last word: “I am a music-lover and ‘J.’ a music-worshipper. Idolatry of that kind does not appeal to me.”

What becomes clear through this epistolary exchange is that the utopian view that recordings would heighten the accessibility of “highbrow” music quickly faltered. Organs such as The Gramophone magazine, like concert critics, favored instead a greater degree of specialization. “Music is regarded as a pastime, an amusement, a digestive, a carminative, an anti-spasmodic, an aphrodisiac, anything almost except what it is—an art, a religion,” moaned Sorabji,
underlining the degree to which supposedly modern listening practices had
roots in the romanticism of the nineteenth century.\(^{124}\) What also emerges from
the correspondence is a willingness to elide taste and class, in keeping with
contemporary discussions about “the brows,” both in Britain and the United
States.\(^{125}\) The terms high-, middle-, and lowbrow (or equivalents) were used
carefully and self-reflexively, indicating a shared awareness of the rapidity with
which the technologies of mass culture were shaping modern times.

In *England After War* (1922), Charles Masterman defined the middle class
not by income but as “those who worked with pen and brain instead of with
hand.”\(^{126}\) They were a diverse body: Masterman distinguished between re-
latively new members—mostly white-collar workers or clerks, as they were
known—and the professionals, among them doctors, teachers, scientists, civil
servants, retailers, and writers.\(^{127}\) The middle classes were also culturally dis-
parate: a small (if historically loud-voiced) proportion might have represented
the intelligentsia or supported new, modernist music. But, according to histo-
rian Ross McKibbin, during the interwar period the majority attached them-
selves to either middlebrow or popular music (attachments that were by no
means exclusive).\(^{128}\) Popular music was associated primarily with America.\(^{129}\)
The middlebrow, by contrast, consisted of a predominantly European perfor-
man ce canon of secular and sacred pieces, the familiarity of which was rein-
forced by what was heard at the cinema, on the radio, and at variety shows.

Discussions of middlebrow culture in the States were closely connected to
the music appreciation movement.\(^{130}\) Not all subscribed to its cause. Gilbert

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124. Sorabji, “Galli-Curci and Hempel.”
125. Collini notes some resistance, among British literary critics, to “commercial and aes-
thetic stratification” by adopting terms from the United States; *Common Reading*, 219.
126. Masterman, *England After War*, 77. The problem of defining the middle class by in-
come, particularly between 1918 and 1923 (after which their financial situation stabilized), is dis-
cussed by McKibbin in *Classes and Cultures*, 44–105.
127. Both branches resided in the suburbs but, as Carey points out (*Intellectuals and the
Masse*, 46–70), the clerks tended to inhabit the new builds while the professionals lived in older,
greener neighborhoods. It was probably significant that Rainford was not London based: he
hailed from St. Helens, Lancashire, and in his other contributions to *Gramophone* wrote about
provincial responses to classical music on record and in the concert hall. See his “Musical
Language” and “The Seaside Orchestra and the Gramophone.” Masterman claimed that those
who lived in the South (especially in London) would be surprised by the real pleasure taken in
good music by inhabitants of Northern manufacturing towns; *England After War*, 110.
128. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 386–90; on 389 he comments that “as in literature, the
predominance of modernism in musical high culture largely excluded the middlebrow audience
from contemporary music.”
129. A more nuanced discussion is provided by Schleifer, *Modernism and Popular Music.
LeMahieu points out that while the process of “Americanization” was expedited by cinema and
the gramophone, cultural influences flowed both ways across the Atlantic; *Culture for Democracy*,
90–99.
130. Horowitz provides an account of postwar middle class musical life in America, with its
emphasis on education, in which he also makes passing reference to Lind’s tours as an example of
how “the circle of readers” might be expanded; *Classical Music in America*, 395–432.
Seldes, in his *7 Lively Arts* (1924), placed the vocal concert first in his list of “bogus” arts, ahead of “pseudo-classic dancing, the serious intellectual drama, the civic masque, the high-toned moving picture, and grand opera.” Seldes complained about the “vast snobbery of the intellect which repays the deadly hours of boredom we spend in the pursuit of art”; a boredom he argued could be lifted by recourse to popular entertainment. In both British and American versions, middlebrow culture was characterized by its variety, a quality which set it against the highbrow’s specialization, and the leveled tone attributed to the lowbrow.

Musicological discussions of the middlebrow tend to focus on composers and conductors, rather than performers and their audiences. Yet the critical reception of Hempel’s Lind project suggests that the singer ably negotiated the “battle of the brows” on both sides of the Atlantic. Her “music hall” antics, disparaged by some, could be celebrated by others (“the circus can be and often is more artistic than the Metropolitan Opera House in New York,” Seldes claimed). Her repertoire catered to a range of tastes, serving both to educate and entertain. (Indeed, highbrow critics’ frustration with her appearances as Lind seems to have been intensified by their appreciation of her vocal skills, which they considered were being wasted on inferior music.) Finally, her recreation of a historical event provided a platform for debates about the meaning of modernity: about the gains and losses of holding on to the past.

Hempel gave her last Lind concert in 1926. There were plans to revive the project the following decade, but they did not come to much. By then, there were new “Linds” around. The Tennessee-born singer Grace Moore played her in the MGM film *Jenny Lind (A Lady’s Morals)* (1931), which fabricated a romance with Swedish composer Paul Brandt (played by Reginald Denny), who had been blinded in a scuffle defending Lind’s artistic reputation. In *The Mighty Barnum* (1934), the titular circus impresario, hoping to be delivered Jumbo the Elephant, instead receives the Swedish Nightingale (played by Virginia Bruce); smitten, he arranges a lavish dinner in her honor, but manages to insult the guests with an inappropriate toast. As in contemporary biopics of Schubert, such as *Blossom Time* (1934) starring Richard Tauber, beyond the costumes there were few attempts at historical accuracy.
Indeed, both movie portrayals of the Swedish soprano were taken to task over such musical discrepancies. The Times reviewer explained, “every now and again [Moore] breaks into the kind of song which belongs to modern, and not particularly good, musical-comedy.”137 Bruce, meanwhile, sang the Irish air to words by Thomas Moore, “Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms”—which Lind may well have known, but she would not have recognized Bruce’s vocal style or the smarmy orchestral arrangement. While the actors’ performances were praised (Moore was described as having “a clarid, gay screen personality”), the word most often used about these films in The Times was “vulgar.”138 In response to one review, Lind’s son Ernest Goldschmidt wrote to the editor: “In this vulgar age truth is at a discount.”139 Hempel at least had managed to be fairly demure. With her voice now showing signs of age, history played a still stronger role in how she sold herself: one of her last discs for Electrola, made in 1935, was of Carl Amand Mangold’s “Zweigesang.” It was given what was now, for Hempel, a doubly nostalgic tagline: “A song Jenny Lind sang.”

Hempel Forever: Gramophone Voices

“The Voice of Jenny Lind’ is only a Memory / But the Voice of Frieda Hempel will live forever, RE-CREATED in all its exquisite beauty by the magic of Thomas A. Edison’s art,” reads an advertisement from a Carnegie Hall program. Hempel “will go down the ages SINGING FOREVER,” it continues.140 It is a cliché to say that listener expectations were fundamentally altered on encountering recordings. But the influence of the gramophone cannot be ignored, particularly for an artist such as Hempel, whose career coincided with the spread of acoustic and electrical recordings in the 1920s. As early as 1917, she had found that audiences were preparing for her concerts by listening in advance to her records; indeed, an advertisement claimed: “People no longer have any excuse for not being acquainted with the voice and style of great singers before their personal appearance.”141 This gave rise, according to Hempel, to “a strange feeling of competition” with one’s recorded self.142

As Potter points out, Tauber adapted his performance style “according to the expectations of his audience,” making extensive use of portamento and embellishment in one salon performance of “Ständchen” at the piano, and presenting a more formal rendition in a concert recital that bore a greater resemblance to twentieth- rather than nineteenth-century practices. See Potter, History of Singing, 208.
There were other ways in which recordings seem to have heightened sensitivity to repetition. As indicated from the accounts of Hempel’s early Carnegie Hall recitals, it was standard in the first decades of the twentieth century for singers to repeat numbers on the program, if the audience responded to them enthusiastically. Once almost every item on a concert program had become, in effect, but one more repetition of songs and arias familiar from the gramophone and radio, that type of encore seems to have faded from practice; instead, it became more typical to add a number or two to the program, as is done today. Recordings were still far from permanent, however, even after the technical improvements of the later 1920s. Gramophone reviewers began to complain about the yearly culling by record companies of certain issues. Several of Hempel’s discs were deleted. Journalists encouraged their readers to get “a few souvenirs of this exquisite artist . . . [to] bring back with amazing vividness [her] memorable concerts.” Even in the age of mechanical reproduction, the history of voices was, and has remained, fragile.

According to Jonathan Sterne, “In bourgeois modernity sound recording becomes a way to deal with time.” Technological developments may emphasize upheaval and change, but recordings also embody “fragmented time,” offering “a little piece of repeatable time within a carefully bounded frame”: a souvenir. Modernity’s anxiety about preserving voices stems from awareness that those fragments are themselves subject to decay—that Hempel’s recordings were deleted or their format became outmoded; or, if they survived, that they fell out of fashion. It is apparent from the reception of the Lind project, however, that alternative attitudes toward history were still in play; that, while recording offered a way to deal with time, it was not the only model available.

In 1920, a New York critic had explained:

The days of sweet song are past, and when Mme. Hempel offers us a Jenny Lind program she offers not half, but twice what Lind had to offer, for she adds to the sweetness and virtuosity of Lind the dramatic force, fervor, passion, the entire modernistic, post-Wagnerian point of view of Hempel.

The Hempel-Lind program is an idealization, a reconstruction. It gives a picture of the past fitted to modern eyes and ears. It is a masterpiece in miniature, and serves a useful purpose.

This is a way to deal with time that nineteenth-century historians would have recognized: through recreation, rather than repetition. It also, of course, describes the historical continuities of live performance: the “useful purpose,”

Quest for Fidelity.” The latter provides an illustration of Hempel performing in a 1918 “tone test” (a comparison of her live voice with its recording) as its figure 1.

143. “Swish of the Scythe,” 372.
144. Sterne, Audible Past, 310.
145. Ibid.
perhaps, was for audiences to encounter, through Hempel’s “reconstruction” of Lind, a doubly golden age of singing. Histories of recorded music tend to treat live music-making as if it existed in an entirely separate sphere, rather than taking into account the ways in which listening and performing practices have overlapped and interacted. Yet it is apparent that while, contrary to the advertising, Hempel did not live forever, her Lind project served as a way for postwar audiences to formulate their responses to music and a musician from a previous era, and to envision how modern technology might transform their musical experiences.

The impulse to recreate voices is still keenly felt—in tandem with the impulse to record them. Later in the twentieth century, Joan Sutherland performed and recorded a tribute to Jenny Lind, and Elizabeth Parcells recorded a historically informed Lind recital. More recently, there have been tributes to Maria Malibran and Farinelli. It is often said that recordings, these days, are no longer considered “representations” of music (as they were a century ago), but simply music. These recreations of earlier singers suggest a more complex reading: one in which performers and audiences attempt to embody history; in the process reconfiguring their relationship to the present.

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Abstract

The recreation of Jenny Lind’s first American concert by soprano Frieda Hempel in 1920 was a popular success, but raised a number of questions for critics. Examining its reception—and that of the concert on tour in Britain—shines light on postwar attitudes toward music history, as manifest in responses to particular repertoires, and to sound recordings. Hempel’s hybrid programs, which included operatic coloratura arias, lieder, and American popular song, ran counter to the trend elsewhere toward specialization. At the same time, they resonated with attempts to cultivate a newly minted sociocultural group, the middlebrow. And, while the Lind project on many levels strove for historical accuracy, on others it overturned ideas of authentic performance. An altogether more complex picture of vocal performance in the age of mechanical reproduction thus emerges.

Keywords: Frieda Hempel, Jenny Lind, middlebrow, concert programs, gramophone