Contents

List of Illustrations ix

Preface and Acknowledgments xi

1. Music Making as Popular Practice 1

PART I. MUSIC FOR THE “PEOPLE”

2. “The Largest and Most Enthusiastic Audience That Ever Has Assembled in the City”: The National Opera Company of 1887 15

3. “A Precarious Means of Living”: Early Working Musicians and Their Jobs 26

4. “Popular Prices Will Prevail”: Competing and Cooperating Impresarios 43

5. Amateurs, Professionals, and Symphonies: Harley Hamilton and Edna Foy 56

6. “Our Awe Struck Vision”: A Prominent Impresario Reconsidered 73

PART II. PROGRESSIVE-ERA MUSICAL IDEALISM

7. The “True Temple of Art”: Philharmonic Auditorium and Progressive Ideology 95

8. “Something of Good for the Future”: The People’s Orchestra of 1912–1913 106

9. Producing Fairyland, 1915 124

10. Founding the Hollywood Bowl 132
### PART III. FROM PROGRESSIVE TO ULTRAMODERN

11. Old Competitors, New Opera Companies in 1925 157  
12. The New Negro Movement in Los Angeles 166  
13. Welcoming the Ultramodern 187  
14. Second Thoughts 202  
15. Calling the Tune: The Los Angeles Federal Music Project 215  

*Appendix A.* Los Angeles Population Growth, with Racial and Ethnic Distribution 239  

*Appendix B.* Musicians and Teachers of Music in the United States and Los Angeles 245  

*Appendix C.* A Music Chronology for Los Angeles, 1781–1941 251  

Notes 255  

Bibliography 325  

Index 345
1 Music Making as Popular Practice

Los Angeles is regularly reported as having had little to offer in the way of music—“culturally unfocused” in one recent, relatively tolerant formulation—until émigrés from Hitler’s Germany began to find their way there in the mid-1930s. Yet in 1910 more musicians and music teachers were working there, in proportion to its total population, than in any other city in the United States. In fact, almost half again as many professional music makers addressed the demand for music teachers, church soloists, bandsmen, theater musicians, and other paid music makers per capita than in New York City, then the center of the entertainment industry in America. Even if the U.S. Census figures (summarized in two appendices here) are less than precise, it is clear that, long before canned and digitized music of all descriptions could be had virtually anywhere for little more than the touch of a finger, a lot of music making took place, involving a lot of people. More than that, the presence of music was so fully taken for granted, so commonplace as a way of life, that later observers thought its abundance scarcely worth comment. Music making was truly popular.

This widespread practice of music as a popular activity changed over the three decades before and after that 1910 Census, just as other aspects of the culture changed, resulting in the “transformation” referred to in my title. By following that changing practice in this one city, over that half century and more, this book lays bare some unexpected elements bridging two style periods in music (late romantic versus modernist for concert music) that are often, for the United States, considered separate and almost independent of each other. On one hand, the book sketches a part of the essential background against which the musics of commercial mass culture blossomed in the twentieth century. On the other, it suggests some previously unexplored, even deliberately ignored, connections (and disconnections) be-
tween the practice of American musical romanticism (sometimes labeled the “genteel” tradition) and the seemingly abrupt emergence of musical modernism in the 1920s. Although these two periods have been described in terms of stylistic differences in the music, it turns out that the gaps between them reflect changing ideas and practices about class, gender, age, and ethnicity as well. Those gaps, as we also discover, were repeatedly contested in music as elsewhere, though in often fragmented and indirect ways.

As is already clear, I use popular here in its earlier sense of widely prevalent forms of engagement with music, rather than in the later sense of music’s most commercially profitable (as well as widely prevalent) genres. At the start of my period, the term was appropriate to much music that we no longer consider popular. In fact, a lot of the music making (and music makers) traced in this book became less visible when the term popular music came to imply primarily the music of commercial mass culture. Some music of that older sense of popular has disappeared, and some of it came to be considered “elite,” partly for its increasingly rigid class associations, partly because its survival depended on some form of special investment or some other cultural formation, as opposed to commercial mass culture. Because of this focus, the book might be thought of as describing a special case of the “antimodern.” In music, though, the situation has its own complexities, for that now largely submerged earlier practice did much to shape the terms under which much later public music making took place. It becomes clearer than ever in these pages that apparently straightforward acts of music making carried wider social and political freight than the notes on the page might suggest and that the complexities of the process were far greater than music critics noted at the time or even than recent cultural critics have argued.

This, then, is a social history. Even though much of it deals with what is now called concert music, it rarely deals directly with the notes or the sounds. Instead, it centers on the extensive web of listeners, patrons, teachers, students, and entrepreneurs, as well as performers and composers, all of whom I include in the term music makers. It celebrates the involvement of a large portion of the population, even before commercial mass culture and new forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction gained more than a foothold. The European-based concert and opera traditions, right along with the practices of domestic, theatrical, ceremonial, religious, and many other kinds of music, all had widespread currency in Los Angeles—as elsewhere in the United States—as common means of self-expression and communication, among men as well as women, and across a wide range of ethnic and racial identities. Most of the music making discussed here comes from these traditions and practices.
I treat a wide range of music makers, women as well as men, for no single individual or group could embody so widespread and varied a practice. The organization of public music making is also very important to my study. Yet I have deliberately chosen to avoid focusing on such criteria as success in importing the most famous virtuosi to give public concerts, or the music of commercial mass culture, or the primacy of the mid-twentieth-century aesthetic of high modernism, as other authors have done. (All of these criteria come up, but so do many other things less often discussed. On the same principle, I have not placed the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra (1919–), for long the lynchpin of the city’s concert music establishment, in its customary front-and-center position.) Often-drawn distinctions such as amateur-versus-professional or public-versus-private are likewise downplayed or, occasionally, challenged. All of the four types of activities proposed by Michael Broyles as necessary to the formation of a concert music establishment—the development of musical organizations including performing groups, the construction of concert venues, the emergence of patrons, and the education of an audience—are among the activities reported here. Yet they are present in far less tidy categories and with far more overlapping and mixed motivations than those neat categories might imply; even then they are not the whole story, for commercial presenters and their various economic interests played an essential role, too. In practice, that means that the individuals I discuss were performing musicians as well as variously patrons, entrepreneurs, and other musical activists. Some can fit into more than one of these categories. Social class, gender conventions, racial and ethnic identities, business interests, and political leanings shaped the manner of their participation as much as did individual talent and personal inclination.

This is a regional study as well as a social history, unusual because it does not focus on a specific genre or performing organization, as many studies centered on individual cities do. For Los Angeles, the only works with wide historical aspirations until recently have been Henry W. Splitter’s “Music in Los Angeles,” covering Anglo concert life and theater circa 1850–1900, and Howard Swan’s 1952 Music in the Southwest, which traces the history of concert music in the city almost entirely through the eyes of one impresario. As a regionally based social history, this book takes us in directions in which, given the constraints of their one-volume format, the several excellent overviews of American music cannot go, for their size limitations prevent them from offering more than broad-stroked accounts of regional differences. The West Coast perspective of this book is, in fact, a rare one for an investigation of Progressive-era music making or the advent of mu-
sical modernism in the United States. The choice of Los Angeles, with its early geographic isolation, its roots as a Mexican mission settlement, and its relatively late development as an Anglo city, may even seem quixotic for such a study. Yet, within limits, Los Angeles can be taken as a case history for medium-sized U.S. cities, especially those in the heartland and the far west. Minneapolis, Denver, Portland (Oregon), and Oakland (California), for example, all reported large proportions of musicians and music teachers in those tantalizing 1910 Census figures in appendix B, table 10; as with many other cities, they too organized community choruses, symphonies, and concert series, all with their own stories.

There is some justice in choosing Los Angeles as an example for the Progressive era, though, for the city was a hotbed of political and social progressivism. (Most dramatically, California’s late vote for Bull Moose candidate Theodore Roosevelt tilted the presidential election of 1912—the first election in which California women voted—away from the dominant Republican Party to Democrat Woodrow Wilson.) Actually, public music making became directly entangled with Progressive politics; that entanglement is an important part of this story. There is also irony in choosing Los Angeles, for the city eventually became one of the major world centers for the new entertainment technologies (especially the movies, but also recording and television) that radically changed the practice of music making in the course of the twentieth century. These new practices, though spawned in part from the Progressive-era music culture, ultimately dwarfed much of that culture. I defer here to the substantial bibliography that already exists on the new media, for the several general studies of Southern California history are largely silent about the music making discussed here, although it played so important a role in the culture.12

Another irony, given Los Angeles’ more recent racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, is important here. In 1890, one-fourth of the city’s population was foreign-born, at first glance a large proportion but nevertheless small by comparison with San Francisco, Chicago, or New York. Even the residents who identified themselves in the U.S. Census as Mexican, always more numerous than in most other U.S. cities, remained a relatively small minority, though one with more influence than the suspiciously low census numbers suggest. (The city had, after all, begun as a part of Mexico, and the cultural memory of this origin has never been lost.) During the years of the spectacular growth described here, most of the city’s new residents were already U.S. citizens, coming from elsewhere in the country rather than from abroad, giving the city a rather unusual degree of middle-class homogeneity.

It may come as a surprise that the broad transformation in the practice
and experience of music such as is exposed here can be traced through a social history that focuses on any one city, let alone this one. Surprisingly, the concept of transformation emerged in the course of what began as a regional study, with no real idea that it would become the book’s main theme. Coupled with the emphasis on music making as an everyday activity, the regional approach has another, related aspect. It has been pointed out with respect to literature that regional studies allow women more visibility and more agency than has been the case for more broadly based surveys. Thus, the feminist tilt present here (in this case by initial authorial intent) has been closely tied to the regional approach all along; it has also become a catalyst, an essential element for understanding the dynamics of cultural transformation.

In all U.S. cities, women were always much more numerous among music makers than they were among the most famous musicians of the age, and Los Angeles had a significantly higher proportion of female residents than was the case for other western cities. Women made up 60 percent of the musicians and music teachers who serviced the city’s music makers in the 1910 Census and 61 percent of the total population. (See table 8 in appendix B.) Locally as well as nationally, performing musicians tended to be male and foreign-born, whereas teachers of music were more likely to be female and U.S.-born. (The tendency for women and men with special talent and strong interest in music to follow different career paths is dramatized here, part of my insistence on including both in most of the stories told.) The high proportion of women engaged in public music making, much of which turned out to be teaching, led some critics to express concern over the “feminization” of a profession long considered dangerously unmasculine for U.S.-born white males, even after the ratio of women to men was reversed in the 1920s.

There is, further, a class distinction about music making relative to the sexes, for music makers in this time period were only beginning to emerge from the cultural assumption that the music professions were not appropriate for U.S.-born males, for whom almost any profession or trade would presumably be more “manly” as well as more stable financially, but that music making was, for middle-class women, a desirable domestic skill. As opportunities arose to make music outside the home, women of a certain class and level of achievement were better situated to pursue them than they were to take up many other occupations. In addition, the woman-dominated audience that had developed for many music events, and indeed the separate “women’s sphere,” remained important even after the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the vote in 1920, as the thriving women’s
club culture of the following two decades attests. Forms of music making mainly associated with the women’s sphere rapidly lost their formal audiences after 1945 and have by now largely disappeared. It seems important to acknowledge these points as playing a major role in several of the music-centered projects described here.

The relatively short period covered here—just over a half century—lends a certain Aristotelian unity of time as well as place to this story. Concert organizing, so large a factor in this narrative, developed over a considerably longer period in cities older than Los Angeles. Almost from the start in this case, the newer media were beginning to challenge or augment the older practices of concert giving, live theater, music printing, piano sales, and do-it-yourself home music making, as means for the dissemination of music. The older practices rubbed up against developing new technologies with increasing frequency, especially from the time of World War I. In addition to these factors, contemporary, largely external but influential changes in the organization of the entertainment industry were impacting public music making and changing the lives of working musicians. Moreover, the rapid population growth that took place nationwide (mainly through immigration) was carried to an extreme in LA, lending its own twist to the narrative. While the overall population of the United States tripled in the half century between 1880 and 1930, Los Angeles grew by a factor of 100, from a town of 11,000 to a metropolis of 1.2 million. (See appendix A for more of the numbers.) Up until 1930, the city’s population at least doubled in every decade but one. This meant that local institutional history was carried by relatively few people, and traditions of music making were frequently readapted to the new geographical situation or reinterpreted by the continuing supply of new residents. Thus, as critic Julian Johnson remarked in 1909, Los Angeles was by no means a “settled city” with “settled musical interests.”

The Progressive era in U.S. history encompassed the closing of the western frontier, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. Higher real income and shorter hours for workers combined with the new technologies of sound recording, motion pictures, and (eventually) radio to draw forth an entirely new cluster of industries, collectively dubbed commercial mass entertainment, and even new kinds of music. The new industrial and commercial monopolies generated a labor movement in their wake. Along with immigration, increased ethnic diversity, and the women’s rights movement, these changes (and more) generated public discussion, most visibly among educated, U.S.-born white men, about who we were as a nation and what we should become. Both the changes and the discussions had broad
implications for music making, which became especially clear in the debates precipitated by Antonín Dvořák’s sojourn in the United States in the 1890s. In the various pronouncements of the participants in that debate, the rapid development of commercial mass culture and the major role played by music in it were acknowledged only indirectly. The increasing polarization of commercially successful (i.e., “popular” music, in the later sense, as opposed to “elite” music) was not acknowledged either. Specific racial and ethnic contributions are subsumed at one end of this polarization, unrecognized in print but widely understood nonetheless. African American contributions were ignored, and European, particularly Germanic influences, decried as participants in the discussion fumbled toward the invention of a characteristically “American” tradition in music. In Los Angeles, the discussions about “American” music bore their most visible fruit in the production of the American opera Fairyland, but they also were part of the background that generated other experiments, such as the People’s Orchestra.) The particular size and makeup of Los Angeles’ immigrant populations, shown in appendix A, was another factor that affected the changing status of music making in the early twentieth century.

This investigation of the popular (widely prevalent) in Progressive-era music takes several specific forms, including explorations of events, organizations, and individuals, as it exposes these underlying, extramusical themes. The several stages in the transformation of my title are marked here by descriptions of the visits of three traveling opera companies (selected from many.) Each appeared under very different and very revealing circumstances. At the start, opera was popular entertainment in both senses, with visits from a half dozen companies in most years; therefore, I begin part I with the spectacular 1887 visit of the pretentious National Opera Company and its anomalous reception in Los Angeles as a highly successful popular entertainment. (The company’s visit to Los Angeles is routinely omitted from accounts of its history, making this moment the first of several surprises here.)

I continue with discussions of the careers of several individuals. In addition to any claim they have to historical importance or previous neglect, they are chosen to demonstrate the range of personal involvement to be found among individuals caught up in this culture of music making. I take up such disparate figures as Charles Leland “Lee” Bagley, journeyman clarinet player and durable union activist, and Lynden Ellsworth Behymer, the city’s best-known impresario, whose role was rather different from what
has been commonly thought. I describe a selection of early public events for which working musicians provided music. Among performers, I concentrate on Harley Hamilton, respected violinist, teacher, and conductor, and Edna Foy, aspiring violinist and long-time concertmaster of the Los Angeles Women’s Orchestra. Public concerts were often organized by the musicians themselves or by early theater operators and music dealers, such as Henry C. Wyatt (hereafter H. C. or Harry C. Wyatt) and Frederick W. Blanchard (hereafter F. W. or Fred W. Blanchard). Some of these individuals—most prominently Behymer, who surfaces several times—remained active and influential for decades. In addition to the wider cultural implications of music making, I want to establish what making music meant to each of these individuals and how it helped define and was defined by their roles in the culture. They remind us that, no matter how mediated by cultural circumstances, music making can bring forth powerful, sometimes unexpected and contradictory individual responses; these can be emotional, sensual, rational, intellectual, kinesthetic, or any of these in combination, and they can change with changing conditions.

Part II addresses the period circa 1905–22, when musical progressivism reached its high point and its ideology was most fully articulated. Its major operatic event, the heavily promoted local production of a new “American” opera, Horatio Parker’s ill-fated Fairyland (1915), actually followed several other Progressive-era landmarks spread over several years. Its predecessors included the construction of what came to be known as Philharmonic Auditorium, with its specific church connection as a lasting reminder of deeply held convictions about the moral and ethical power of music, common across the political spectrum; the short and conflicted career of the People’s Orchestra (another discovery); and the events leading up to the founding of the Symphonies under the Stars at the Hollywood Bowl, by far the most successful and long-lasting product of progressive music making and ideology in Los Angeles. Their organizers and patrons, among them Clara Bradley Burdette, Charles Farwell Edson, Artie Mason Carter, and (once more) Fred W. Blanchard, are perhaps an even more varied lot than the individuals who appear in part I.

In part III, I take up the transition from the Progressive to the modern and the “ultramodern,” thus addressing aesthetic issues more directly along with cultural changes. Performers and composers (Olga Steeb, Dane Rudhyar, Harold Bruce Forsythe, William Grant Still, and more) take the stage somewhat more frequently here. Back-to-back visits of two competing opera companies in 1925 dramatize the demise of opera as a widely popular event and its entrenchment as an elite, class-affirming happening. Where
visiting opera companies large and small had once been a staple of the much smaller city’s theatrical life, now two weeks of large-scale opera were too much, even though the city’s population was ten times larger. Other changes are juxtaposed with the simultaneous social ascent and accompanying ossification of opera. For one, a potent echo of the New Negro movement resonated in the Los Angeles of the 1920s.

The repertoire of traveling virtuosi and the large opera companies may have grown static, but the “ultramodern” arrived anyway, leading to a new aesthetic polarization between the old and the new in concert music as well as to a new relationship between the sexes in matters musical. Contrary to received tradition, experimental, often dissonant ultramodernist music was at first welcomed in Los Angeles, although the welcome deteriorated rapidly after 1926. The welcome reminds us forcefully of the early identification of the ultramodern with mysticism and the occult, as well as its association with the dangerously foreign “other.” (This story, told in chapter 13, has been so well obliterated that even the founders of the Evenings on the Roof series a decade later were unaware of it. They believed that they had introduced ultramodernism to Los Angeles themselves.)

The career of the Federal Music Project, a part of the Depression era’s Works Progress/Work Projects Administration (WPA in both cases) (1935–42), serves as a postscript, both summing up the role of music making through the Progressive era and setting the scene for the music making of a later generation. The FMP’s Los Angeles version included an effort to reinvent opera as a community-based ensemble event and restore its popular aspect in a new way. Although that project ran aground in a sea of mismanagement, the changes it helped set in motion became significant in later decades.

Differences in the cultural values associated with different genres make the stories diverse for bands, orchestras, opera, choruses, and other music media, but they share some elements in common. Tensions were pervasive and continuing over the ways performances were organized and promoted. A range of commercial aspirations and more-or-less altruistic interests was always present, with seemingly endless variations and anomalies. Sometimes the divisions fell along lines separating political Progressives (with some Democrats and socialists as musical allies) from more orthodox Republicans. Most often, the issues involved who the audiences should be, including the construction (literal and figurative) of venues and the setting of ticket prices, as well as what features of performance and repertoire were considered most desirable. Gender, too, became an underlying theme, for women were more likely to claim the high ground of altruism and to act
under the old banner of music, particularly concert music, as a secular reli-
gion. It is no accident that women were so powerfully involved in the ide-
alistic ventures described in part II or that the disillusionment with ultra-
modernism that becomes so clear in part III was tied to the decoupling of
dissonant-sounding and experimental music from religious mysticism. In-
deed, it was in the 1920s that the role of L. E. Behymer as impresario became
a negative one, discouraging new musical enterprises and in the process
shunting women toward what was fast becoming a ghettolike women’s club
culture, despite such successes as the low-budget opera reading clubs.

Throughout, the distinction between the popular and the elite in music
making was unstable, its inflections dependent on both the date and, in part,
the position of the observer as well as the genre. As becomes clear, opera,
once a major, self-supporting element of popular culture, struggled to sur-
vive as new forms of popular culture, particularly the movies but also
vaudeville, emerged to shove it aside. (Signs of its rebirth were still rare at
the end of the period discussed in this book.) It is one of the ironies that the
symphony orchestra and its literature, which had so fully captured the
imagination and intelligence of so many well-trained musicians of goodwill,
became so thoroughly entrenched in opera’s elitist role, dependent by the
end of World War I for its audiences and its very survival on the patronage
of the white middle and upper classes. Fortunately, a constructive, if quiet,
cross-fertilization has always occurred among the relatively elite operatic
and symphonic repertoires and the genres we think of as more commer-
cially oriented or less musically literate, if only because no music making,
and none of its makers, exists in a cultural vacuum.

For all my claims of inclusiveness, I acknowledge several omissions as
well. Mexicans colonized the Los Angeles area several generations before
the coming of the Anglos; their continuing and diverse presence has always
been significant, even at those moments when their numbers were rela-
tively small in proportion to the whole population. In treating that influence
only in passing here, I defer to the already large body of scholarship on the
Mexican presence and influence in Southern California. Likewise, I have
not addressed in any detail the growing importance of the Hollywood movie
colony, the technological changes in music making, or the coming of the
émigrés from Hitler. Each of these topics would have provided many more
excellent stories and greater insight; together they would have extended
this book to several more volumes.

It is not surprising that a city’s music making carried these complex and
incomplete cultural narratives in the Progressive era, a period when concert
music and opera were marginalized as elite, white, confusingly gendered
fragments of a much larger amusement industry. It is also not surprising that many persons strongly resisted the pigeonholing of concert music as an elite form of entertainment, with a relatively narrow audience, and that women played a large role as resisters. In fact, resistance to the elitist aspect that came with the commodification of concert life remained a major factor in Los Angeles’ music history.

Some of what is described here survives now in such unexpected places as school music programs and remains prestigious for an ever-smaller circle. Yet it is little known or understood by most of those who make their music largely by newer means. The accounts here combine to reveal the wide range of music-making interests, activities, and values that lie beneath that remarkable census figure from 1910 and, in doing so, offer some insight about the changing role of music making in the city and the nation. Always, in Los Angeles as elsewhere, the basic issue in the Progressive era and afterward was about the ownership of music. The resulting struggles often echoed and even influenced pervasive battles about economic organization, class, gender, ethnicity, and race. Who would call the tunes, who would perform them, who would hear them, and what would be the context in which they would be heard? How did the widely popular in concert music and opera come to blossom in the era of political Progressivism, then find itself transformed a few decades later, unreasonably burdened with restrictive, class- and gender-related associations, yet prepared, on some level, for a rebirth? This book addresses those questions.