



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Grant, P. (2022). Sounds of War: Music in the British Armed Forces during the Great War. *English Historical Review*, 137(584), pp. 297-298. doi: 10.1093/ehr/ceab312

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/28201/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceab312>

Copyright: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

Reuse: Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Sounds of War: Music in the British Armed Forces During the Great War, by Emma Hanna
(Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2020; pp. xiii + 307. £29.99).

Despite the deluge of books on the First World War over the period of its centenary it is gratifying to find that there are still titles being published that are filling gaps in our knowledge. Such a publication is Emma Hanna's new study of the use of music in the British armed forces. Previous works have examined aspects of this subject, for example Glenn Watkins *Proof Through the Night* on 'classical' music or John Mullen's *The Show Must Go On!* covering popular song, but we have lacked a fully comprehensive review that brought all forms of music together in one volume. As the Great War came at probably the highpoint of live music in British culture with, for example, one piano for every 15 people and over 30,000 brass bands in existence, this is a vital element in the war story.

Some of these previous works have suffered from a distinctly outdated knowledge of the military aspects of the war but Dr Hanna seamlessly integrates a thorough understanding of the conflict within an analysis of various musical aspects over eleven thematic chapters. For example in her chapter on Songs, Identity and Morale, Hanna situates the use of 'trench songs' within a wider understanding of troop morale that few other writers have been successful in doing.

Other chapters extend our knowledge of music as medical therapy and the use of the gramophone at the front and a recurring theme is the clash of 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' culture, whether in attempting to limit the repertoire of military bands or restricting the use of gramophones at the front.

But the book also has time to take a look at some key individuals as well. One prominent military figure is John Mackenzie-Rogan, who rose from humble band boy to become Senior

Regimental Director of Music to the Brigade of Guards and the British Army. Beside his musical talents Hanna describes Rogan's efforts in recruitment and fundraising, including his adaptation of Ernst Lissauer's famous anti-British poem the 'Hymn of Hate' to which he appended not just patriotic tunes, including the 'Marseillaise' and 'Rule Britannia', but also popular comic favourites like 'If you want to know the time, ask a Policeman'.

In combat, Lance Corporal James Vickery's steadying of his comrades at Loos by playing the mouth organ is just one of many colourful examples that are blended into the wider narrative. Vickery achieved celebrity status and his actions match those of the famous football kicked by Rifleman Frank Edwards at the same battle.

The book is especially strong on the activities of celebrities such as the irrepressible Harry Lauder, Clara Butt, who raised the equivalent of £2.5 million, and Lena Ashwell, founder of the Three Arts Emergency Relief Fund for Women, who found that the authorities in 1914 were not at all enthusiastic about her ideas for troop entertainments at the front. Despite this Ashwell's activities only multiplied. They included 'YMCA Grand Concerts' on the Western front in March 1915 and, in 1916, even extended as far as Malta and Egypt.

Despite Lord Kitchener's scepticism the husband and wife team of Ellaline Terriss and Seymour Hicks established a 'National Theatre at the Front' in the winter of 1914-15. There is a superb photograph of ranks of wounded in their beds enjoying the Terriss-Hicks concert party and an outstanding feature of the book is its wealth of illustration. Many of the photographs I had never seen before. Terriss and Hicks reprieved their morale boosting work in the Second World War for which Hicks was knighted and received the *Croix de Guerre*. Terriss was not honoured, though Lena Ashwell did get an OBE in 1917.

Another of the book's strengths is in situating the work of the Salvation Army, YMCA and other voluntary organisations in the war effort. Hanna links their activities, and what she terms 'hut culture', back into the debate on troop morale and is especially convincing in this. Her analysis extends to include the musical activities of those from other cultures who were integral to Britain's war effort including those from the Indian sub-continent and Chinese labourers as well as the influence that French colonial music from Algeria and Senegal had on musician Percy Scholes.

Inevitably in such a wide-ranging study one sometimes wishes the book had space to develop some topics further. This is certainly the case with the ethnic musics mentioned and also when Hanna touches on female impersonation both in prisoner of war camps and concert parties without linking this with the issue of masculinity in the forces. However this is a minor drawback.

In summing up the work of the YMCA and Salvation Army in her conclusion Hanna says:

The power of music to console, educate and entertain was particularly effective when the work of individual musicians and performers combined with the logistical might of the YMCA. The YMCA and the Salvation Army were particularly effective at combining their own brands of practical Christian philanthropy and ministry to serviceman. (241-2)

And the same combination of linking individual stories to a clear overall structure is a major element of her book. Overall the variety of topics and the lucidity of Dr Hanna's prose makes the book not just a clear first choice for any student of music in the Great War but also as entertaining a read as much of the music itself.

PETER GRANT

City University of London