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AULD LANG SYNE

A Song and its Culture

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7. The Folk's Song

> Mr Sims Reeves was announced to appear, and the rarity of his presence in Glasgow caused quite a rush for tickets [...] His finishing number was "Auld Lang Syne", in which he was assisted by a chorus from Glasgow Choral Union. An incident causing some amusement here occurred. In the programme it was stated in parenthesis that "the audience will oblige by singing the chorus." The audience did join at the chorus of the first verse, drowning Mr Reeves and his choristers, and falling nearly two bars behind him. Mr Reeves looked quite bewildered, turned to his choristers, and then addressed the audience in the following terms:—"Ladies and Gentlemen,—There must be some mistake here. If the audience has been requested to join in the chorus, it was unknown to me. I have gentlemen here to sing the chorus, and I pray the audience will allow us to go through the song as originally intended." The song was thereafter allowed to go on unassisted by the audience, and Mr Reeves had another round of applause.[1]

> Somehow or other everybody some time or other wants to sing "Auld Lang Syne," and only one man in a million knows the words. And he only knows the first verse, and he doesn't sing it right.[2]

The previous chapter demonstrated how *Auld Lang Syne*'s star rose through the nineteenth century, and detailed some of the factors that contributed to this ascent and to the traditions that rose, and sometimes waned, along with it. Before addressing the last of the three major traditions associated with *Auld Lang Syne*—its use at New Year—this chapter will discuss some other aspects and a number of tangents which contribute to, and help illustrate, the larger story and themes under discussion.

7.1 Mr Micawber's Song

> God knows how infantine the memory may have been, that was awakened within me by the sound of my mother's voice in the old parlour, when I set foot in the hall. She was singing in a low tone. I think I must have lain in her arms, and heard her singing so to me when I was but a baby. The strain was new to me, and yet it was so old that it filled my heart brimful, like a friend come back from a long absence.[3]

Auld Lang Syne is mentioned four times in the course of *David Copperfield* (1848–1850), Charles Dickens' novel of the eponymous hero's life from birth till established

1 *The Scotsman*, 28 September 1875.
2 Anonymous writer in the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, quoted in the *New York Times*, 8 August 1885.
3 Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1848–1850), Chapter 8. Dickens was married to George Thomson's granddaughter.

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adulthood. The song David's mother sings in the quotation above, as he returns from boarding school to find her nursing his new half-brother, is never named, but indicates how music and singing is woven into Dicken's narrative. Songs appear in this novel as memorials of times past, snatches of popular verses put into the mouths of some of the most colourful characters in nineteenth-century fiction.

In this novel, *Auld Lang Syne* is always associated with one of Dickens' most famous creations, the incorrigible Mr Micawber, who borrows and debts his way through a great many court appearances and even a jail sentence, accompanied by his loyal, long-suffering wife (who, as she tells us on several occasions, never would leave Mr Micawber) and a huddle of children. As sung by Wilkins Micawber, *Auld Lang Syne* epitomizes his overly sentimental nature and ability to delude himself and others that things are much better than they actually are. It is first sung when Mr Micawber, who had given lodges to David Copperfield in London, stumbles on him by chance in Canterbury and invites him to dinner. This dinner is followed by Mr Micawber's specialty, and a constant companion of the song in this novel—a seemingly rather potent punch:

> As the punch disappeared, Mr Micawber became still more friendly and convivial. Mrs Micawber's spirits becoming elevated, too, we sang "Auld Lang Syne." When we came to "Here's a hand, my trusty frere," we all joined hands round the table; and when we declared we would "take a right gude Willie Waught," and hadn't the least idea what it meant, we were really affected.[4]

The episode is followed, as becomes inevitable, with David receiving a letter from Micawber informing him of impending insolvency and certain doom.

This rendition of *Auld Lang Syne* is as classic as it gets in this period (see also the section on iconography, below): it accompanies a series of toasts, a bowl of punch, and hands are joined around the table at the last verse. It is unclear which verses were actually sung, though the next incident implies that several if not all were. Having encountered Mr Micawber again, in London some years later, David invites him for dinner at his lodgings, along with Mrs Micawber and David's school friend Tommy Traddles. Again, Mr Micawber provides a bowl of punch. And Punch, says Mr Micawber,

> "[…] like time and tide wait for no man. Ah! It is at the present moment in high flavour. My love, will you give me your opinion?"
>
> Mrs Micawber pronounced it excellent.
>
> "Then I will drink," said Mr Micawber, "if my friend Copperfield will permit me to take that social liberty, to the days when my friend Copperfield and myself were younger, and fought our way in the world side by side. I may say, of myself and Copperfield, in words we have sung together before now, that
>
> We twa hae run about the braes
> And pu'd the gowans fine

4 Dickens 1848–1850, Chapter 17.

> —in a figurative point of view—on several occasions. I am not exactly aware," said Mr Micawber with the old roll in his voice, and the old indescribable air of saying something genteel, "what gowans may be, but I have no doubt that Copperfield and myself would frequently have taken a pull at them, if it had been feasible."
>
> Mr Micawber, at the then present moment, took a pull at his punch. So we all did; Traddles evidently lost in wondering at what distant time Mr Micawber and I could have been comrades in the battle of the world.[5]

Traddles may well wonder: on the previous occasion when the song had been sung, Copperfield was a schoolboy and Mr Micawber a married man with children, and when they first were acquainted Copperfield was an even younger schoolboy and Mr Micawber even then a married man with children.

Mr Micawber's attachment to the song perfectly captures the kind of over-arching sentimentality to which it is so often subject. However, if we smile at Micawber's grandiose emotions, we do so with a certain amount of sympathy and understanding, even more so on the third occasion on which the song appears. Between times, much has happened. Mr Micawber is now in the employ of Uriah Heep (rhymes with creep), and Heep's immoral, indeed illegal activities have left Micawber facing a huge dilemma. Such is the distress that it is even causing a rift between Mr and Mrs Micawber, and at the height of this distress Micawber visits London and meets Copperfield again. The old ritual is repeated: ingredients are fetched for Mr Micawber to make punch, but he is so distracted that disaster ensues—lemon-peel ends up in the kettle, and he attempts to pour boiling water from the candlestick. He breaks down, rejecting Copperfield's attempts at assistance:

> "No, Copperfield!—No communication—a—until—Miss Wickfield—a—redress from wrongs inflicted by consummate scoundrel—HEEP!" (I am quite convinced he could not have uttered three words, but for the amazing energy with which this word inspired him when he felt it coming.) "Inviolable secret—a—from the whole world—a—no exceptions—this day week—a—at breakfast time—a—everybody present—including aunt—a—and extremely friendly gentleman—to be at the hotel in Canterbury—a—where—Mrs Micawber and myself—Auld Lang Syne in chorus—and—a—will expose the intolerable ruffian—HEEP! No more to say—a—or listen to persuasion—go immediately—not capable—a—bear society—upon the track of devoted and doomed traitor—HEEP!"[6]

Indeed, on each of these occasions, the punch and the song are also linked to the villains of the piece, Uriah Heep, James Steerforth and his accomplice-cum-butler Littimer. In the first case, when Mr Micawber and David discover each other in Canterbury, David is having tea with Heep and his mother. On the second, Littimer interrupts looking for his master, who—as is later revealed—is in the process of running off with, and (according to the moral standards of the day) ruining, David's beloved childhood friend Em'ly. Now, at the denouement of many tragedies, the mention of the song takes

5 Dickens 1848–1850, Chapter 27.
6 Dickens 1848–1850, Chapter 49.

on tragic qualities. The story does, however, end happily, for the old acquaintances together see off the scoundrel Heep, and the Micawbers, having borrowed from practically everyone in England, emigrate to a new life in Australia (accompanied by the two "fallen women" Em'ly and Martha, and Em'ly's faithful uncle Mr Peggotty). On parting, they do not sing *Auld Lang Syne,* although punch is certainly drunk. After all, for Mr Micawber, *Auld Lang Syne* is a song of reunion, not parting.

There is, however, a coda. Many years later, Mr Peggotty returns briefly and shows Copperfield an open letter published by the finally flourishing and respectable Mr Micawber in an Australian newspaper:

> TO DAVID COPPERFIELD, ESQUIRE,
> THE EMINENT AUTHOR.
> MY DEAR SIR—Years have elapsed since I had an opportunity of ocularly perusing the lineaments now familiar to the imaginations of a considerable portion of the civilised world.
>
> But, my dear sir, though estranged (by the force of circumstances over which I have no control) from the personal society of the friend and companion of my youth, I have not been unmindful of his soaring flight. Nor have I been debarred,
>
> Though seas between us braid ha' roared,
>
> (BURNS) from participating in the intellectual feasts he has spread before us.
>
> I cannot, therefore, allow of the departure from this place of an individual whom we mutually respect and esteem, without, my dear sir, taking this opportunity of thanking you, on my own behalf, and, I may undertake to add, on that of the whole of the Inhabitants of Port Middlebay for the gratification of which you are the ministering agent [etc.][7]

Whenever *Auld Lang Syne* appears in this novel, it is always tongue-in-cheek—one cannot approach Mr Micawber otherwise. But for all the burlesque quality of these references to it at key points in the novel's progress, the song's sentiments echo much further. Dickens has distilled the essence of the song, and its sentiment pervades *David Copperfield* on practically every page.

7.2 The Song of Conflict and Reconciliation

David Copperfield is not the only novel by Dickens to contain references to *Auld Lang Syne.* In *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–1865), the song briefly appears in a scene featuring two characters who are not so much auld acquaintances, as new partners in crime, Silus Wegg and Mr Venus. Wegg is fond of paraphrasing from songs and poems, as if to give a rhetorical sheen of authority to his underhand schemes. The game is to some extent given away, though, by the fact that his quotations are fairly wide of the mark:

> "We'll devote the evening, brother," exclaimed Wegg, "to prosecute our friendly move. And afterwards, crushing a flowing wine-cup—which I allude to brewing rum and water—we'll pledge one another. For what says the Poet?

7 Dickens 1848–1850, Chapter 63.

> And you needn't, Mr. Venus, be your black bottle,
> For surely I'll be mine,
> And we'll take a glass with a slice of lemon in it to which you're partial,
> For auld lang syne."[8]

References to popular song are far from unusual in Dickens, and also play an important role in the works of several other nineteenth-century authors, not least among them Walter Scott. In a study of this topic, C. M. Jackson-Houlston quotes from Scott's *Redgauntlet*, in which Scott writes that "in Scotland, where there is so much national music, there is a kind of freemasonry amongst performers, by which they can, by a mere choice of a tune, express a great deal to the hearers."[9] For writers of novels, on the other hand, it is important that readers understand the connotations of the song or tune introduced into the narrative. This in turn can provide us with further information on what scholars of hermeneutics would call the horizon of expectation of the audience in question.

An interesting case in this regard is *Auld Lang Syne*'s appearance in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). Hardy is another author who often uses musical references to underline central themes in his work. He was writing at a time when a sense of English vernacular or "folk" song was emerging, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* provides a timely reflection on this. The central conflict in the novel is between the mayor, Michael Henchard, and a young Scotsman called Donald Farfrae. Farfrae is passing through Casterbridge on his way to emigrate, but Henchard is impressed by him and convinces him to stay and enter his employ. The relationship turns sour, however, when Henchard becomes increasingly bitter at the success of Farfrae's modernizing measures and his general popularity.

Shortly after his arrival in Casterbridge, Farfrae delights the locals in the tavern The Three Mariners with his renditions of Scots ballads, causing one to comment that he is "Danged if our country down here is worth singing about like that!" Farfrae sings on, "winding up at their earnest request with 'Auld Lang Syne'." As Hardy's narrator describes it,

> By this time he had completely taken possession of the Three Mariners' inmates, including even old Coney, notwithstanding an occasional odd gravity which awoke their sense of the ludicrous for the moment. They began to view him through a golden haze which the tone of his mind seemed to raise around him. Casterbridge had sentiment—Casterbridge had romance; but this stranger's sentiment was of differing quality. Or rather perhaps the difference was mainly superficial: He was to them like the poet of a new school who takes his contemporaries by storm; who is not really new, but is the first to articulate what all his listeners have felt, though but dumbly till then.[10]

The analogy Hardy draws between the ballad singer and the new-fangled poet is not simply a clever swipe at the claims of Scots song to antiquity: it also hints at a more

8 Dickens 1864–1865, Book 3, Chapter 6.
9 Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet*, Chapters 9–10, quoted in Jackson-Houlston 1999, 34.
10 Hardy 1886, Chapter 8.

important analogy in the novel. For Farfrae is not merely a stranger: he is a modernizer and an opportunist, a man whose purpose is to go out in the world to seek his fortune. He is, to sum up, a prototypical Scot, and personifies the two big threats that English folklorists of the period perceived for local culture—industrialization, and the creeping domination of non-local song cultures, whether these be Scots, Irish, or simply modern urban.

The real threat, as the novel makes clear, is simply that the songs Farfrae sings are irresistible. As Hardy's narrator tells us, they seem strange and yet also resonate with the people that listen to them. Even the emotionally blunt Henchard is not immune, as becomes apparent when he sets out to settle matters with Farfrae once and for all through the only medium he can think of—physical violence:

> Farfrae came on with one hand in his pocket, and humming a tune in a way which told him that the words were most in his mind. They were those of the song he had sung when he arrived years before at the Three Mariners, a poor young man, adventuring for life and fortune and scarcely knowing whitherward:
>
> "And here's a hand, my trusty fiere,
> And gie's a hand o' thine."
>
> Nothing moved Henchard like an old melody. He sank back. "No: I can't do it!" he gasped. "Why does the infernal fool begin that now!"[11]

In the fight that nevertheless ensues, the two auld acquaintances grasp at each other's hands and arms in a way that has nothing whatsoever to do with friendship. And yet Henchard cannot bring himself to kill Farfrae, as was his intention.

This example may be fictional, but it is not far removed from reality. Songs as general in their sentiment, and as familiar across communities, as *Auld Lang Syne* can be used to stir up divisions, or to quell them. Several broadsides from the time of the American Civil War use *Auld Lang Syne* as the basis for parodies and contrafacta; there are both Union and Confederate examples, and at least one which is a general plea for the war to end.[12] There are also abolitionist songs on *Auld Lang Syne*,[13] and it was one of the tunes played when Abraham Lincoln's funeral cortège proceeded through Albany.[14] At the major Peace Jubilee held in Boston in 1872, following the success of one in 1869 to celebrate—belatedly—the end of the War, a correspondent reports how the British Grenadier band closed their set with *Auld Lang Syne*:

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11 Hardy 1886, Chapter 38.

12 See for example the ballads *Death of Col. Ellsworth* (Gay ca. 1860s; Ellsworth was the first major casualty on the Union Side); *John Bell of Tennessee* (Bib. II/ca. 1860s; Bell was a southern slaveholder who had also been a candidate in the 1860 presidential election won by Lincoln. Although he was personally against the secession of his own state, Tennessee, this happened anyway after raids by the Union forces; the song text talks of "Traitor Lincoln" and "N[*****] Lincoln"); and *I Wish The War Was O'er!* (Anderson 1862).

13 See, e.g., William L. Gallard, *Song of the Abolitionist*, manuscript, http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/archive/03/0319002r.jpg

14 *New York Times*, 27 August 1865.

> [this] produced an electrical effect on the audience, who jumped to their feet, and took part in the chorus, singing at the top of their voices, "Should auld acquaintance be forgot," while the enormous organ sent forth its tremendous peals, nearly drowning everything else.[15]

As in Britain, *Auld Lang Syne*'s use in American political contexts was frequent and cut across party lines. It was more than once used to restore harmony where there had been discord: it was played in an attempt to soothe a heated exchange at the Democratic convention in Saratoga in 1880,[16] and a report on the Republican Party meeting in Albany in 1881 also draws attention to the irony underlying the sentiment:

> The scenes in which the long struggle at Albany closed on Friday cannot be called edifying. The affectation of general harmony, the pathetic recital of a verse from "Auld Lang Syne," the effusive cheers for Messrs. CONKLING and DEPEW and for the Senators-elect, the protestations of unswerving fidelity to the "grand old Republican Party," cannot possibly have concealed from those who took part in them the very serious elements of discord and discredit which have been created by this tedious and bitter contest.[17]

Perhaps by that point the business of day-to-day politics had subsumed (or suppressed) the memories of more violent conflicts. Only a few years earlier, a report in *The Times* on the centenary commemoration of the Battle of Bunker Hill during the American War of Independence noted the particular poignancy of an event which saw "the fraternization of soldiers who ten years ago were fighting against each other in the war of the Rebellion". At a formal reception hosted by the Governor and Mayor of Boston, "the brotherly process of clasping hands by North and South reached a climax" and a particularly warm reception was given to General Fitz Hugh Lee, son of the famous Confederate commander, who had this to say:

> I came here with the Norfolk Light Artillery Blues, a Confederate organization. Those guns have roared on many a hard-fought field. As we arrived before your city this afternoon and were steaming up your beautiful harbour the first notes that reached us from the band of music sent to meet us were of that good old tune called "Auld Lang Syne," and I felt that I was not going to Boston, but that I was returning again to a common country and a common heritage.

"Then, again," continues the report in *The Times* "there was a tumult, and the orchestra played 'Auld Lang Syne' amid silence that was as significant as the previous shouts".[18]

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15 *The Scotsman*, 11 April 1872. The visiting musicians included Johan Strauss, who was besieged by lady autograph hunters. For more on the original Peace Jubilee in 1869, see Branham & Hartnett 2002, Chapter 4.

16 *New York Times* 29 September 1880 (Saratoga incident); 24 July 1881 (Republican). Earlier incidences are noted in the *New-York Daily Times*, 9 June 1856 (Democrat), *New York Times*, 7 June 1867 (Republican); in the latter, it is noted that "A colored delegate suggested that the band play 'Auld Lang Syne' while the audience were going out, and the suggestion was adopted".

17 *New York Times*, 24 June 1881.

18 This and previous quotations: *The Times*, 30 June 1875.

7.3 Variations on a Theme

Around 1867, and following what he calls "a long immunity from the dreadful insanity that moves a man to become a musician in defiance of the will of God that he should confine himself to sawing wood", the narrator of what is supposed to be "A Touching Story of George Washington's Boyhood" by Mark Twain tells instead how he acquired an accordion on which he learned to play the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*. "It seems to me, now," he continues

> that I must have been gifted with a sort of inspiration to be enabled, in the state of ignorance in which I then was, to select out of the whole range of musical composition the one solitary tune that sounds vilest and most distressing on the accordeon. I do not suppose there is another tune in the world with which I could have inflicted so much anguish upon my race as I did with that one during my short musical career.[19]

If the fellow boarders and landlady of his place of residence were displeased enough with his renditions of the tune itself, they were even less amused when, after about a week, he decided he could add some variations: half of the boarders left "and the other half would have followed, but Mrs Jones saved them by discharging me from the premises." Two lodgings later, things again went from bad to worse: "the very first time I tried the variations the boarders mutinied. I never did find any body that would stand those variations." And so he ended up moving again:

> I went to board at Mrs. Murphy's, an Italian lady of many excellent qualities. The very first time I struck up the variations, a haggard, care-worn, cadaverous old man walked into my room and stood beaming upon me a smile of ineffable happiness. Then he placed his hand upon my head, and looking devoutly aloft, he said with feeling unction, and in a voice trembling with emotion, "God bless you, young man! God bless you! For you have done that for me which is beyond all praise. For years I have suffered from an incurable disease, and knowing my doom was sealed and that I must die, I have striven with all my power to resign myself to my fate, but in vain and the love of life was too strong within me. But Heaven bless you, my benefactor for since I heard you play that tune and those variations, I do not want to live any longer & I am entirely resigned and I am willing to die and in fact, I am anxious to die." And then the old man fell upon my neck and wept a flood of happy tears.

Surely enough, the old man soon died, and eventually, the narrator himself got bored of the instrument, although on reflection he noted that "I derived some little benefit from that accordeon; for while I continued to practice on it, I never had to pay any board and landlords were always willing to compromise, on my leaving before the month was up."

Twain's characteristically sardonic take on how a favourite tune becomes, for those not currently in possession of an accordion, a despised tune, is quite believable if we look at the many sets of variations on *Auld Lang Syne* and other tunes which made

19 All quotations from Twain 1867.

up a not insignificant part of the music published in the nineteenth century. Many of these are not for the faint-hearted—not because they are shockingly chromatic or progressive (the harmony is almost always straightforward, and most follow the same pattern of presenting the tune, and then presenting it again in broken chords, or *presto*, and so on) but because they are designed to flex a musician's muscles and show off her or his skills. If these proved any kind of model for Twain's very amateur performer, it's hardly surprising that it was more than his housemates could take.

The art of taking a simple, often popular tune and adding elaborate variations is one of the constants of musical practice across a number of eras and cultures. As Chapter 2 recounted, the earliest known written source for a tune called "Old Long Syne" was a set of variations from the late seventeenth century; and in the eighteenth century and beyond, Scots fiddlers would play at a society ball one day, at a rural wedding the next, in both cases being accustomed to spinning out a well-known tune for the extenuated delight of the dancers. The practice of using a popular tune as the basis for a set of variations had lost none of its popularity some two hundred years later, and constituted one of the largest sectors in the nineteenth century's booming music publishing trade. The number and type of variations on M2 which appear over the course of the nineteenth century are testimony to this general phenomenon. And although these pieces are ostensibly products of a "written" tradition, belonging to those sectors of the population with access to instruments and the education necessary to read music, the way the melody is stated and treated reflects the types of minor deviations and developments from the source that are also well known from studies of the oral transmission of song. It is hard, therefore, to find two renditions of M2 which are exactly the same here. There is, however, a certain statistical "constant" which ensures that the same basic elements recur again and again, though not necessarily in the same way. For example, very many sources for the melody have at least one "Scotch snap" rhythm, and the earlier publications in particular have several; however, there is a great deal of variety in the points at which these actually appear. As the century proceeds, there is also an increasing tendency to "square" the rhythms of the melody—often, but not exclusively, where the arrangement adopts a clearly march-like style. An exception would be Alexandre Croisez's *Military Rondo on the Air Auld Lang Syne* for pianoforte, published in 1848: the arrangement retains the Scotch snap rhythm at the first and second lines of the chorus. Another feature in many of these pieces is the tendency to alter the first bar of the tune so that its melodic shape is similar to that of the second bar. Thus, sometimes the opening motif features a dip down to the (un-pentatonic) leading note from the tonic (Figure 7.1a); and in what may be a related development, some versions also present the 2-1-2-3 pattern of the second bar as 2-1#-2-3, a descent of a semitone rather than a whole tone (Figure 7.1b). All these tendencies contribute to the loosening of the tune from a specifically "Scottish" genre—its "internationalization", if we like.

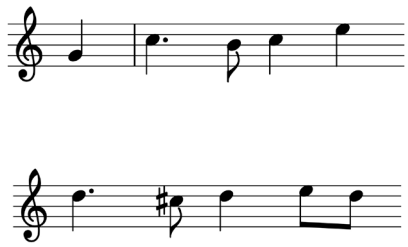

Fig. 7.1 (a) and (b) Some typical alterations to the opening of M2 in nineteenth-century instrumental variations. Figures created by author (2021).

Audio example 11. Audio example 12.

https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/36abf7d5

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The earliest instrumental variations on M2 as *Auld Lang Syne* seem to have been Scottish in origin, written by Daniel Ross, of whom little is known other than that he published numerous piano variations on Scottish tunes.[20] One edition has been dated by Aberdeen University Library at 1809, but most other editions in British libraries come from around 1820, when there is also an upsurge in editions published in the USA.[21] Ross's variations are fairly typical of those that come later. There is no development of the theme as such: instead, it forms the clearly audible skeleton around which semiquaver arpeggiation, triplet-style rhythm, or varying styles of accompaniment are added like swirls on a wedding cake. Interesting in the case of Ross is, however, the surfeit of little black notes that once caused Thomson (and his ladies) to shrink in commercial terror. It is one indication that the variation style, like the style of performance improvisation it was derived from, was aimed at showing off the skill of the instrumentalist in question. And unlike the Scots songs, the ladies would be able to concentrate on their playing, without the added difficulty of singing at the same time.

The bias of western music aesthetics towards the act of composing rather than performance, and towards professionals rather than amateurs, has meant that pieces such as these do not figure very strongly in official histories of music, though this is gradually changing. However, if performance, and not just composition, is seen as a driving force in musical culture, we can begin to appreciate this preponderance of instrumental variations and fantasias, which serve a double purpose of delighting the audiences with a tune they know well, and using this as a springboard to demonstrate technical virtuosity. Both composition and virtuosic performance are linked in the

20 Catalogues sometimes list him as being John Ross, who was Professor of Music at Aberdeen and also a composer. The confusion may derive from the fact that Daniel Ross's music is generally published under the name "D. Ross", which occasionally becomes "Dr. Ross".

21 See Chapter 3, above. One of the editions held by the British Library is available online: BL Digital Store g.1529.g.(30.).

practice of improvisation on a given theme, which was a recurrent feature of concert programmes at this time. One of the earliest sets of variations on *Auld Lang Syne* is by the flautist Charles Nicholson, whose playing is said to have inspired the instrument maker Theobold Boehm to develop the modern-day concert flute. Though he may well have improvised on the tune at one of his appointments at Corri's Rooms in Edinburgh in 1807, his take on *Auld Lang Syne* was first published in the 1820s, as part of his *Preceptive Lessons for the Flute* (the tune is used to exercise the key of B♭ major) and in a more elaborate version with piano accompaniment provided by John Bianchi Taylor and published in 1821.[22] Another flautist, Johann Carl Weidner, presented at least two compositions which included *Auld Lang Syne*—his *Three Solos for a German Flute* op. 9, which also includes *Corn Riggs Are Bonny* and *The Caledonian Hunt's Delight*, and *A Medley for the German Flute* op. 29, advertised in *The Times* of 31 August 1819.[23]

Although variations on *Auld Lang Syne* appeared throughout the nineteenth century, the publishing pattern seems to reflect the general surges in popularity of the song witnessed elsewhere. Thus, while there are a few appearances of the tune early in the century, there is a surge around the time of Davy and Pocock's opera.[24] Thereafter, there is a decline in the number of pieces on *Auld Lang Syne*, with a slight surge occurring in the 1850s, particularly if we include dance pieces also based on or incorporating the tune.[25] In the later nineteenth century, there are more pieces for solo instrument accompanied by piano, for example flute or violin, while in the earlier part of the century, variations for piano or harp predominate: these are almost invariably written by men, and dedicated to women. This reflects very accurately the contemporary division of labour, or rather division of labour and leisure: young ladies of a particular standing were expected to play the piano or the harp, and they were taught to do so by men. But many women were also active as composers, as witness Charlotte Newton's set of harp variations, published in 1821 and dedicated to Miss Harriet Kerslake, and Julia Woolf's *Auld Lang Syne: Fantasie on the Favorite Scotch Melody* (1862) for piano, which is dedicated to Alfred Mellon. Newton seems to have published very little music, but Woolf (1831–1903) was a well-established composer of instrumental music, song, and the comic opera *Carina*.[26]

One of the more interesting sets is that written by Gustavus Holst (1799–1871), grandfather of the more famous Gustav. In his harp variations on *Auld Lang Syne*,

22 Nicholson ca. 1821, Nicholson & Taylor 1821.

23 In this case, the other tunes introduced are named as being "Sul Margine, Welch [*sic*] Air, Oh still remember me, Auld lang Syne [*sic*], Petersburgh Bells".

24 See Chapter 4, above.

25 There are a few such pieces in the 1840s (e.g., Harris 1840, Holmes 1840, Bayley 1845, Croisez 1848), then a small cluster in the 1850s and early 1860s (Sulzner 1851, Wallace 1851, Wrenshall 1853, Osborne 1854, Grobe 1854, Rziha 1855, Streather 1857, Favarger 1860, Dawes 1860, Praeger 1862, Woolf 1862, Murillo 1862), thereafter a slight falling off again. This survey is based largely on the holdings of the British Library and the digital collections of the Library of Congress, and may not therefore be entirely representative.

26 A detailed biography can be found, in German, at Silke Wenzel, "Julia Woolf", *MUGI*, 25 April 2019, https://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/artikel/Julia_Woolf.pdf

published in 1822, the air is only directly recognizable in the opening statement, and the variations are peppered with gentle chromatic inflections of the type so typical of early Romantic chamber music. Other titles such as Felix Reinhold's *Auld Lang Syne, Reverie for the Pianoforte* (1869), some *Fantasias*, including Nicholson's, and pieces called *Transcription brillant* (Jules de Sivrai, 1871 and J. J. Freeman, 1898) or *Brillant transcription* (Jules Favre, see below) indicate other, freer ways of introducing the tune: in Nicholson's case, for example, it is hinted at in the introduction, but only introduced in its entirety about two thirds of the way through.

Many of the composers mentioned here have faded into oblivion. The compositions which they wrote—transcriptions of more complicated works and operas, variations and fantasias on airs taken from songs, arias, and the themes of symphonies—seemed to have outlived their use, while the airs themselves have lived on in other forms and in other arrangements. These pieces were intended for day-to-day musicianship in a social context which has changed dramatically since. Aesthetic standards were also changing: a review in *The Times* of a concert given by the violinist Joseph Joachim in 1889 lauds his performance but berates the "egregiously bad taste" demonstrated by a Mademoiselle Janotha (probably the composer and pianist Nathalie Janotha) at the same concert, noting that "Neither the tune of 'Auld Lang Syne' nor Beethoven's variations on 'God save the King' are suitable for impromptu performance at such concerts as these".[27] Playbills for Covent Garden, which a few decades before had boasted of the many popular songs in their productions, now reflected its status as the Royal Italian Opera, which it became in 1847.[28] And in the 1890s, the impresario Robert Newman and the conductor Henry Wood set out to educate the public with a series of promenade concerts which became, in time, *the* Promenade Concerts, the Proms, which are in fact a latter-day survivor of the garden concerts and musical extravaganzas that were such an important part of musical public life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Two composers closely associated both with the Proms and what is often called the "English Musical Renaissance" produced sets of orchestral variations relevant to the present discussion. We can start with what is undoubtedly the most famous set of variations associated with *Auld Lang Syne*—and one which in all probability is not on *Auld Lang Syne* at all. This is the *Variations on an Original Theme* op. 36 by Edward Elgar, commonly known as the *Enigma Variations*. The "enigma" of Elgar's subtitle was never revealed by him, but has often been presumed to be a popular tune which formed the basis of the theme. This, too, may have a basis in the practice of improvisation: according to his own account—albeit related very much after the fact—Elgar came home on 21 October 1889 after a hard day's teaching, and, refreshed by a cigar, started to improvise on the piano. His wife overheard him just as his casual playing had evolved into what

27 *The Times*, 20 March 1889.

28 Continental operas had long been a feature of London's musical life, but earlier in the century they often had popular songs and the favourite numbers of the star singers woven into them. See Fend 1993.

is now the "Enigma" theme, and she commented positively. On the first performance, Elgar suggested that "through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes', but is not played" and that "the principal Theme never appears. Even as in some late dramas [...] the chief character is never on the stage". Later, in exchanges with friends, he suggested that the "Enigma" is a tune to which the "Enigma" theme itself forms a counterpoint.

The *Enigma Variations* are a series of musical portraits of friends and colleagues, and given the cultural connotations of *Auld Lang Syne* it is hardly surprising that this tune has so often been posited as a solution to the puzzle.[29] One of Elgar's friends suggested at a very early stage that the hidden theme was *Auld Lang Syne,* but Elgar insisted that this answer "won't do"—a rebuke which, however, has also been read as being a smokescreen.[30] Many commentators have suggested that the "larger theme" mentioned by Elgar is not a theme in the musical sense, but may simply be "friendship". "In such circumstances", asks Roger Fiske, "what else could the 'hidden' tune be but *Auld lang syne*, with its nostalgic opening, 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot'?"[31] Fiske argues that M2—in this case, transposed into a minor key, and played twice before the refrain, which is in the major—works very well as a counterpoint; other suggestions have left the tune in the relative major key.[32] Eric Sams provided a more complex solution, suggesting that Elgar may have used the principle pitches of the tune to create a musical cipher which appears, sometimes chordally, sometimes melodically, in the "Enigma" theme, similar to the manner in which Robert Schumann also built motivic material from the pitches associated with the letters of his name and those of his friends.[33]

Fiske argues that Elgar's unwillingness to admit that the tune used was *Auld Lang Syne* may have come from embarrassment that his *Variations*—which by that point had become one of the most successful English orchestral pieces of all time—could be based on such a musical banality. The same could be true of many other tunes suggested as solutions for the enigma at various times, including *Rule Britannia*. Indeed, the presumption that *Auld Lang Syne* holds the key to this enigma tells us as much about the status of the song in popular culture as it does about Elgar's work.

Elgar himself "appears" in another set of variations for orchestra which were definitely based on the tune. Joseph Holbrooke (1878–1958) wrote his *Auld Lang Syne: Variations no. 3* (*Scotch*) op. 60 in 1906. The frontispiece declares it to be "An impression of my musical friends and their work": they are identified only by their initials. Like Elgar's *Enigma*, these are much more elaborate variations than those which make up the

29 A compact survey of various answers to the Enigma is provided in Rushton 1999. Rushton however misinterprets Elgar's description of the Enigma being a "dark saying" as implying that the solution must involve a saying, phrase or sentiment that is dark in nature. As Eric Sams had already pointed out, "dark saying" is in fact a translation of the Greek source word that gives us the term "enigma". See Rushton 1999, 66; Sams 1970/1, 1970/2.

30 Fiske 1969.

31 Fiske 1969.

32 See Rushton 1999.

33 Sams 1969/1, 1969/2.

bulk of the pieces discussed in this section. New ideas are introduced and developed which do not have any directly obvious relationship to *Auld Lang Syne*. For example, the variation dedicated to "E. E." is an "Allegro giacoso" featuring an anthem-like tune which sounds like a combination of *There'll Always Be An England* (which was written later, during World War II), *We Wish You A Merry Christmas*, and the nursery rhyme *Polly Put The Kettle On*. The latter is not so unlikely as a possible basis considering that another set of variations by Holbrooke, which proved a hit at the Proms, was on the nursery rhyme *Three Blind Mice*.

Variations on *Auld Lang Syne* are less frequent in the twentieth century, though instrumental and band arrangements of the tune continue to appear, mostly in collections. One exception to this rule is worth mentioning, however, not least because it provides a very different sort of answer to Elgar's *Enigma* and its ruse of deriving the material from a tune which is never actually heard. According to Ernest Tomlinson, composer of a *Fantasia on Auld Lang Syne* (1983) which is available in a version "for two pianos and two turner-overs" as well as the original version for saxophone orchestra,

> It is a well-known fact that the "Enigma" theme [...] was based on the famous Scottish air "Auld Lang Syne." What is not generally known is that all other important sets of variations were also based on this song. Indeed, all the greatest tunes in musical history were based on "Auld Lang Syne".[34]

Accordingly, and in a spirit which Twain would no doubt have applauded, he proves his point in a set of variations introducing a total of 129 different tunes—always accompanied, in logical musical fashion, by *Auld Lang Syne*. Some of the more obvious tunes include the Toreador theme from *Carmen*, the *Ode to Joy* from Beethoven's Ninth, and *Good King Wenceslas*. There is also a twelve-tone version in a distinctly Webernian style.

7.4 Iconography and Reminiscence

The increasing popularity of *Auld Lang Syne* through the nineteenth century naturally led to representations of the song in the form of drawings, paintings, and also sculpture. To start with a particularly imposing example: in advance of the Burns centenary celebrations in 1859, and demonstrating the song's status in Burns's oeuvre by that point, the Royal Scottish Academy commissioned George Harvey to create a set of engravings based on the song; these were published in a lavish book, interspersed with the words of the text.[35] The five prints demonstrate the contrast built into the childhood verses of the poem. The first, illustrating "We twa ha'e run about the braes / And pu'd the gowans fine" shows two young children (possibly a girl and a boy) reclining on an obviously Scottish hillside, pulling the gowans; the second part of the verse ("But we've wander'd mony a weary foot / Sin' auld lang

34 Tomlinson 1983.
35 Royal Association for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in Scotland 1859.

syne") shows a young man, obviously in a much warmer climate, looking intently at what appears to be a wilted flower. Similarly, the third print shows the same two children, but slightly older, standing in a burn—they appear to be filtering water through a handkerchief similar to the one they gathered the gowans in; this print illustrates the lines "We twa ha'e paidled i' the burn / Frae morning sun till dine". The verse's conclusion, "But seas between us braid ha'e roar'd / Sin' auld lang syne" again shows the grown man, in the hat and galoshes of a seaman, perched on the rigging of a ship at sea and staring intently in the direction of some imagined shore. The final print shows this same man, much older (bald patch), and apparently recently arrived from a journey (his bag, hat and stick are beside him). He is raising a glass with another man, apparently some years older again: "And we'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet / For auld lang syne."

With the exception of the two engravings of the young man alone, these images correspond to many other visual representations of *Auld Lang Syne*. The statue "Auld Lang Syne" which for many years from the 1860s stood in Central Park, New York also shows two men in later middle age, seated at a table, joining hands and raising their glasses; of the two, one is slightly smarter in dress, and has a bag at his feet; his "man of the world" appearance contrasts with his old friend's smart, but slightly rustic, attire.[36] A depiction of *Auld Lang Syne* preserved in one of the Mitchell Library's many collections of cuttings relating to Burns (unfortunately, no source is given) shows three men seated at a table in a tavern: the two at the front are shaking hands and raising their drinks, and one of these has a knapsack, a stick, and is slightly smarter dressed than his friend, who is wearing a Scots bonnet and is accompanied by a sheepdog.[37] A similar picture is found in *The Illustrated Book of Scottish Songs* (1854): the scene is a tavern, with three men seated at a table. Two are shaking hands, with one simultaneously raising his tankard.[38] The men are apparently in early middle age, and are dressed in the garb of the late eighteenth century. There is a walking stick at the feet of the man raising the tankard, but no other suggestion of a journey. Another group of three men are standing in the background, raising their tankards to one another.

Another publication, a pocket-sized yet lavish edition of the song published in London and New York in 1905, presents two rather different interpretations (Fig. 7.2). The frontispiece shows a rural scene with a young couple sitting on a bench by the banks of a stream. Two further illustrations within the book, which presents a verse per page, show typical Scottish landscapes.[39] The picture at the book's end, on the other

36 The *New York Times* noted that this statue was "presented by a number of gentlemen, residents of this city"; 10 December 1864. My description is based on a photograph of the statue in the Mitchell Library. Burnsiana collection, cat. no. 343195, folio 41 verso; see also, e.g., https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e1-f16c-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99

37 Mitchell Library Burnsiana, cat. no. 343191, pasted on page 52.

38 The book has been digitized by Google: see https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=zZYlAAAAMAAJ&vq=syne&hl=de&pg=PA238#v=onepage&q&f=false

39 One features a river, the other a hilly landscape with flowers: possibly, these were intended to illustrate the two childhood verses, with their burn and their gowans, but their placement within the book does not reflect this.

hand, facing "And surely ye'll be your pint-stoup" (the final verse in this publication), shows a group of wigged Georgian gentlemen standing around what appears to be a large bowl of punch, raising a glass together.[40] The linking of the song specifically to Georgian social life is interesting; another, slightly later book by the same publisher, containing several poems by Burns as well as *Auld Lang Syne*, also portrays men standing round a punchbowl, raising their glasses, but in a slightly later style of dress.[41] While the illustrations discussed in the previous paragraph deal specifically with the song's text, these images reflect its use in society, and the perceived age of the song. The frontispiece, meanwhile, reflects the storyline of three different light novels of the later nineteenth century with *Auld Lang Syne* in the title, all of which tell the same basic story of a boy and girl, close since childhood, who then mature and fall in love, only to suffer a separation (in two cases, the male protagonist is press-ganged, while in the third the separation is one of domestic rather than military drama).[42]

The phrases "auld lang syne" or "Should auld acquaintance be forgot" also appear in the title of several volumes of poetry, personal reminiscence and local history. Generally speaking, novels and volumes of poetry using the title are slightly earlier than volumes of reminiscence—personal, fictional, or relating to local history—which do the same, the latter tending to be published around 1890–1905 and again from around 1920–1940. The preface to one of the poetry volumes speaks for many:[43]

> The Author of the following Songs and Poems died in the Spring of 1864.
>
> The Title "Auld Langsyne" is prefixed to them, because, though presented to the Public now for the first time, at least in a collected form, the most of them were written 40 or 50 years ago. To the few surviving members of the Author's circle of early friends these pages may recall old times; but it is hoped that they will also be generally acceptable at least in the locality to which they refer, and among the class for which the Author wrote, and to which he belonged—the working population.[44]

Most of the volumes, however, relate to people from a quite different background. The most well-known of the autobiographical volumes is by the German-born orientalist F. Max Müller (1823–1900), an expert on Indian culture who lectured at Oxford from the 1850s (he moved to Britain around the time of the second peak in the reception of *Auld Lang Syne*).[45] Among the other autobiographical volumes is one from a member of the English aristocracy, and one from the Glaswegian writer and journalist William Power (1873–1951), who went on to become leader of the Scottish National Party, and who also wrote a perceptive essay on *Auld Lang Syne*.[46] Alongside the personal volumes of

40 Bib. II/1905.
41 Bib. II/1908.
42 Russell 1878 (also mentioned in the previous chapter), Watson 1880, Weber 1889.
43 Hamilton 1865, Dryburgh 1865, Latto 1892, Beck 1902, Hay 1920.
44 Dryburgh 1865, 3.
45 Müller 1898.
46 Russell 1925, Power 1937. Others include Watson 1903, Tiplady 1926. The article on *Auld Lang Syne* is Power 1926.

Fig. 7.2 (a) Frontispiece and (b) final verse images from a book edition of *Auld Lang Syne* published in 1905 (NLS shelf mark T.8.g); artist not credited; and (c) an alternative frontispiece image, by Gordon Browne, from an edition published in 1908 as *Auld Lang Syne and Other Poems* (London: Ernest Nister; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.). Image for (c) from a copy in the author's possession; also held in the British Library, UIN BLL01000543385.

reminiscences, the title crops up in books dedicated to local history,[47] and there is also a song dedicated to *Old Norwich* written to the tune of *Auld Lang Syne*, and published in 1885. Its first verse and chorus sets the scene and the connection to the other song:

> To dear old Norwich, Boys, a toast
> One glass before we go;
> To the Royal City we can boast,
> The friendly Town we know;
> CHORUS
> To dear old Norwich, Boys we'll raise,
> Our brimming goblets high;
> Now chorus forth our City's praise,
> We here would live and die.[48]

The phrase also crops up in one of the classics of Scottish "kailyard" literature, Ian Maclaren's *The Days o' Auld Langsyne*.[49] By this time, it had become synonymous with a particular type of misty, heather-tinged recollection of Scotland's rural past.[50] It also appears in the poetical effusions of non-Scots as well, such as a poem written by Augusta Webster published in a volume for private circulation which also refers to the phrase in its title.[51] Entitled *Auld Lang Syne. Where Home Was* and written in 1874, Webster's poem bemoans the changes that have replaced "elm-trees and the linnet's trill" with a "flaunting grimy street" and the "thud and roars of wheels and feet". This brings us to another song whose subject was home, and a cottage home at that, and which in many ways can be compared with *Auld Lang Syne*.

7.5 The Sentimentalist's Song

That the nostalgic song *Auld Lang Syne* should have become so popular in the mid- to late nineteenth century is no surprise, particularly when we compare it to another song that ticks most of the same boxes: *Home, Sweet Home*. Like *Auld Lang Syne*, *Home, Sweet Home* also owed its initial success to the theatre. The tune is generally attributed to Henry Bishop, who initially claimed the melody was Sicilian; it has also been suggested that Bishop based the melody on another by the German composer Johann Abraham Peter Schultz.[52] Bishop's first version of the melody, with four eight-line verses, came in the first volume of his *Melodies of Various Nations* in 1821. Two years later, he shortened the melody and brought it together with John Howard

47 Penicuik 1899, Neilson 1935, McNeil 2003 (written from 1955).
48 Taylor & Campling 1885.
49 Maclaren 1895.
50 See for example also a song called *The Days o' Auld Langsyne*, to a tune called "The Burnside", which is published in Whitelaw 1848.
51 Pen & Pencil Club (London) 1877. The first verse of *Auld Lang Syne* appears on the title page, where it is attributed to Burns.
52 Underwood 1977, whose starting point is a comment made by William Parke to the effect that the tune came from a German opera.

Payne's poem *Home! Sweet Home!* for the opera *Clari, or the Maid of Milan*, which premiered in London in 1823.

In both Britain and America, *Auld Lang Syne* and *Home, Sweet Home* vie for the position of the most important sentimental song in this period. Histories of music in the Victorian era are much more likely to discuss the impact of the latter, however. As Pearsall puts it, *Home, Sweet Home*

> was a song for bringing the house down, sung as an encore by Jenny Lind, the song [Adelina] Patti elected to sing when she was discovered sitting on a sofa in the Arundel Hotel, Norfolk Street. At a charity concert at the Albert Hall, a lady in the audience was so overcome that she immediately handed over a cheque for £1,000.[53]

Derek Scott also notes that *Home, Sweet Home*, as played by Billy Bolden's band when troops were leaving for the Spanish-American war in 1898, caused so many soldiers to jump ship that the US Army banned it from being played at future departures.[54] It was often played together with *Auld Lang Syne* when British troops were leaving port as well. In an address to a meeting attended by Gladstone in 1879, a Scottish Liberal said that

> We are proud of our Scottish ballads, and think we can challenge any nation to beat our pathetical [*sic*] "Flowers of the Forest," our patriotic "Scots wha hae," our spirited "A man's a man for a' that," our homely "Auld Lang Syne." But there is one thing that we cannot match, and that is "Home, Sweet Home."[55]

(At this point, his audience cheered). In his *Stories of Famous Songs*, published in 1898, which also contains a chapter on *Auld Lang Syne*, S. J. A. Fitzgerald found it "inevitable" that he should begin with *Home, Sweet Home* and end with *God Save the King*.[56] *Home, Sweet Home*'s sentiment has featured in countless needlework samplers, not to mention its refrain becoming further immortalized in the twentieth century as spoken by a girl with pigtails and ruby slippers, carrying a dog called Toto: "There's no place like home."[57]

Comparing these two songs helps put into sharper focus those qualities of *Auld Lang Syne* that have contributed to its lasting success. Possibly the biggest difference between the two is that while *Home, Sweet Home* remains indelibly connected to the sentimental milieu of the nineteenth century, and is nowadays more likely to be encountered in the form of a biting parody, *Auld Lang Syne* has to some extent transcended this—it always was something more than just a sentimental song, despite

53 Pearsall 1973, 163.
54 Scott 2017, 188.
55 Speech given by "Mr Tod of St Leonard's Hill" at a Scottish Liberal meeting; reported in *The Scotsman*, 27 November 1879.
56 Fitzgerald 1897, xv.
57 In the novel by L. Frank Baum on which the film *The Wizard of Oz* was based, published in 1900, Dorothy is not transported back to Kansas after reciting these words, but with the rather less poetic: "Take me home to Aunt Em!"

the best efforts of many an interpretation to the contrary. Ostensibly, the texts of the two songs deal with broadly the same topic, but while *Auld Lang Syne* focuses on the maintenance of personal relationships, specifically friendship, the exile of *Home, Sweet Home* reflects on a thatched cottage, birds that sing there, "a fond father's smile" and the "cares of a mother". It is not irrelevant in this regard that one of the most popular of all Burns's poems in the nineteenth century was *The Cotter's Saturday Night*: this too depicts a domestic scene, with a family gathering around a humble meal and then listening to the head of the family read from the Bible. On the other hand, like *Auld Lang Syne*, *Home, Sweet Home* also has the virtue of conjuring up many associations with the simple three words of its title, and of expressing the most fervent wish of many an exile or emigré. Meanwhile, changes were afoot that would present new means of maintaining contact with both those distant and those passed.

7.6 *Auld Lang Syne* at the Threshold of the Information Revolution

In 1877, the Scots emigrant Alexander Graham Bell presented a new invention, the telephone, to a number of audiences in North America and Britain. In February of that year, he demonstrated the new device in Salem, and a report on the proceedings was then transmitted, by telephone, to Boston, for publication in the *Boston Daily Globe*:

> Professor Bell briefly explained the construction of the instrument, and then sketched his studies of the system of transmitting sounds. He explained that it was his first attempt before an audience to try these different experiments. An intermittent current was first sent from Boston by Mr Thomas A. Watson, Professor Bell's associate. This caused a noise very similar to a horn from the telephone. The Morse telegraph alphabet was then sent by musical sounds and could be heard throughout the hall. The audience burst into loud applause at this experiment. A telephonic organ was then put into operation in Boston, "Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot" and "Yankee Doodle" were readily heard through the hall and heartily recognized. At this point Professor Bell then explained how he learnt to transmit the tones of the human voice, and paid a grateful tribute to Mr. Watson. Professor Bell asked Mr. Watson for a song, and "Auld Lang Syne" came from the mouthpiece of the instrument almost before his words were ended.[58]

Much the same procedure was repeated in London, when Bell presented the telephone to a meeting of the British Association:

> Mr. Preece, communicating with the Post-office, asked an operator to put the section into telephonic connexion with the Guildhall, and in a very short time a verse of "God Save the Queen" as played on a harmonium, was distinctly heard. A song with the chords was afterwards played, and the operator at the Post-office sang "Auld Lang Syne," repeated several times the sentence "To be, or not to be—that is the question;" and read a paragraph from a newspaper. The song and the sentence were easily and clearly heard by considerable numbers of the audience seated in proximity to the instrument, but the articulation of the paragraph was not so successfully followed.[59]

58 *Boston Daily Globe*, 13 February 1877 as cited in *The Times*, 28 February 1877.
59 *The Times*, 22 August 1877.

And again in Canada, later in the same year:

> At Hamilton, Canada, nine telephones were placed on the same circuit, on a line connecting three private houses. Speaking or singing from any one of the telephones came distinctly to all the listeners at the other houses on the circuit. "Auld Lang Syne" and "Old Hundred," sung at the same time at two of the houses, were heard simultaneously at the third. On holding a telephone against the sounding board of a piano at one house, the music was enjoyed by six listeners at the other houses.[60]

What is notable in these three excerpts from the many reports on Bell's invention and distribution, is that there are always two songs played, and one of them is always *Auld Lang Syne*. The other songs are often regionally specific: the British national anthem; the popular song *Yankee Doodle*, so quintessentially American (although the tune is of British origin); "Old Hundred" is more generally known—perhaps Bell could not think of any typically Canadian tunes. For all these communities, however, *Auld Lang Syne* enjoyed the same level of significance. This is probably the reason why Bell chose it, the more poetic explanation being that he recognized that this invention would transform the way people keep in touch with even the most far-flung of auld acquaintances. (Not to mention that, as a migrant from Scotland, the song would have particular significance for him personally.)

In the early days of telephone, one of its projected uses was to be the transmission of music, and not just voices. For technical reasons, however, it was other innovations such as radio which would bring music to the masses through new channels. Another step in this revolution came in the years just after Bell's invention, with the first scratchy but promising attempts to record sound in such a way that it could be played back exactly as it had sounded. Of several innovations in this direction, the one that eventually succeeded was based on an invention by Emile Berliner, a German who at the time was, like Bell, working in the United States. In 1890, he made a small number of recordings to demonstrate the potential of his "gramophone". It is presumed that many of these are of his own voice, including what is without a doubt the world's first recording of the first verse and chorus of *Auld Lang Syne*, making it one of the first songs ever to be recorded.[61]

60 *The Times*, 16 November 1877.

61 Now available online at https://archive.org/details/EmileBerliner