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### Introduction

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# Introduction

*Krisztina Lajosi and Andreas Stynen*

The nineteenth century, as is widely known, was an era of far-reaching changes. It is hard, if not impossible, to argue which evolution was the most decisive one. Not so for the Belgian periodical *L'Echo Musical*: its 1882 volume explained that the nineteenth century was to be labelled not the century of industrial development or democratic regimes, but rather “le siècle de la musique.”<sup>1</sup> It seemed that music had become a greater priority than food or drink. Exaggerated as it was, this statement carried some truth: the rise of both instrumental and vocal societies was unmistakable, and so was their position in social life. Though *L'Echo Musical*—one of several periodicals devoted to music—was referring to the Belgian situation, the observation was valid for many European countries and regions, from Spain to Wales, from Estonia to the Balkans. This was no coincidence, nor a mere consequence of similar developments; the musical, and especially choral movements of the nineteenth century were a transnational phenomenon, with foreign models and practices often deliberately adopted, imitated, and modified—or rejected.

Logical though it seems, current historiography bears no witness to the transnational dynamics of the choral movement. Studies of choral history are rare, and the few that do exist are mainly limited to a clearly defined area—usually a town or a country. Even less examined is the potential of choral singing in mobilizing people for nationalist projects. In order to better comprehend these issues, a comparative workshop was hosted in Antwerp in February 2011. This two-day event—which opened with a performance of nineteenth-century music by two male choirs—was organized jointly by NISE and SPIN. NISE (National movements and Intermediary Structures in Europe), founded in Belgium in 2008 and continuously expanding, is a research, heuristic, and archival platform designed to promote comparative and transnational studies of the structures mediating between the authorities and the individual. SPIN (the Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms), founded the same year in the Netherlands, is a research hub designed to chart the cultural and historical roots of European nationalisms, bringing into focus the intellectual networks

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1 “Le Siècle de la musique,” *L'Echo Musicale* 14 (1882), 37–38.

which carried and disseminated the emerging ideals of cultural nationalism between 1770 and 1914.<sup>2</sup>

The primary objective of the workshop was to collate case studies and bring together specialists from different countries to work towards an integrated, Europe-wide, and comparative transnational study of the phenomenon of (male) choirs as vehicles for the assertion of separate national identities. This happened at a time before mass media and transregional communication reached full development, and in a great variety of contexts: in large as well as small countries, established states as well as emergent nationalities. Choirs could operate on their own or unite in larger federative structures; their practices ranged from weekly rehearsals to small- or large-scale festivals and competitions. To enhance the workshop's comparative dimension in this multi-faceted topic, participants were asked to keep in mind a number of perspectives, including the choirs' physiognomies, repertoires, rehearsals, performances, and representations, with particular attention to the extent to which trends were influenced by 'foreign' or 'domestic' circumstances. The inspiring enthusiasm and lively debates among the participants of the Antwerp workshop are now embodied in this volume, which contains a selection of reworked and fine-tuned papers along with some altogether new studies, all offering an important contribution to the history of musical nationalism in Europe, with an outspoken emphasis on the interaction between the local and the transnational. Our special thanks are due to Gene Moore for his invaluable help with the copy-editing.

### Choirs in National Context

The dynamic interplay of choirs and national movements was a typically nineteenth-century phenomenon involving new forms of cultural and social activity. Choral singing and vocal societies, however, were nothing new. Singers have been performing in groups at least since the Greek tragedies, and Christianity had its *schola cantorum* (and consequently its choral tradition) since the fourth century. Outside the church, community singing was probably less practised during the Middle Ages; secular music was foremost a matter of soloists, and remained so until the seventeenth century. From that time onwards, opera composers periodically relied on choral singing, whereas oratorios, with their dramatic stories put to music, took religious singing out of

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2 More information is available online at: <http://nise.eu> and <http://spinnet.humanities.uva.nl>.

the liturgy (and the church).<sup>3</sup> The secularization of choral singing was greatly accelerated in many parts of Europe by the French Revolution: in its fight against the Catholic clergy, many religious singing schools and chapels were closed. And even though choral singing often remained connected to church practices, the secularization of leisure activities was unprecedented.

The defining impetus for the choral movement's success, both internationally and undeniably, originated in the German-speaking world. Hans-Georg Nägeli, a Swiss composer, wrote in 1809 about a dream he had: if people started singing together with hundreds of thousands, from any background whatsoever, they would feel more closely related to one another to such an extent that it would mean a decisive step towards a more complete humanity. To realize this democratic, Enlightenment ideal Nägeli opened a singing school in his hometown Zürich, resulting in two choirs: one for young men and another for their female peers.<sup>4</sup> The dissemination of his pedagogical principles, inspired by his compatriot Johann Henrich Pestalozzi, provoked some controversy, but was influential, and not only in his own country. An extremely workable model for community singing, albeit for men exclusively and without democratic underpinnings, was that of the so-called *Liedertafel*, founded in Berlin early in 1809. The members met not only for the *a cappella* singing of (original) compositions, but also for the sake of social conviviality. Mainly middle-class, the choir members presented themselves in their activities and repertoire as a cohesive group with shared ambitions; friendship, liberty, and a Romantic world view colored their choral life, but also a longing for political unity in the territorial patchwork that was to become Germany.<sup>5</sup>

Although the German *Liedertafeln* would become an inspiring model for several generations of singing enthusiasts all over Europe, there were also other models of community singing. One important alternative approach was developed in France, based on the teaching method of the Paris music teacher Guillaume-Louis Bocquillon, better known as "Wilhem." When he introduced his method to the working class in 1830, free of charge, the so-called *orphéon* was born: again male *a cappella* choirs, but from a broader social background. Contemporaries emphasized how the *orphéons* were a means to lift the entire French people to new cultural heights.<sup>6</sup> Both prototypes—the *orphéon* and the *Liedertafel* (or *Gesangverein*)—found supporters all over Europe, though

3 Smith and Young, "Chorus," in *Grove Music Online* (<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>; accessed 17 Sept. 2010).

4 See Asper (1994), 11–12 and 18–20.

5 Brinkman (1970), 16–20; Langewiesche (2000), 142–45.

6 Fulcher (1979), 47–56; Gumplowicz (1987), 20–33.

mediated by local circumstances that differed widely from those found in the German lands or in France.

Among the differences the choral models encountered during their dispersal over the continent were different stages of nation-building and divergent nationalistic agendas. Several explanatory models exist to understand the historical development of nations and national movements. The most popular theories in recent decades have been those of constructivism and modernism: out of a sociological approach, the hypothesis arose that nations can be constructed by élites; 'imagined communities' are created thanks to the 'invention of traditions.' The nation is thus conceived as a product of modernization and without roots in history.<sup>7</sup> Some scholars, however, have criticized this intrinsically Western perspective and asked why the state is deemed necessary for the creation of nations. Ethnosymbolists like Anthony D. Smith and John Hutchinson argue that national identity and nations should be considered rather as specialized developments of ethnicity and ethnic groups. Smith defines a nation as "a named and self-defined human community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories and symbols, have a distinctive public culture, are attached to a historic homeland and observe shared laws and customs."<sup>8</sup> Ethnosymbolists move beyond the idea that nations are mere inventions or constructions, and in most cases emphasize continuity with ethnicity: nationalism comes into being as a process of secularization, in which (transcendent) ethnic motifs (myths, traditions, symbols . . .) are selected and codified.<sup>9</sup> Both the modernist-constructivist and the ethnosymbolist schools are important for understanding the choral phenomenon.

To comprehend the development towards nationalism as a mass movement, the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch conceived a renowned three-phase model in 1968 that is still useful and relevant today. In Phase A, intellectuals lay a foundation for a national identity by studying cultural, linguistic, and other traits to increase the awareness of a common bond; Hroch calls this the period of scholarly interest. Phase B is labelled the era of patriotic agitation: activists try to persuade as many people of the same ethnic group as possible to strive for a fully-fledged nation. Phase C, finally, witnesses the rise of a mass movement: nationalism is now the binding element of a full social movement, with several branches, occupying a wide ideological spectrum.<sup>10</sup> Nowhere is this

7 See Anderson (1983); Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds. (1983).

8 Anthony D. Smith (2004), 17.

9 For the position of ethnosymbolism in the historical debate on nationalism, see Boeva (2010), 11–22.

10 Hroch (2000), 22–24.

development visible before the eighteenth century, but it proliferates remarkably in the nineteenth, also because it was a model disseminated through intense international exchanges.<sup>11</sup> This was a trait shared with the choral movement. Hence, it can be no surprise that choirs showed themselves as a potentially valuable vehicle in each of Hroch's phases. The chapters in this book also show how the societies embodied the working of what has become known as Romantic Nationalism: "The celebration of the nation [...] as an inspiring ideal for artistic expression; and the instrumentalization of that expression in political consciousness-raising."<sup>12</sup> Choirs offer a prime view into nineteenth-century burgeoning national sentiments.

### Musical Cultures

To grasp the ideas and practices of nineteenth-century choirs—both national and otherwise—it is important to study much more than just the music itself. Music receives its meaning in a wider context that goes beyond the repertoire, composers, and directors. In other words, this book deals with the history of musical culture, including performances and processes such as identity formation or the transfer of knowledge. This dynamic approach also challenges widespread and fixed musical categories, such as the dichotomy between classical and popular music. Clinging to a view of choral music as a serious, even elite genre, as opposed to the preferences of the common people, would put from the beginning a strain on discerning any mobilizing force in choral singing. The (implicitly) supposed links between certain musical genres and the practices of specific social groups are subject to change. For instance: late eighteenth-century composers, including Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, were very mild in their judgment of uninitiated audiences, and used similar musical motifs for both 'easy' *divertimenti* and more demanding forms such as symphonies.<sup>13</sup> A few decades later, middle-class connoisseurs began to distance themselves from music that was deemed too easily accessible: overtures, operatic pot-pourris, virtuoso bravura compositions, dance music, and several types of songs—a group for which, halfway through the nineteenth century, the previously unknown term 'popular music' was coined. The counterpart was 'classical music,' more complex and often instrumental compositions to be savored in respectful silence. In the late nineteenth century this opposition

11 Thiesse (1999), 11.

12 Leerssen (2014), 5.

13 See William Weber (2008), 1–12.

between popular and élite/classical music gained general acceptance—the so-called Great Musical Schism that is still very alive after a double turn of centuries.<sup>14</sup>

Some musical genres and performances, however, lingered in the borderlands between both categories, a (changing) grey zone of the élitist and the popular. Without this nuance it would be impossible to understand both the acclaim of Jacques Offenbach's operettas among European rulers or the programming of Georg Friedrich Handel's *Messiah* at factory choir concerts. Processes of appropriation need to be taken into account to understand the nationalist fervor surrounding choral singing. This observation is especially true when considering folk music, a factor apparently further complicating the popular-classical divide. Its advocates used the term to glorify music from the (presumably) authentic people, thus opposing tradition to modern musical aberrations.<sup>15</sup> Obviously this musical taste was no less an example of processes of appropriation, usually taking place in Hroch's Phase A: folklorists presented 'genuine' tunes to their fellow countrymen as unalienable elements of a collective national identity. Hence, this book deals with constant negotiations, with putting music to specific uses. An awareness of the changing reputations of genres and practices is thereby indispensable, scrutinizing a wide cultural field rather than reasoning within predefined visions.

The negotiations were in part between classes. Two distinct types of social compositions dominated the European choral world: societies with a markedly middle-class membership versus choirs composed of working men. The second type ranged from initiatives by factory bosses to singing unions initiated by the workers themselves. Nonetheless, everywhere a large degree of societal self-organization was noticeable as were, apparently, singing practices.

Another aspect of the composition of choirs involves the issue of gender. Choral singing began as a preponderantly if not exclusively male activity. In most cases women's choirs came into being only after several decades, and long before mixed singing became a common practice. In a society offering little room for female participation in public life, the male nature of choral singing seemed inevitable. Masculinity was also at the core of national thought: the discourse in national movements was heavily centered around the male patriot and overwhelmingly dominated by masculine interests and ideology; the women's part was a domestic, motherly role.<sup>16</sup> *Gendered Nations*, a publication following a ground-breaking symposium in 1998, widened the scope

14 Van der Merwe (1992), 15–19.

15 Bruyneel et al. (2012), 13–14.

16 See Nagel (1998).

to musical practices: an image of the massively attended third Latvian Song and Dance Festival (1888) captured young rural women in (recently invented) national costumes, embodying peasant women's folk songs that (male) intellectuals had collected as evidence of an authentic collective identity.<sup>17</sup> Such a close entanglement of masculinity, nationalism, and music was deconstructed in the essays of *Masculinity and Western Musical Practices* (2009), postulating the key role of collective male singing in the (German) nationalist movement, and also the persistence of such thinking: at least until the early twentieth century the conviction was strong that women could be inspiring muses, but that actual musical creation belonged solely to the male realm.<sup>18</sup> These and other beliefs made the the singing patriot a cultural icon capturing the imagination and setting the practice of male singing in a positive light.<sup>19</sup>

Such masculine values as sacrifice, struggle, and fraternity were omnipresent in the European choral repertoire. The variety among nations was nonetheless considerable. Sometimes this was due to clearly identifiable local conditions: Austrian censorship limited the possibilities for Czech choirs; rehearsing in churches left its mark on the Welsh repertoire. Other differences are less easily explained. Flemish choirs had an essentially contemporary repertoire, while their Scottish counterparts favored folk songs and often sang centuries-old polyphonic compositions. The French *orphéons* developed their own repertoire, while elsewhere in Europe foreign melodies were imported—sometimes provided with altogether new texts, sometimes in translation. Such transfers took place even between the leading German and French choral traditions; in 1856 the German publishing house Schott found a ready market for *L'Allemagne Chorale*, a series of compositions made popular by touring German choirs but with French lyrics.<sup>20</sup>

The international mobility not only of repertoires but of choral societies themselves was striking. In the Basque case, participation in French competitions forced the choirs to steer away from their folk tradition. In many parts of Europe there was ample opportunity to compete with other choirs; specialized magazines published large numbers of announcements in each issue. The Enlightenment notion of Progress was an important catalyst: the urge to improve fostered rivalry not only in the economic sector but in the scientific and cultural world as well. Inevitably the musical struggle often ended in bitter fights, prompting many to adhere to another, more peaceful model of choral

17 See Novikova (2000).

18 See Taylor-Jay (2009).

19 Hoegaerts (2014), 15.

20 Stynen (2012), 201.



meetings: festivals where societies could not only learn from one another but which embodied the ambition to enlighten and instruct the masses. The formulas were numerous, from small-scale events to nationwide manifestations. Again, the German lands set the tone, with *Musikfeste* from 1818 onwards, followed by *Sängerfeste*; in August 1845 more than 1,700 singers gathered in Würzburg, bringing songs from several regions, thus giving a boost to the longing for unification.<sup>21</sup>

### Performing Songs

By studying choral societies with a focus on nationalist mobilization, researchers naturally reach a point often missed in music studies and musical history: each concert, festival, competition or open rehearsal is a performance in which not only the musicians (in this case singers) take part, but also the audience. From an anthropological perspective, singing a song is a ritual with collectively entailed symbols and meanings, and this has always been so, from the Greek tragedies to present-day performances.<sup>22</sup> Rather than a homogeneous, anonymous and passive multitude, the audience is a dynamic group, often invited to sing along, or joining in spontaneously. In this act the boundaries between performers and audience were blurred and the music was transmitted and appropriated, all the more so because, in the days before recording devices, sheet music and live performances were the only distribution channels available. The crowd was musicalized, and often politicized as well. A memorial service for the famous Czech Romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha in Prague in spring 1859 suffered from such repression by the Austrian authorities that a poem dedicated to his memory could only be read silently; but those present could then sing national songs aloud, imbuing the meeting and the vocal act with an enormous political charge.

The contributions in this book reveal a striking difference between choirs operating in established nation-states and in nations without an autonomous state. Since music and choral societies were deemed non-political, they were in the latter case all the more prone to politicization, as channels through which emancipation, both social and national, could be experienced and encouraged. Whenever a state system or another national movement challenged a nation, the political role of choirs became more obvious.

21 Porter (1996), 171–74.

22 See McCormick (2006); Geisler and Johansson (2014), 3–4.

Often, and both in the context of a nation-state and of nation-building, the nationalism present in the choral movement was of a banal nature. The repeated positioning of a repertoire as part of the nation's musical tradition and its multiple lyrical references to the nation's history, landscape, and people—with words like 'here' or 'us'—are an important part of what Michael Billig has labelled “flaggings [which] provide daily, unmindful reminders of nationhood.” These ubiquitous references root people in a homeland, “made to look homely, beyond question and, should the occasion arise, worth the price of sacrifice,” especially since the flaggings draw a distinction between 'us' and 'them.’<sup>23</sup> Indeed, among the most powerful traits of the nineteenth-century choral movement is its capacity to generate a feeling of unity. Group singing generates an acoustic resonance that exceeds individual ability. Ideally, this experience addresses the participant's heart, uplifting her or him into a larger, meaningful whole. Out of an emotional experience stem feelings of fraternity of greater importance than any political message.

This bonding could operate on several levels. Beyond the solidarity and conviviality within the choir itself—dinners, excursions, balls and festivities of all kinds abounded—the members explicitly reached out to the wider community. In line with nineteenth-century civic society, choral singing served a wider social utility. Besides the sometimes pompously stated ideal of disseminating art, this public service frequently involved fund-raising. A respectable status paid off, and many choirs became spear-heads of communal pride. Singers returning home after victory in a contest often received a very warm welcome, complete with a parade, a reception at the city hall, and fireworks. The most exuberant enthusiasm was perhaps to be found in Wales, where choral societies enjoyed a staunch support comparable to that of present-day football teams—sometimes even including hooliganism. Such an identification and mobilization was not incompatible with a more national scope, as the essays in this book demonstrate. Double and even multiple layers of identity were very common, even on the level of nationality, as the Flemish case proves, with choirs freely and in an *ad hoc* manner moving between (or combining) a Belgian patriotic and a Flemish nationalist stance. The longing for unity on a national scale, by the way, did not always imply (structural) solidarity or even feelings of equality with all fellow citizens: whereas the Association of Serbian choral societies managed to gather choirs from cities, towns and villages, elsewhere the tensions between urban culture and the countryside were very vivid. Also within a national framework, negotiations were a lasting and dynamic process.

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23 Billig (1995), 174–76.

## A European Phenomenon

The essays in this book cover large parts of Europe and mainly follow a geographical order. In a study focused on the transnational dimensions of the choral movement, starting with the German case is an obvious choice. It was in the German-speaking world that the modern choral societies originated, but Joep Leerssen also shows how the movement soon obtained a dynamic political role: choral practices and performances not only reflected an ideological position, they engaged in an ongoing interaction with political attitudes. The German model was hugely successful and was unabashedly invoked as an inspiration and consequently invested with other ethnic guises.

The other important model for choral societies was the French *orphéon* which Sophie-Anne Leterrier meticulously analyzes as a phenomenon closely related to the French regime. Sharing the authorities' centralizing ambition, the *orphéon* movement opposed any regional particularism, including folk music or the use of dialects, and thus contributed to the republicanization of even small towns. By the end of the century, French choirs were an embodiment of the state rather than the nation.

In Norway the choral repertoire and the vision of the moral and esthetic importance of choral singing bore witness to German influences. Anne Jorunn Kydland analyzes how, despite the transnational reality, the choral movement was partly positioned against Scandinavianism and contributed to a self-conscious nation stretching as far as the Norwegian migrant communities in the United States.

Great Britain offers an interesting set of cases because of the influence of a shared pedagogical technique for teaching sight-singing: the Tonic Sol-fa. Among the advantages of this system was that it replaced the usual staff notation with letters and punctuation marks, familiar symbols that made music scores appear less an alien code. The English case, as Fiona Palmer argues, is remarkable for another reason as well: the oratorio tradition, with large choirs as a common feature of public ceremonies, dates from the 1730s onwards, thus pre-dating the German choral model. With the popularity of foreign composers like Felix Mendelssohn, the protagonist in the choral movement in continental Europe, the transnational exchange was assured, though the Handel tradition in Victorian England remained strong.

Lacking any higher music education until 1890, the Scots were much more inclined to look beyond their own cultural traditions. Jane Mallinson explains how the Scottish repertoire was directly inspired by what was common in England, though small choirs in particular showed a Scottish (folk) nature; classical and folk music were less at odds than in most other European countries.

Such a repertoire was an expression of cultural nationalism, but without challenging the political reality of the United Kingdom. Gareth Williams makes a similar observation for Wales: the highly popular (labor) choirs pursued no openly political agenda, but were undoubtedly vehicles of national pride. The strongest symbol of this self-confidence is the *eisteddfod*, a Welsh festival formula with literary and musical competitions. Devoid of precedents for choral singing, the (national) *eisteddfod* together with an unprecedented industrialization fuelled a wide-ranging choral movement with some peculiar characteristics.

Western Europe holds a fascinating position due to the proximity of the two main choral models. In the Netherlands the preference was quite univocal: in two generations starting around 1825, the *Liedertafel* was imported from Germany. Until the 1870s the German repertoire held a dominant position, notwithstanding several pleas to replace it with a distinctively Dutch repertoire. Jozef Vos nuances these debates and emphasizes that for the average choir member the singing itself mattered more than the songs' origins. Also, the local identification of choirs was stronger than their national loyalty. Jan Dewilde observes that this is much less true for the Flemish choral movement. After independence, Belgian authorities promoted a patriotic culture that was both anti-French and anti-Dutch, including a choral repertoire aimed at glorifying the past. Flemish cultural activists, observing the spread of the French language (and culture) in public life, turned towards the German example and in 1845 a transboundary Singing Union was founded. Though short-lived, the inspiration of this initiative had a lasting impact and perhaps even mitigated against the success of the French *orphéon* model in Flanders.

Though fundamentally French, *orphéons* were founded in Spanish regions longing for autonomy, though sometimes only the name remained. In Catalonia, discussed by Dominique Vidaud, the Orfeons were primarily oriented towards the middle classes and drew inspiration from folk music. Moreover, the model was challenged by at least two other choral types. As a strong vector of identity, these choirs had a crucial role in the region's national awakening and resistance against the Spanish state. The situation in the Basque country was not entirely different. Carmen de las Cuevas Hevia equally notices different choral traditions, some founded in labor circles, some officially patronized: the city of San Sebastián provided funds to host an international choral competition in 1885 and favored the Orfeon Donostiarra as a catalyst of Basque music and language.

Choral movements in Central and Eastern Europe are often illustrations of an outspoken nationalist mobilization. Building on existing religious and military traditions, Czech choral life germinated after the turmoil of 1848.

Keeping a close eye to the symbolic and performative dimensions, Karel Šima, Tomáš Kavka, and Hana Zimmerhaklová trace how in the 1860s choral societies held an explicitly patriotic position. They developed in competition with (but also parallel to) networks of Germanized choirs, and combined a series of musical genres and traditions in order to achieve a maximal mobilization of national sentiments. In the 1870s this task moved into the political and economic spheres and the Czech choral movement diversified. Similarly, in Hungary the German choirs provided both a model to emulate and an obstacle to overcome. Krisztina Lajosi shows how Hungarian choral societies reflected complex social tensions that were both ethnic and class-related, and provided a form of sociability and entertainment in a fractured and often fractious society. In the Serbian national movement, choral singing played a key role in communication. Tatjana Marković shows how for the Serbs, who lacked a unified territory, singing was a way to build bridges between a shattered people. In the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire identity was a complex issue. Serbian advocates mirrored their ambitions to the German example, including the exchange of magazines. In an effort to maximize the impact, concerts were organized both in concert halls and in public places, with varied programmes adapted to the audience. For Bulgarian nationalists choral singing was not only a vehicle of mobilization but of modernization as well; industrialization lagged far behind the situation elsewhere in Europe. Ivanka Vlaeva demonstrates how music obtained a central place in the Bulgarian Revival. At first, folk traditions and Turkish and Greek models were completely discarded and, through the mediation of foreigners, polyphonic singing was introduced instead. The wider gap between practices and traditions than in other European regions strongly indicates the presence and functioning of transnational transfers.

The studies in this book demonstrate how a flourishing choir scene was for nineteenth-century national movements a proof of being developed. Ambiguous combinations of foreign models and local profiling seemed to secure the membership of a modern transnational movement. If the chapters in this book teach one thing, it is that musical ideas and practices can and do cross boundaries, though in varying degrees and at differing speeds. Scholars studying local situations, and not looking primarily for cultural transfer or processes of nation-building, will also find it rewarding to look beyond what is immediately apparent.

Illuminating as these studies are, not all the questions have been answered. One obvious point is the absence of some nations. The choral situations in Italy, Poland, and the Baltic countries certainly deserve closer attention. Another opportunity for scholars is historical research into the actual singing practices of choirs; the songs they sang were arguably the most important

aspect of their performances, but also a very fleeting and intangible one. Historical reconstructions of the sounds and the techniques used to produce them, on the one hand, and of the sentiments (for example of self-liberation) produced by choral singing, on the other, offer promising fields of study. Some pioneering studies also show how compositions can be analyzed in function of their acoustic representation of the country, including close attention to the issue of who was to produce which sounds.<sup>24</sup> There are possibilities not only for more in-depth research; the topic can also be broadened. Juxtapositions or comparisons with other types of societies can only contribute to a better understanding of the massive importance of transnational exchanges in the history of nineteenth-century national movements. As Joep Leerssen reminds us, the proliferation of choirs was never a matter of “spontaneous generation”:

The spread of male choirs is not a matter of parallel responses to similar circumstances; it is to a large extent a matter of diffusion, of *communicative procreation*. For that reason, understanding the emergence of choirs purely in terms of context and circumstances is insufficient.<sup>25</sup>

The aim of this volume is to understand the institutional self-replication of choirs and their role in the formation of national identity.

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24 Dolar (2006), 59–60; Hoegaerts in Geisler and Johansson, eds. (2014), 14–32.

25 Leerssen (2015), 11–12.