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Ways of Living Abroad: The Foreign Composer in Britain after World War II

*Ivan Moody*¹ CESEM – Universidade Nova, Lisbon, Portugal

Како живети у туђини: инострани композитори у Великој Британији после Другог светског рата

Иван Муди CESEM – Universidade Nova, Лисабон, Португал

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Abstract

The situation for émigré composers in Britain during World War II and afterwards was extremely complicated. British attitudes towards foreigners were highly ambivalent, and this was reflected institutionally, as the policies of the BBC at the time clearly show. This article reflects on the lives and legacy of five foreign composers, all very different from each other, who were, remarkably, discussed by Francis Routh in a book on British music he published in 1972. I attempt to situate these composers over the course of a longer period of time and ask whether such attitudes have in fact truly changed.

KEYWORDS: Émigré composers, British attitudes, Francis Routh, BBC.

Апстракт

Ситуација у којој су се нашли емигрантски композитори у Великој Британији током Другог светског рата и после њега била је изузетно сложена. Британски ставови према странцима били су врло амбивалентни и то се одразило институционално, као што то јасно показује ондашња политика Би-Би-Сија. Овај чланак говори о животу и наслеђу петорице иностраних композитора,

1 ivanmoody@gmail.com

међусобно веома различитих, о којима је изванредно писао Франсис Раут у књизи о британској музици коју је објавио 1972. године. Покушавам да лоцирам те композиторе у дужем временском периоду и постављам питање да си су се поменути ставови заиста променили.

Кључне речи: композитори-емигранти, британски ставови, Франсис Раут (Francis Routh), Би-Би-Си.

INTRODUCTION

In 1972, Macdonald and Company published a book by Francis Routh entitled *Contemporary British Music. The twenty-five years from 1945 to 1970.* It was the second part of a trilogy, the first part being entitled *Contemporary Music* and the third *The Aesthetics of Music – A Study of Tonality.* It is a book that has never been reprinted and has thus almost vanished from view today, but it struck the present author at a young age as a remarkable volume. Revisiting it provides a great many insights into the British musical scene of the time; the particular focus of this article is the inclusion in it of five composers born abroad but who settled and made their careers in Britain.

Francis Routh was born in 1927 in Kidderminster, and was educated at Kings College Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music in London. He is still much respected as a composer and as a writer on music, but his more in-depth work as a musicologist is unfortunately greatly neglected today. *Contemporary British Music* was a pioneering volume, bringing together the various aesthetic strands to be seen in British music of that period, from Walton to Tavener, but it is unfortunate that many of the short essays included therein remain, some fifty years later, the only substantial commentary on the work of several of these composers.

While the larger part of the book naturally concerns composers born in Britain, Routh is absolutely even-handed in his discussion of those who came to live and work in his native country either by simple personal decision or by force of circumstances. The chapter entitled "British by choice. The influence of other traditions" thus includes brief studies of Franz Reizenstein, Matyas Seiber, Egon Wellesz, Roberto Gerhard and Andrzej Panufnik. While in Britain the latter two have, in recent decades, begun to receive the attention from programmers and scholars that is due to them,² both Seiber and Wellesz have remained relatively marginal,³ and Reizen-

² The bibliography on Gerhard is impressive: important contributions include Adkins and Russ 2017; Russ & Adkins 2014; Ortiz de Urbina 2017 and Perry 2013. In Panufnik's case, while performances of his music have increased in recent years, and while considerable musicological attention was aid to him in the 1980s, writing on his work has somewhat tailed off. Exceptions include Bolesławska 2016; Jacobson 1996 and Kaczyński 1994, and the forthcoming republication of the composer's autobiography is keenly awaited (Panufnik 2021).

³ Honourable exceptions include, on Seiber, Scheding 2019, *passim*; and, on Wellesz, Bujić 2017; Levi 2018 and Wanek 2019.

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stein is barely considered at all.

It is interesting to speculate on precisely why Routh chose these five. He could also have included, for example, Francis Chagrin (1905–1972)⁴, Hans Gál (1890–1987)⁵, Peter Gellhorn (1912–2014)⁶, Berthold Goldschmidt (1903–1996)⁷ or Leopold Spinner (1906–1980)⁸, but he offers no criteria for his selection. Given his evident sympathy for the work of those he does discuss, however, one might imagine have imagined him writing a second volume dedicated exclusively to émigré composers in Britain. What is more than evident is the extremely high quality of the music of all these composers, something confirmed in at least the cases of Panufnik and Seiber by gradually increasing numbers of performances and recordings. This factor alone would be enough to justify an examination of their work, but their status as émigrés makes their contributions to British musical life doubly interesting, especially at this historical juncture when attitudes to foreigners in Britain are so frequently negative.

Composers

Of the five composers Routh discussed, one was German (Franz Reizenstein), one Hungarian (Mátyás Seiber), one Austrian (Wellesz), one Catalan of German-

4 Chagrin was born into a Jewish family in Bucharest, and studied in Zurich. He graduated in 1928 and left for Paris, where he studied with Paul Dukas and Nadia Boulanger. In 1936 he travelled to Britain and stayed. He studied with Seiber, and when war broke out, he worked for the BBC French service. He wrote an astounding amount of music for films, television and advertisements, in addition to two symphonies, a piano concerto and a large number of chamber works.

5 The Austro-Hungarian Hans Gál studied at Vienna University and established a successful career as a composer, writer and teacher. With the rise to power of Hitler, his music, like that of other Jewish composer, was forbidden, and he moved to Edinburgh, becoming a lecturer at the University and helping to set up the Edinburgh International Festival. He continued to compose until his death.

6 Gellhorn studied at the Hochschule für Musik Berlin, graduating in 1934, but was forced to emigrate to Britain, via France, the following year. He became musical director at Toynbee Hall in the East End of London until 1939, and in 1940 was interned, in Bury and then on the Isle of Man. On his release, achieved through the intervention of Vaughan Williams, he returned to London, and worked at Covent Garden and Glyndebourne, joining the BBC as director of the BBC Chorus in 1961. He continued to compose and was much esteemed as a teacher.

7 Goldschmidt studied with Franz Schreker in Berlin and established himself as a highly successful composer before being obliged to emigrate from Germany in 1935. He continued his career by conducting and working for the BBC, but the lack of interest in his work led him to abandon composition in 1958, only returning to it twenty-four years later. Since then his music has been warmly received, and performed and recorded by outstanding orchestras and ensembles.

8 Leopold Spinner was born to Austrian parents in Lviv, in Ukraine. He studied composition and musicology at the University of Vienna, and was a pupil of Webern. In 1938, following the *Anschluss*, he escaped to England, and worked in a locomotive factory in Yorkshire during the war. In 1947 he went to work for Boosey & Hawkes as an editor, copyist and arranger. Though not a prolific composer, he wrote a substantial amount of vocal and chamber music, a Symphony, concertos for piano and for violin, and a Chamber Concerto. Swiss descent (Gerhard), and one Polish (Panufnik); the circumstances of their move to Britain varied considerably, but the prime motive in all cases was the rise of fascism.

Franz Reizenstein was born in 1911 in Nuremberg. A very talented pianist, he studied composition with Hindemith and piano with Leonid Kreutzer at the Berliner Hochschule für Musik. Hindemith, it seems, held him in great esteem, and, according to Routh, one of his guiding principles was "[...] a rejection of dodecaphony, atonalism, serialism, and all the other *avant-garde* experiments. He aligned himself artistically with the established norms of tonal composition, as far as idiom and structure are concerned, and worked from that basis without reservations" (Routh 1972: 138). He left Nazi Germany and came to England, where he studied at the Royal College of Music from 1934 under Vaughan Williams. He also continued his piano studies, with Solomon (Cutner) and performed regularly as soloist and accompanist both in Britain and abroad. With the announcement of World War II he was interned briefly in Central Camp in Douglas, on the Isle of Man, but continued to write music while he was there.

In 1958 Reizenstein became professor of piano at the Royal Academy of Music and, six years later, at the Royal Manchester College of Music. In 1966 he was appointed Visiting Professor of Composition at Boston University for a period of six months at the suggestion of Professor Jean Philips. His compositional activity was very varied, embracing not only concert (especially chamber) music, but film music (for example, The Sea from 1953, The Mummy from 1959 and Circus of Horrors from 1960), incidental music for the BBC and collaborations with Gerard Hoffnung. It is notable that his very Hindemithian, contrapuntal, style (still evident, for example, in his Trio in A for flute, oboe and piano from 1949) gradually changed after working with Vaughan Williams to something rather more consciously English and lyrical. Perhaps the two Piano Concertos, from 1941 and 1959 respectively, best illustrate this, though there is no question of any imitation of his teacher's style in the second, which is still very much in the heroic 19th-century tradition. His choral and vocal music, today almost completely neglected, was highly regarded in his lifetime: there are a large-scale cantata, Voices of the Night (1950–51), an oratorio, Genesis (1958), a song cycle to poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1959) and two operas. Reizenstein died suddenly in 1968, and since then his music has barely figured in concert programming in Britain, though it must be said that there are some outstanding recent recordings of his work, including the piano music and two of his concertos.9

According to Simon Wynberg, both anti-semitism and the traditionalist tendencies of Reizenstein's music kept him out of the spotlight, notably that of

⁹ Reizenstein: Piano Music, Martin Jones, piano, Lyrita SRCD2342, 2014; Reizenstein: Piano Concerto No. 2, Oliver Triendl, Nürmberger Symphoniker/Yaron Traub, CPO 55245-2 and Goldschmidt and Reizenstein: Cello Concertos, Raphael Wallfisch, Konzerthausorchester Berlin/Nicholas Milton, CPO 555109-2. There is an extensive listing of recordings of the composer's work at http://www.franzreizenstein.com/recordedmusic.html [accessed on 18.3.2021.]

the BBC.¹⁰ While the idea of a composers' blacklist maintained by William Glock, the Corporation's Controller of Music between 1959 and 1972, has been ridiculed with some frequency,¹¹ it is also the case that the BBC's attitudes towards émigré composers were at best inconsistent, and that Reizenstein's neglect in the concert halls of Britain has hardly been corrected since that time.

The case of Mátyás Seiber is different in many respects, though it is also true that his music still awaits the recognition it deserves. Seiber was born in Budapest in 1905, and studied composition with Kodály at the Budapest Academy. This was something that began to count against Seiber in his native country, as the composer's observation concerning the criticism of his String Quartet no. 1 shows: "I still cherish the first criticism I got after this performance [in 1925] in one of the Budapest leading papers: if you consider how simple and tuneful this piece appears today, it sounds almost comic."¹² This was in fact part of a concerted campaign against Kodály at the time, and Seiber moved on, teaching and also playing cello on transatlantic ship journeys. In 1928 he began teaching at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt, where he established course in jazz music and played with the Lenzewski Quartet, but he was removed from his post in 1933 after Hitler assumed power, and he returned to Budapest. He was able to visit Russia during this time, before emigrating to England in 1935.

In his adopted country he undertook a remarkable range of activities, and in 1942 was invited by Michael Tippett to teach at Morley College. His composition pupils included Don Banks, Peter Racine Fricker, Anthony Gilbert, Ingvar Lidholm, Peter Schaat and Hugh Wood. Seiber's career came to a tragic end when he was killed in a car crash in South Africa in 1960. Kodály would later dedicate his choral work *Media vita in morte sumus* to the memory of his former pupil. Seiber's influence on British music was highly significant – and it should not be forgotten that he was a founder member of the Society for the Promotion of New Music – but only slowly has his work begun to reclaim the place in both concerts and recordings that it surely deserves.

The life of Egon Wellesz (1885–1974) was rather different from those of Reizenstein or Seiber. Born into a wealthy family of Jewish origin in Vienna (though he himself converted to Catholicism, having been brought up as a Protestant), he studied musicology under Guido Adler and compositional techniques with Arnold Schoenberg, of whom he published the first biography.¹³ Wellesz led a highly distinguished dual career as composer and musicologist, becoming Professor of Music at the University of Vienna and produced a string of large-scale works. All this changed in 1938, when he was forced by the *Anschluss* to leave his native country and emigrate to Britain.

¹⁰ Simon Wynberg, "Franz Reizenstein", http://orelfoundation.org/composers/article/franz_ reizenstein [accessed on 18. 3. 2021.]

¹¹ See, for example, the obituary of Glock by Stephen Plaistow at https://www.theguardian.com/ media/2000/jun/29/bbc.guardianobituaries [accessed on 18. 3. 2021.]

¹² Quoted in Hugh Wood, booklet notes to *Mátyás Seiber, String Quartets Nos. 1–3*, Edinburgh Quartet, Delphian DCD34082 (2010).

¹³ Arnold Schönberg, Vienna: E. P. Tal & Co., 1921.

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Though he was offered a teaching position at Lincoln College, Oxford in the following year, his work as a composer stopped until 1943, when he wrote his String Quartet no. 5. He was highly influential as a teacher of both musicology and composition, and made a lasting and fundamental contribution to the study of Byzantine music, but his reputation as a composer never really recovered, and there was a huge diminution in the number of performances of his works.¹⁴ In any event, it is worth noting Routh's comments with regard to Wellesz's appointment to Oxford:

"It was not Wellesz the composer who was given this academic post, but Wellesz the musicologist; and however distinguished his name might be among international European musicians, there were, so he was told, those at Oxford, and in the more sound-proof ivory towers of this country, to whom his name meant little or nothing. Could he not write a book in order to establish his name in those quarters where it was appropriate that it should be established?" (Routh 1972: 165)

There is another Schoenberg connection in the figure of Roberto Gerhard (1896–1970). He was born in the small town of Valls, in Catalonia, of a French mother and a Swiss father. He studied piano with Enrique Granados (1915–1916) and composition with Felip Pedrell (1841–1922), and then sent some of his work to Schoenberg – specifically, the *Dos Apunts* (1921–1922) for piano and *Sept Hai-kai* (1922) – and became his pupil between 1923 and 1928.¹⁵ Gerhard was certainly Catalan enough to write works of distinctly national colour such as the two *Sardanas* (both 1928) and a cycle of *14 Cançons Populars Catalans* for soprano and piano (1928–1929); six were orchestrated in 1931 as *Sis Cançons Populars*), and the luxuriant *L'Alta Naixença del Rei en Jaume* for soprano solo, choir and orchestra (1932), but already the earlier *Sept Hai-kai* for voice and ensemble (he revised them in 1958),¹⁶ which in retrospect seem to owe an unmistakeable debt to Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, had been modelled in fact on Stravinsky's *Three Japanese Lyrics* of 1912–1913, whose instrumentation was itself modelled on Schoenberg's work,¹⁷ while *Dos Apunts* move clearly in the direction of atonality.

When Gerhard returned to Catalonia, expectations were naturally high, and the Associació de Música da Camera organized a concert of his new work: the Concertino for strings orchestra (1929, originally conceived as a String Quartet) the Wind Quintet (1928) the 14 Cançons Populars Catalanes, and the Two Sardanas. In the Wind Quintet, Gerhard experiments with serialism, but using a series of seven notes rather than twelve, and there is still a genuinely popular character to much of it, and its angularity is thus softened. The concert was predictably unsuccessful, and

¹⁴ Useful information about Wellesz's life and work may be found on the website of the Egon-Wellesz-Fonds at https://www.egonwellesz.at/e_wellesz_frameset.htm, and a useful summary of his work in Byzantine musicology and its relationship to his compositions is found in Wanek 2019.

¹⁵ The letters that went back and forth between Gerhard and Schoenberg are discussed in detail in Ortiz de Urbina 2013–14 and Ortiz de Urbina 2017.

¹⁶ The differences between the two versions are discussed in detail in Walshaw 2014.

¹⁷ See Walshaw 2014: 15–16.

Gerhard engaged in a bout of polemics in answer to his critics, in the arts journal *Mirador*.¹⁸ Of the Wind Quintet he wrote, in a notebook, that, it was "the most serious attempt made at non-individualistic music. Detached, objective approach."

Rather abruptly, however, he quite soon afterwards changed his approach, declaring that there was a need for utilitarian music that communicated with the public, praising the work of Hanns Eisler in particular (though not his politics), (Tomás 2014: 46), sensing the need for the overt affirmation of Catalan nationalism – what he called "música aplicada". This did not mean rejection of modernism, however: it was not by chance that a work as apparently Catalan as *L'Alta Naixença del Rei en Jaume* (to verses by Josep Carner) won first prize at the 1933 edition of the ISCM Festival in Amsterdam.

As Belén Pérez Castillo has clearly established (Pérez Castillo, 2017), however, Gerhard's Schoenbergian orientation kept his esteem in Catalonia and in Spain more generally at a low ebb. In December 1938, Gerhard went with his wife to Warsaw, to select works for the ISCM for the following year. As it became clear that the Civil War in Spain was going to be won by Franco's forces, instead of returning to Barcelona, he went to Paris, whence he wrote to acquaintances in search of advice and help. Through the recommendation of Professor Edward Dent, Gerhard was awarded a research scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, and he moved to that city in June 1939. This move inevitably had great consequences for Gerhard's career, in many senses, one of those being that he was so often not viewed in Spain as a Spanish (or even Catalan) composer, as noted above. It took time, too, to become accepted as a British composer. Mark E. Perry has examined the greater part of the slowly increasing critical reception of his work in Britain (Perry 2013: 4–13), to which should, of course, be added Francis Routh's remarkable chapter on Gerhard's work in his pioneering book.

Finally, we come to Andrzej Panufnik. He was born in Warsaw in 1914, and studied not only in his native country but in Vienna and Paris. During the German occupation of Poland he played piano duets in cafés and similar venues in Warsaw with Lutosławski, this being one of the few means available of performing and hearing live music. His career as both composer and conductor blossomed after the end of World War II, but the advent of the communist regime meant that he came under increasing pressure to conform to the dominant ideology, especially since he had been persuaded to become Vice-President of the Union of Polish Composers. The increasing complications of his personal life, too, meant that in 1954 he took the decision to leave for Britain, after dramatically evading the Polish Secret Police in Zürich, and he was granted political asylum.

Panufnik was for two years Principal Conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, but he thereafter decided to work exclusively on composition. Though circumstances were very difficult for him initially, his career was eventually

¹⁸ Gerhard 1930.

¹⁹ Roberto Gerhard, notebook Cambridge University Library, Gerhard 10.136, 22, apud Tomás 2014: 43.

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highly successful, with many high-profile international commissions. He became a British citizen in 1961, and was awarded a knighthood by Queen Elizabeth in 1991, the year of his death. He also received, posthumously, the Order of Polonia Restituta, from the country of his birth, which he had refused to visit again until the restoration of democracy.

Always an original, Panufnik's stylistic trajectory made him fundamentally unlike any other composer, and after his move to Britain he was able to reinvent himself in a remarkable way. As Adrian Thomas has noted, "Before he left Poland, he had given ample evidence of the role of pattern and clarity in his music, and these features became even more marked after 1960, as did the sometimes contradictory pulls of intuition and intellect." (Thomas 2005: 286)

Retrospection as conclusion

How might one look at the legacies of these five composers in the light of Routh's pioneering discussion of their work and their subsequent reception? As noted above, the frequency of their programming in concerts and recordings has been highly variable, but there was a background to negative British attitudes towards foreign musicians already earlier in the 20th century, as has been detailed, frequently shockingly, by Erik Levi and Florian Scheding.²⁰ This also had to do with provincialism: as Scheding has noted,

"For those Continental European émigré composers who had, in some way or another, associated themselves with the avant-garde, musical life in Britain was a complete shock. Despite the efforts of younger composers like William Walton and Benjamin Britten, Elgar's late-romantic pathos and the Celtic nationalism of Arnold Bax still largely epitomised British musical style at the time the waves of Nazi refugees became larger and rolled in more regularly in the mid- to late-1930s." (Scheding 2014: 258–259)

Tippett's support of émigré musicians at Morley College was a highly honourable exception to the prevailing negative attitude, but, to quote Scheding again, "Exceptions like Morley College pale into insignificance when compared with the harshness of the BBC's policies regarding the migrants' compositions, for example." (Scheding 2014: 261) Indeed: while varying between the different sections of the Corporation, it is clear from this recent research that the BBC was appallingly protectionist in its attitudes. It is also clear that such attitudes did not appear suddenly. Scheding gives a glimpse of the background to this:

"The economic crisis of the 1920s and the advent of the talkie in British cinemas had forced many instrumentalists out of their jobs. Foreign instrumentalists and singers, especially Austrians, Germans and Italians, had excellent reputations in Britain, and fears now grew that the new arrivals, many of them well trained and with impressive CVs, would compete on the tight job market and take the few jobs there were for themselves. The Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) took up these fears and lobbied the government to ban foreign musicians from any form of musical employment." (Scheding 2014: 251)

Routh's chapter on these five composers was, then, a hugely valuable corrective to such positions, not only because they were included in the book's main narrative, but because he engaged in serious analysis of their work.

Some of the exposure of these composers, or the lack of it, naturally has to do with the question of how well they have been promoted. Panufnik, who became a relatively "establishment" figure, was well-served both in concert and in recordings during the commemorations of his 100th birthday, and certain works, such as the *Sinfonia Sacra* (1963) and the Violin Concerto (1971) have remained fairly constantly in repertoire, and one of the reasons for this is the fact that his work has been reasonably consistently promoted by his publishers, Boosey & Hawkes. Wellesz was published by a number of houses, such as Universal, Doblinger and Heinrichshofen, Seiber by Augener, Boosey & Hawkes and Schott, Gerhard by OUP and Boosey & Hawkes and Reizenstein by Lengnick.

What if these composers had settled in the USA rather than Britain? While this is obviously a rhetorical question, it is the case that nothing was clear-cut on the other side of the Atlantic either. In an article originally published in German in 1959, and published in English translation in 1970, Ernst Krenek notes that,

"In keeping with the American tradition, the emigrant composers, as victims of oppression, were received with open arms and given warm assurances of readiness to help. But even without their being told so directly, they could feel that in regard to the professional situation people would have been happier had they not been forced to come. This the immigrant was pushed, from the outset, into a certain defensive attitude that was hardly conducive to a far-ranging, adventurous creative spirit." (Krenek 1970: 113)

Krenek was, in fact, one of a number of émigré musicians who, having arrived in Britain and experienced its parochial attitudes towards the arts, and the employment bans in force, decided to leave it and continue on to the United States. Others included Hanns Eisler, Erich Katz, Karol Rathaus and Ernst Toch. Schoenberg avoided the British staging-post entirely, and went directly to America.

If we return to Francis Routh's chapter – now almost fifty years of age – we may appreciate not only how forward-thinking and, to use contemporary terminology, inclusive he was for his time, but just how little things have changed. At a time when British attitudes towards immigrants have become consolidated through political manipulation, and at a time when such attitudes have become visible throughout the world, it is legitimate to wonder not only whether we have learnt anything from the past, but how we might make fruitful use of the legacy of these composers – and, more importantly still, their music! – in order to understand that creativity in fact knows no boundaries, least of all those imposed by dotted lines on a map.

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Иван Муди

Како живети у туђини: инострани композитори у Великој Британији после Другог светског рата

(Резиме)

Добар део новијих истраживања показао је да је ситуација за емигрантске композиторе у Великој Британији, од којих је већина побегла због нацистичког режима, током Другог светског рата и касније била изузетно сложена. Британски ставови према странцима одраније су били врло амбивалентни, и то се одразило институционално, као што показује тадашња политика Би-Би-Сија, мада је било и изузетака, пре свега у случају рада Мајкла Типета на колеџу "Морли", који ће постати уточиште за избегле музичаре. Многи од тих композитора, и уопште музичара били су интернирани и било им је изузетно тешко да нађу запослење. У овом чланку се бавим животима и наслеђем петорице иностраних композитора који су дошли у Велику Британију да покушају да наново изграде своје животе; то су: Франц Рајзенштајн, Маћаш Шајбер, Егон Велес, Роберто Герхард и Анджеј Пануфник. Изабрао сам њих петорицу зато што је о њима изванредно писао Франсис Раут у својој одавно распродатој књизи Савремена бришанска музика: двадесей йей їодина, 1945–1970, објављеној 1972. године. Наведени композитори су се међусобно веома разликовали, а Раутова расправа о њима објективна је у највећем могућем степену.

Моја намера је да лоцирам ове композиторе у дужем временском периоду. Ослањајући се на новија истраживања наведене проблематике, постављам питање: зашто је Раут одабрао баш ове композиторе? Јер било је много више композитора између којих је могао да бира, а не само ових пет. Такође, моје питање је да ли су се посматрани ставови заиста променили.

Кључне речи: композитори емигранти, британски ставови, Франсис Раут (Francis Routh), Би-Би-Си.

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