Louis Jullien: A Visionary of Nineteenth Century Conducting

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Abstract

Well known for his extravagant appearance, Louis Jullien (1812-1860), a prominent conductor in England, programmed concerts that were entertaining and accessible to the public. During the nineteenth century, conductors began to take responsibility for the artistic and musical direction of their concerts. Jullien's concerts included dance, choral, and classical music to appeal to a variety of tastes. His theatricality on the podium and use of a baton captivated his audiences, while his distinctive conducting personality contributed to the visual appeal of the concert experience. Audience members and musical reviewers alike were attracted to the spectacular display at Jullien's concerts. Through the examination of articles in the *Musical World*, the most important London-based music periodical published in Jullien's time, and Romantic orchestral scholarship, this research investigates Louis Jullien's role as a conducting figure. While Adam Carse has described the biographical accounts of Jullien's life and Holly Mathieson has examined the artistic representations of Jullien and has interpreted his conducting as militaristic and magical, scholars have not yet examined the sublime in the reception of Jullien's performance. Jullien's virtuosic self presentation and performance behaviour inspired responses that drew upon the language of the sublime and influenced how he was received as a visionary figure. His status as a visionary was further developed by his innovations as a conductor.

Keywords: conducting, baton, sublime, nineteenth century, Louis Jullien, visionary

During the nineteenth century, orchestral conductors began to take responsibility for the artistic and musical direction of their concerts. Before conductors had an established role in the orchestra, a system of dual-leadership existed where the keyboard player (who was often the composer) would play, cue performers with his body, and make audible time markings (such as stomping the foot), while the principal violinist would lead instrumentalists through physical gestures and musicianship.[1] As orchestras increased in size and the musical repertoire became more complex, the dual-leadership system became ineffective at keeping the

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John Spitzer, Neal Zaslaw, and Michael Kennedy, "Conductor," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed June 29, 2018, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.cyber.usask.ca/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000901114?rskey=lKJ8sV&result=4.

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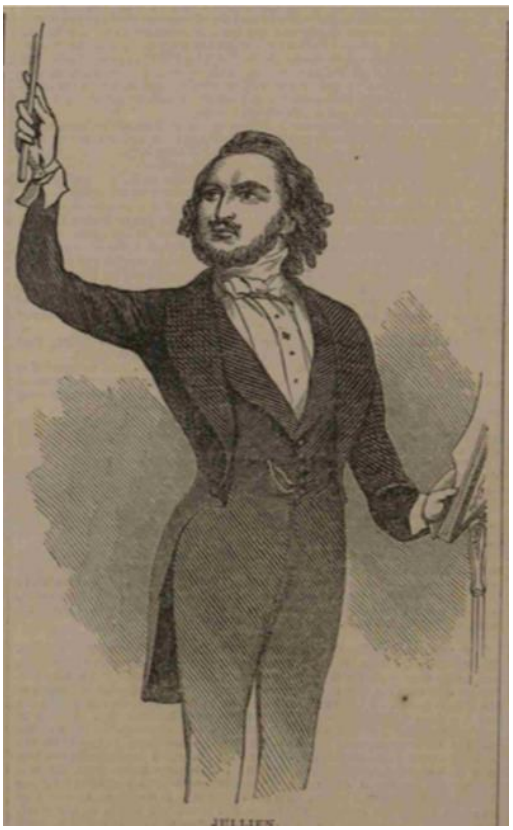

Figure 1: A portrait-sketch of Jullien posing with his baton.[2]

musicians in time and following one musical interpretation.[3] The emergence of a conductor, a musical director who would lead the orchestra with silent physical gestures, allowed for greater artistic expression. Released from the restrictions of having to keep audible time, conductors could create individualized conducting patterns and approaches with their silent movements. Furthermore, although conductors do not produce sound, they still perform. They make musical decisions, display virtuosity, choose program selections, and share some commonalities with soloists such as memorization or standing in the center of the stage. Therefore, conductors influenced the musical interpretation of works, rehearsal techniques, and concert culture.

In England, one under-examined figure of this new conducting method is Louis Jullien (1812-1860), who programmed concerts with a variety of dance, choral, and classical music. His theatricality on the podium and use of a baton captivated his audiences, who were fascinated by the new role of the mid-nineteenth century conductor. With distinctive gestures and styles, Jullien contributed to the visual appeal of the concert experience and helped to promote the importance and function of conducting. Through the examination of digitized *Musical World* articles from 1838-1850 and Romantic orchestral scholarship, this research investigates Louis Jullien's role as a conducting figure.[4] Previously, Adam Carse has described the biographical accounts of Jullien's life and Holly Mathieson has interpreted the artistic representations of Jullien's conducting as militaristic and magical.[5] However, scholars have not yet examined the sublime, the overwhelming and awe-inspiring experience caused by contact with vast and terrible objects, in the reception of Jullien's performance.[6] Jullien's virtuosic self-presentation and performance behaviour inspired responses that drew upon the language of the sublime and influenced how he was received as a visionary figure. His status as a visionary was further developed by his innovations as a conductor.

Jullien's deliberate outfit choices established his role as the virtuoso of the orchestra. In the nineteenth century, "the figure of the virtuoso emerges through the material details of clothing, personal appearance and charisma, name, fame, and money."[7] Jullien's appearance is repeatedly noticed by musical reviewers who are intrigued by his white waistcoat, carefully groomed facial hair, and jewelled baton. For a visual representation of Jullien's appearance, see figure 1. In a concert critique of Jullien's

[2] Anonymous, *Jullien*, 1843, portrait sketch, *The Illustrated London News*, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk /viewer/bl/0001578/18431125/056/0012.

[3] Larry G. Curtis and David L. Kuehn, *A Guide to Successful Instrumental Conducting* (Dubuque: WCB Brown and Benchmark, 1992), 4.

[4] *Musical World* was the most important London-based music periodical published in Jullien's time.

[5] Adam Carse, *The Life of Jullien: Adventurer, Showman-Conductor and Establisher of the Promenade Concerts in England, Together with a History of Those Concerts up to 1895* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1951).

Holly Mathieson, "Embodying Music: The Visuality of Three Iconic Conductors in London, 1840-1940," (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2010), https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/handle/10523/461.

[6] Though there are many theories of the sublime that were known in the nineteenth century, including those by Burke, Kant, and Schiller, Burke's version of the sublime resonates most with the English critical reception of Jullien.

[7] Susan Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt, and Baudelaire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 11.

band performing in Dublin, Jullien's appearance is described in detail: "Jullien, with his hyacinthine curls, his whiskers, his ocean of white waistcoat and cravat, his gorgeous baton studded with precious stones – why it is a positive treat to look at him."[8] This characteristic appearance supports the idea that Jullien had a specific image he wanted to convey to his audiences and that he wanted to attract attention. An English concert review of Jullien's performance at Drury Lane Theatre describes his appearance positively and connects it to leading the band: "We had the picturesque *Conducteur*, who returned to delight our ocular senses after several days truanting, and who is a whole gallery of pictures in his own proper person."[9] Viewing the concerts and having Jullien "delight [their] ocular senses" became a form of entertainment in addition to listening to the music. Just as a soloist would be dressed in attire that stands out, Jullien's attention to his appearance was a statement about the conductor as the soloist of an orchestra.

In addition to Jullien's elaborate and slightly unusual outfits, his stage behaviour enhanced the idea of the conductor as a musical artist. Virtuosity became an important characteristic for conductors:

> The rise and influence of the virtuoso conductor coincide with the period during which public concerts became the primary centers for musical activity. Composers and performers, increasingly dependent upon an open market for their livelihoods, were forced to adjust the characteristics of their art: the pursuit both of virtuosity and novelty was energized and individualized.[10]

Jullien's personality and performances were a novelty that garnered attention. Even in reviews critical of Jullien, it is still recognized that he is the attraction of his band:

> The striking action with which M. Jullien conducts his orchestra – the royal air with which he reclines in his seat – the expansive white waistcoat – all have been themes for merriment. But there has not been one damaging laugh – not so much as an injurious simper. The world has been told through all sorts of organs, that M. Jullien is possessed of most amusing eccentricities, and accordingly the world goes to see him. […] The causes of merriment were also causes of attraction, and every titter as acceptable as a puff of incense.[11]

For English audiences, the idea of a conductor using a baton was new. In England, the dual-leadership system persisted as late as the 1840s and silent conductors wielding batons were an oddity.[12] The baton, "despite its newness as an art craft," was attributed to being used by specific conductors such as Louis Jullien.[13] In an article commenting about Jullien's success, his silent conducting was a novelty:

> He sweeps his baton through the noiseless air, and a burst of harmony follows; he moves his arm in slow and gentle undulations, and the music, obedient to his behest, rises and falls with softest cadence, the variations of which are felt rather than heard. The slightest motion, and the most animated, are followed by their appropriate musical effects. It seems as if he alone were the performer.[14]

The silent conducting allowed Jullien's gestures to be considered performative rather than purely metronomic. The movement of his arms, and by extension his baton, is noted as the behaviour that initiates a musical response. The silent communication between conductor and musicians is a

[8] "Dublin," *Musical World* 20, no. 34 (August 21, 1845): 404, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082249297;view=1up;seq=414;size=150.

[9] "Concerts D'Ete at Drury Lane Theatre," *Musical World* 9, no. 191 (August 26, 1841): 139, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082250527&view=1up&seq=149.

[10] Elliott Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting: In Theory and Practice* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1988), xxix.

[11] Covent-Garden Theatre," *Musical World* 19, no. 10 (March 7, 1844): 88, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082249289;view=1up;seq=95;size=125.

[12] Spitzer, Zaslaw, and Kennedy, "Conductor."

[13] Galkin, *A History of Orchestral Conducting*, 498.

[14] J.W.D., "Monsieur Jullien," *Musical World* 20, no. 5 (January 30, 1845): 49, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082249297&view=1up&seq=62. Italics original unless otherwise specified. As indicated in the *Musical World*, this text originally appeared in the Birmingham Journal.

fascination and the resulting singular musical idea that is created allows for Jullien to be considered the sole performer. In a review of Jullien's tour to Carmarthenshire, the baton is recognized as the instrument keeping the band together: "Great was the admiration expressed of the unequalled precision exhibited under the magic *baton* of the celebrated Jullien; all seemed possessed but of one mind, acting under one common impulse, producing a result, which no one, having the opportunity, should omit witnessing."[15] Since the baton allowed for everyone in the ensemble to be acting "of one mind," audiences attributed to it a magical force. While the baton's power to keep the ensemble together was acknowledged by reviewers, the means of musical transmission between Jullien and his players was not fully understood or comprehended.

The imagery used to describe Jullien further contributes to his understanding as a visionary figure. Repeatedly in concert reviews, descriptions of nature are used to evoke the sublime in Jullien's performance. Edmund Burke (1729-1797), a British philosopher, describes the effect of the sublime in his treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). He argues that the experience of the sublime is often provoked by natural forces, and that the primary effect of the sublime in this instance "is Astonishment [...] that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror."[16] Because aspects of the natural world can initiate responses of astonishment, music critics use this imagery to emphasize how Jullien's performance elicited the same response from the audience. Natural imagery is used to describe Jullien's performance in his Drury Lane concerts: "[Jullien] has evidently not looked at Nature through the spectacles of books, but he has taken her in at his eyes and ears, and drank deep at her fount of inspiration. After hearing this *finale*, we felt inclined to say that Jullien was born of an avalanche."[17] As a visionary figure, Jullien's performance, recounted with natural imagery of the sublime, is perceived to transcend rational thought.

Burke describes sound and loudness as characteristics that can cause the sublime passion: "Excessive loudness alone is sufficient to overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror. The noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and awful sensation in the mind."[18] In a review of Jullien's concert in Manchester, the music is described in relation to several of these sonorous forces: "At last all join forte, with rolling crescendos of the drums, that roar like a park of artillery; while the monster drum is used with a booming effect, that realizes the dull reverberation of cannon. Suddenly, as if by magic, 'Jove' silences the thunder, and the closing strain is given placidly and smoothly."[19] Jullien, who is attributed with the power of a god through the allusion to Jove, is directing music that has an overwhelming sound presence and he is recognized for having the ability to control the music by "silencing the thunder." The reviewer even likens the baton to a thunderbolt, another example of how the sublime is used in Jullien's reception: "though last, not least, Jove himself, who wields his thunder-bolt with an effect occasionally as tremendous as that of the great son of Saturn, but generally so as almost to call down the music of the spheres."[20] Jullien's ability to conduct the powerful sound of the orchestra is perceived as divine. As demonstrated by the references to forceful and astonishing natural events, Jullien's performance prompted the language of the sublime to be used in his reception.

Jullien's status as a visionary figure is further emphasized by depictions of him entering rapturous states. In an article summarizing Jullien's success, the conductor is perceived to have been granted the powers of Apollo: "Apollo, we could almost believe, has conferred upon Jullien, for his musical enthusiasm, *the power of creating harmony by a wave of his cabalistic wand*."[21] Enthusiasm is "a practice in

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[15] "Jullien in the Provinces," *Musical World* 25, no. 16 (April 20, 1850): 239, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082282025;view=1up;seq=257;size=125.

[16] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53.

[17] "Drury Lane," *Musical World* 22, no. 43 (October 23, 1847): 676, https://books.google.ca/books?redir_esc=y&id=FJMPAAAAYAAJ&q=Jullien#v=onepage&q=Jullien&f=true.

[18] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 75.

[19] "Jullien's Concerts at Manchester," *Musical World* 23, no. 53 (December 30, 1848): 838, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082249305;view=1up;seq=847.

[20] "Jullien's Concerts at Manchester," 837.

[21] J.W.D., "Monsieur Jullien," 49. As indicated in the *Musical World*, this text originally appeared in the *Birmingham Journal.*

which an initiate directly communicates with the deity."[22] In another article commenting about Jullien's career, enthusiasm is mentioned again: "his handsome face lighted up with the enthusiasm of the moment – *his attitude embodying (so to speak) the very sounds elicited from the instruments around him*."[23] Here, Jullien's body channels the spirit that is brought to him through the instruments. This is further emphasized by a physical description of him entering an altered state of consciousness: "at the head of his band, flourishing his sparkling baton – *his eye 'in a fine frenzy rolling*'."[24] The descriptions of Jullien's physical alterations and references to enthusiasm demonstrate that he was understood by critics as experiencing ideas beyond the accessible world. Jullien's comparisons to god-like figures, performances that can control forces similar to natural events, and rapturous states characterize his status as a visionary conductor.

While Jullien's self-presentation contributed to his understanding as a virtuoso and his reception, which included language of the sublime, contributed to his understanding as a visionary, Jullien's role as a conductor was further developed by his innovations that included making musical and interpretive decisions. Unconventional in his musical programming, Jullien was able to educate the public with a diversity of repertoire in his concerts. Incorporating both classical works and popular works together at an affordable price, audiences were able to listen to a variety of music to which they would not otherwise have been exposed.[25] Jullien is remembered as "the man who was to hold the promenade concerts together for nineteen years, and was to give them that firm grip on the affections of the ordinary middle and lower class British audiences."[26] Through his economically accessible concerts, Jullien was able to entertain a broad audience by attracting them with popular selections and informing them with more serious musical works. In his 1872 book, *Musical Recollections of the Last Half-Century*, John Edmund Cox describes the impact of Jullien's programming:

> At his concerts some of the greatest orchestral works that ever were written were performed with a precision and completeness which not only interested but elevated the tone of mind of his overflowing audiences. [...] The advantages he initiated have become not only permanent, but are still steadily increasing.[27]

Only a few decades after his early prominence, Jullien's programming and popularity were regarded as having a positive musical effect.

Jullien's band, even though it performed popular selections, was well trained. Because promenade concerts did not serve the "usual cultured and limited concert-going audience of a large city," they had a reputation of being of lower quality.[28] However, several articles commented about the quality of musicians Jullien was able to recruit.[29] In addition to having talented musicians, the band itself was recognized for being well prepared: "Another great advantage attending these concerts is the constant practice they afford, polishing and refining the talent of all engaged. As rehearsals are seldom to be had in this money-making metropolis, this was much wanted."[30] While multiple rehearsals were not common, Jullien endeavored to prepare his ensemble for a polished and professional performance. As a result, Jullien elevated the perception of promenade concerts:

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[22] Amanda Winkler, "Enthusiasm and Its Discontents: Religion, Prophecy, and Madness in the Music for *Sophonisba* and *The Island Princess, Journal of Musicology* 23, no. 2 (2006): 308.

[23] "The Puff Poetical," *Musical World* 20, no. 10 (March 6, 1845): 117, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433082249297&view=1up&seq=129.

[24] "The Puff Poetical," 117.

[25] Carse, *The Life of Jullien*, 3.

[26] Carse, *The Life of Jullien*, 11.

[27] John Edmund Cox, *Musical Recollections of the Last Half-Century* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872), 2:158. https://books.google.ca/books?id=pURGAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA161&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false.

[28] Carse, *The Life of Jullien*, 3.

[29] In a review of Jullien's promenade concerts, the soloists were mentioned for their musical ability: "We mean, the very great excellence of the solo players, who certainly have not been surpassed in our remembrance at concerts of much higher price, as well as higher pretensions." "Covent-Garden Theatre," 88.

[30] "Covent-Garden Theatre," 88.

> He has succeeded in training a very excellent band to work with great energy and precision, and his conducting is a thing quite unique of its kind, efficient in regulating his orchestra, as well as entertaining to the eye of his spectators. [...] Examples enough have been cited to show that these concerts, though at first lightly regarded, are gradually raising the character of the art in this country.[31]

Jullien's concept of programming and his attention to rehearsal scheduling expanded the role of the conductor to include duties beyond keeping the orchestra together on stage. His ability to provide concerts with a competent ensemble and a diverse repertoire selection was visionary. A powerful entertainer, Jullien's philosophy made both his concerts and his conducting successful.

Jullien's unique performative style established his position as the prominent figure of his orchestra. Audiences marvelled at his extravagant appearance and demonstrative podium personality. Jullien's popularity was widespread as "his figure was a household shape and his name a household word throughout the length and breadth of the country."[32] Jullien became the virtuoso of the orchestra and his reputation became the main attraction. His stage behaviour and use of the baton, while sometimes overly theatrical, were regarded by music critics as powerful tools to organize and lead an orchestra. Due to the unfamiliarity with conductors and conducting batons, audiences did not fully understand Jullien's performances and his silent communication with the orchestra. The power and manner of his performances, which evoked language of the sublime in his reception, were overwhelming to the audience and gave the impression of transcending the sensible world. As a visionary, Jullien was a superstar conductor who was perceived as commanding the most forceful musical experiences. Jullien helped establish a tradition in England of conductors being musical leaders with a clearly defined function in the orchestra. Today, orchestral conductors continue to have name-recognition, use a baton, and program popular works to attract different audiences. Louis Jullien, despite his critics, led a successful orchestra that delivered music to the masses who recognized him as the star of the operation.

[31] "Covent-Garden Theatre," 88.

[32] Carse, *The Life of Jullien*, 101.

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