The masculinity of the Victorian painter-poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) has always been a subject of intense interest for scholars of nineteenth-century British literature and art history. The question ‘how manly was Rossetti?’ resurfaces every so often, and answers have always been varied. Jay D. Sloan’s ‘Attempting “Spheral Change”: D.G. Rossetti, Victorian Masculinity and the Failure of Passion’ (2004) positions Rossetti as a nonconformist, a man who rejected gender norms and sought to express his manhood through a rhetoric of passion.1 Sloan’s argument provides a neat contrast to one provided by Herbert Sussman in Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art (1995), in which Sussman argues that Rossetti crafted a ‘Bohemian’ model of manhood that, despite its veneer of otherness, allowed room for ‘masculine’ expressions of a normative nature.2 These perspectives are continually complicated by others that provide nuance to what would otherwise be a dichotomy of conventionality and unconventionality. For instance, in ““He and I”: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Other Man’ (2001), Joseph Bristow suggests that Rossetti, through his creative work, exhibited signs of same-sex desire.3

While this article will seek to provide yet another answer to the question ‘how manly was Rossetti?’, it will do so by considering an important aspect of Victorian culture that influenced gender identity on a grand scale: music. Far from being das Land ohne Musik, Britain, especially in the nineteenth century, experienced an explosion of musical activity that no individual could have avoided in his or her day-to-day life.4 With a growing middle class willing to patronise music, there came a refinement of concert life established in the previous century, the appearance of numerous music societies and the
growth of instrument making and music publication as industries. In addition, we cannot ignore the number of people who were interested in reading and writing about music; there were around two hundred music journals in existence during this period and thousands of music reports printed in the general press.\(^5\) Within this context, two major ideas about music were circulating that coloured the production and consumption of music — music as aesthetic ideal and music as a feminine art — ideas that, as this article will argue, were involved in the construction of Rossetti’s masculine identity during his most productive years. It will become clear that this identity was partly a result of a negotiation between the two ideas.

In reading Rossetti’s constructed masculinity through these ideas about music, however, I am aware of treading upon territory that has often been seen as removed from the painter-poet’s life. After all, some of his contemporaries said that he had absolutely ‘no passion for music’ and found music ‘positively offensive’.\(^6\) But we should keep in mind that others have hinted otherwise, introducing a serious complication that, if examined further, may subsequently change the way we look at Rossetti. Indeed, Alfred James Hipkins (1826-1903) said, in a review of Rossetti’s musical paintings in 1883, that Rossetti’s unmusical ear was ‘liable … to correction’.\(^7\) William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919) admitted that his brother ‘could enjoy an opera, or a simple tuneable song’.\(^8\) This complication, if not contradiction, in Rossetti’s relationship with music mirrors that found in other Victorian middle-class men’s relationships with music. We find that not only is reading Rossetti’s constructed masculinity via music conceivable, but it is also a necessity, for it may very well reveal much about Rossetti (and other Victorian men) that has so far remained puzzling.

**Music as Aesthetic Ideal and as Feminine Art**

Before examining how music as aesthetic ideal and music as a feminine art affected Rossetti, it is necessary to establish a general sense of what these ideas meant in Victorian Britain. They were not the only conceptions about music at the time, but they were the ones that appeared to be most relevant to British middle-class men — particularly those who were writers and artists. It is interesting how they came to be such, for they did not originate in Britain. The
notion of music as aesthetic ideal – that music was the ‘highest’ of all the arts and their model – had its origin in late-eighteenth-century Germany when new developments in the realm of language and human consciousness by German Idealists led to a revolutionary shift in perception that paved the way for music’s rise. Prior to this, most of Western Europe, under the influence of the French neoclassicists, believed that music was the vaguest of all the arts. Unable to imitate nature and fully convey meaning, music was nothing more than mindless entertainment or, at best, a ‘language of emotions’ that had its comprehensible counterpart in verbal/written language. However, through the German Idealist philosophers, music gained respect. Based on the Idealist belief that the mind subjectively constructed reality instead of merely perceiving a fixed empirical world predetermined by a deity, the German Romantics of the early nineteenth century saw music as a form of articulation that could express what other forms could not. Vague and ineffable, it was ‘higher’ than verbal/written language, ‘speaking’ beyond the conceptual. This view continued as the century progressed. A key figure was the composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883), who placed music at the centre of his dramas beginning in the mid 1850s, cementing music’s place at the apex of all arts.

Unlike in Germany, the idea of music as the ‘highest’ art was not taken seriously in Britain until the 1860s. The British were more interested in the practical rather than theoretical side of music and their tastes were still neoclassical. In addition, music was closely entwined with the other arts in aesthetic criticism, with poetry as the preferred art. Furthermore, the overall concern among writers and artists was not so much what was the ‘highest’ art as how art’s engagement with life could elicit positive changes in society. It was only when this concern was challenged after the 1830s that music began to be noticed for more than its entertaining qualities. For instance, the failed revolutions on the Continent during the late 1840s confirmed growing suspicions that ideal visions of society were, in reality, not enough to change society. Although Britain was geographically removed from the revolutions, it was still strongly affected by them. One effect was the gradual acceptance, beginning in the 1860s, of the aesthetic doctrine ‘art for art’s sake’, which originated in 1830s France and which advocated the creation of beautiful art that was completely detached from morality and utility. The idea of art for art’s sake was perfect for music, as no other art-
form could so sever itself from gross materiality. Music was the goal of this idea – it could be beautiful without purpose, it could express without material reference. Music was the ideal art-form.

The Victorian British version of music as aesthetic ideal, whose orientation was more formal than philosophical, began to gain popularity around the 1860s. A key figure was James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), who attempted to create, in such works as At the Piano (1858–1859) and Symphony in White No. 1: The White Girl (1862), a musicality through colour and structural arrangement of lines and objects. For him, music was an ideal model for painting because it was capable, through formal relationships, of expressing experiences that may not stem from emotions or preconceived ideas. The ‘benefits’ of music also found their way into poetry and criticism. Robert Browning (1812–1889) used structures of musical genres like toccatas and fugues to organise his poems, and would often insert bars of music in his letters and poems to ‘say’ what could not be said with words. Familiar with Baudelaire’s writings and the musical dramas of Wagner, Algernon Swinburne (1837–1909) produced Wagnerian-inspired poetry – notable examples include ‘Laus Veneris’ (1864) and ‘Tristram of Lyonesse’ (1882) – and criticised with musical analogies, as if suggesting that music was capable of expressing with more accuracy the essence of artistic and literary pieces. As for Walter Pater (1839–1894), music was the ultimate art-form because it fulfilled art’s purpose. ‘All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music’, he wrote in 1873, because it is only in music that form and subject can be one.

But it should be remembered that music as aesthetic ideal took shape in a cultural milieu that already possessed longstanding conceptions about music. Music may have been thought of as ‘pure’ by artists and intellectuals, but it was actually entangled with worldly concerns such as gender. The political, economic and technological changes that Britain had experienced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had resulted in the reconstruction and institutionalisation of social relationships; differences between men and women, already a topic of interest, were further emphasised in the medical literature of the day and through the establishment of specific roles in domestic ideology. This division of the sexes found its way into virtually all aspects of music. Musical pieces, genres, composers, performers and instruments were frequently divided along ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ lines. Even music-related activities
were gendered. Composing, conducting, critiquing and theorising were ‘masculine’ because they required sustained mental effort, which, according to popular belief, could handicap the reproductive capabilities of women. Performing was ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ depending on where it was being done (public/private space) and who was performing.  

As if these divisions were not enough, music as a whole was considered to be a ‘feminine’ art. This was not so much due to the large number of middle-class women practising music as part of their education as to the avoidance of the art by a large number of middle-class men. This avoidance had multiple causes. A major one was tradition; for centuries in Britain, men believed that playing music led to feminisation, and so must be avoided at all costs. Also largely responsible was the development of a masculine ideal in Victorian Britain whereby a man was expected to be disciplined, industrious and responsible; such an ideal man could hardly have time to pursue leisurely and frivolous pursuits like music. Even if a man did pursue music as a profession, he had to be a recognised genius or expert, or had to be highly proficient in other areas of life. Basically, men’s overall attitude towards music was one of suspicion, and this led to a number of effects. Conspicuous was the general lack of music classes for boys across England. Another consequence was men’s development of disassociation tactics. Extremely common was boasting of one’s ignorance or indifference to music. As for musical men, the adoption of female pseudonyms was sometimes practised when writing for magazines.

The more music was shunned by men, the more it became identified with women. Indeed, music was considered a ‘natural’ art for women due to their perceived greater emotional sensitivity. Unfortunately, being ‘naturally’ disposed toward music did not entail greater influence and freedom in music culture; it was widely held that women’s more delicate physiological and emotional constitution demanded supervision and control. In the realm of music, women were circumscribed twice over. Because of their sensitivity, women were advised to treat music as a superficial accomplishment. Moreover, on an abstract level, supposed similarities in character were drawn between women and music. Since Plato, the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘music’ collapsed into one due to their perceived similarities; it was believed that while women and music could inspire men – that is, be muses to their
creativity and morality – they were also dangerous creatures, morally and sexually, because they were unpredictable. In *The Queen of the Air* (1869), John Ruskin (1819–1900) – who saw music as an ideal art for its instructive potential rather than for purely aesthetic reasons – continued this tradition by describing music’s double nature of inspiring order and/or disorder using the female pronoun and possessive. The many paintings in the Victorian period portraying women and music together are thus more than aesthetically pleasing images; both subjects are dangerous Others that are observed and then denied, a negation that could be used to (re)affirm hegemonic, normative masculinity.

**Rossetti and Music**

Having touched upon the ideas of music as an aesthetic ideal and music as a feminine art in Victorian Britain, this article will now discuss their relationship to Rossetti and what their interaction in his works can reveal about the construction of his masculinity. Regarding music as aesthetic ideal, it should be remembered that Rossetti was already practising his own version of it at least a decade before Whistler began his musical paintings. This version was focussed not so much on what music could do for the other arts as on music’s ability to reveal harmonious relationships between the self and the universe. In this respect, Rossetti was a follower of the Pythagorean tradition of music, a tradition whose early history was shaped by individuals like Plato (427-347 BCE) and Boethius (c.480-c.525). How Rossetti developed this interest in Pythagorean music is not entirely clear, though a few likely influences can be traced. During the 1840s, the painter-poet made several brief trips to France where he could have encountered recently published writings on Pythagorean music. Another way Rossetti could have developed this interest was through his father’s scholarly work on Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), whom his father believed was influenced by various ancient Mysteries, Pythagorean ones included. Yet another possible influence was Rossetti’s admiration of previous treatments of Pythagorean music by poets whom he admired. Whatever the cause(s), Rossetti’s appreciation of music in his early career is evident in a variety of works that meditate on its power. Here follows a brief look at two examples, as understanding their
approaches to music will help to highlight deviations in later works that point to Rossetti’s heightening awareness of the masculine norms of his day.

In the 1851 lyric poem ‘During Music’, music is portrayed as a wondrous art that, unlike verbal language, can speak directly to the soul and its feelings:

O cool unto the sense of pain  
That last night’s sleep could not destroy;  
O warm unto the sense of joy,  
That dreams its life within the brain.

What though I lean o’er thee to scan  
The written music cramped and stiff; –  
’Tis dark to me, as hieroglyph  
On those weird bulks Egyptian.

But as from those, dumb now and strange,  
A glory wanders on the earth,  
Even so thy tones can call a birth  
From these, to shake my soul with change.

O swift, as in melodious haste  
Float o’er the keys thy fingers small;  
O soft, as in the rise and fall  
Which stirs that shade within thy breast.34

Featuring two individuals at a piano or organ, the poem conveys an intensely personal musical experience. Despite lacking knowledge of music – ‘The written music cramped and stiff; – / ’Tis dark to me, as hieroglyph’ (6–7) – the poet is still able to recognise musica instrumentalis’s profound power over musica humana.35 Music is capable of soothing pain and heightening joy: ‘O cool unto the sense of pain … O warm unto the sense of joy’ (1–3). And even though its visual trace or notation looks completely ‘dumb now and strange’ (9), it can be mysteriously transformed by the player into a ‘glory’ that ‘wanders on the earth’ (10) – in other words, a glorious, all-pervading sound – that can be understood by the intuitive soul even though it passes by the objective mind: ‘thy tones can call a birth / From these, to shake my soul with change’ (11–12).
Interestingly, music’s unique characteristics in physical reality are also acknowledged, with the poet highlighting its ‘swift[ness]’ (13) and ‘soft[ness]’ (15).

Even more intriguing is the watercolour *The Blue Closet* (Figure 1). Completed in 1856, this work attempts to illustrate through visual symbolism the connections between *musica mundana*, *musica humana* and *musica instrumentalis*. Here, a group of women surround an instrument consisting of bells, strings and keyboards. Immediately noticeable is that the music emanating from this instrument cannot be separated from the other elements in the watercolour; it is the *singularity* from which all other aspects of the picture arise. While the harmonies of a piano or organ can affect the soul of a human being, the harmonies of this imaginary instrument can affect the change from day to night (indicated by the sun and moon emblems) and the change from season to season (shown by the decorative holly and sprouting lily). It can also organise the picture into a series of visual symmetries and balanced colour.

*Figure 1* Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blue Closet* (1856). Tate, London.
combinations. The symmetry is shown by the parallel keyboards, the women with complementary expressions and the crossed legs of the instrument. The colours scarlet, purple and green, worn by the two women on the left, appear again on the women on the right. The final result is a self-contained closet in the service of harmony, enhanced by the players’ intense concentration and absorption in their task.

These early works show Rossetti as a highly sensitive painter-poet. However, they also suggest that he was deeply unmasculine. In the realm of painting, the ‘manly’ artist was, generally speaking, academically orientated, producing objective and/or historically accurate pictures. Poetry was less strict due to the perceived femininity of the genre, but it too had ‘manly’ conventions; as Thaïs Morgan has noted, Victorian male poets were often called upon ‘to represent paradigms of heroism’. Although Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) mentions in On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History (1841) that the male poet must possess ‘musical thought’ or the ability to see the inner harmony in all things, he does so without reference to actual music, or music that is seen and/or heard, as being a component of such thought. Demonstrating neither historical accuracy nor ‘manly’ heroism in his early music-orientated works – the blue closet cannot exist in reality and the poet in ‘During Music’ is preoccupied with deep feelings – Rossetti was challenging gender expectations. That he was consciously doing so is shown by the fact that actual music, either suggested by the presence of musical instruments or as notation, appears in a number of his works in this period, among them the wood engraving The Palace of Art (St. Cecilia) (1857), the watercolour My Lady Greensleeves (1859), a panel for King René’s Honeymoon Cabinet (1861) by John P. Seddon (1827–1906) and a sofa exhibited at the 1862 International Exhibition in London.

Rossetti’s vision of music was not, however, to remain static. In the 1860s, he became influenced by the works of the Venetian masters, particularly Giorgione (c.1477–1510) and Titian (c.1485–1576), triggering a more sensual artistic practice. This change to a more earthly mode affected the way he portrayed women and music. Music became less abstract and more sensual, mingling with colour, smell and touch. And although Rossetti’s treatments remained focused on music’s unique qualities, they now possessed an additional element: concern for music’s feminising potential. This cannot be separated from Rossetti’s entry into a larger community of men. In previous decades, Rossetti was a young, unrecognised painter-poet. Although
the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the ‘second Brotherhood’ that formed in 1856 at Oxford were stimulating male communities, they were immature ones. The mature male network consisted of older artists and men of letters, some of whom Rossetti had approached in hopes of obtaining encouragement, advice and/or patronage. In 1848, Rossetti sent some of his poems to Leigh Hunt (1784–1859) to obtain feedback. In the early 1850s, he came to know Ruskin, from whom he wished to gain financial security and publicity by association. By the 1860s, Rossetti had no need for such relationships as he became a mature and respected artist in his own right. He became friends with other notable men and found a number of patrons, such as Liverpool ship owner Frederick R. Leyland (1832–1892) and Glasgow MP William Graham (1816–1885).

Of course, these friends were also middle-class men, and as such, possessed certain beliefs. One of them was that music could threaten a man’s normative masculine identity if taken too seriously; another one was that a man’s performance of conventional masculinity could in some ways counter suspicions of effeminacy. With Rossetti’s integration into this community of men – he became close to his patrons and obtained membership in clubs where important men of the day dined and socialised – he also adopted these beliefs. Granted, it may be difficult to picture Rossetti as a conventional Victorian man possessing conventional manly beliefs; numerous colourful accounts of his life have made it virtually impossible to think of him without imagining an eccentric artist. Any doubt about his conventionality is dispelled, however, when one considers the fact that Rossetti could not have been accepted by his peers in the first place if he was not to some extent sober and pragmatic. Rossetti had a shrewd business sense despite his costly lifestyle; he cultivated a small group of patrons to ensure a steady income and knew how to sell his artworks. He also knew whom to keep as company. When Simeon Solomon (1840-1905) was arrested for gross indecency in 1873, Rossetti, along with Swinburne, terminated connections. Knowing that sympathy towards conventionality has material rewards, Rossetti took music’s (believed) threat to masculinity seriously. In the 1860s, he began to distance himself from music, ceasing his occasional visits to the opera and belittling music in his correspondence by making it the target of jokes.

One may argue that the male community in which Rossetti circulated was an exception in that it was partial towards music. Leyland, George Price Boyce (1826–1897), Charles Augustus Howell
(1840–1890) and Rossetti himself collected musical instruments. There was Hipkins, who was acquainted with Rossetti and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. There was also Rossetti’s close friend Franz Hüffer (1845–1889), whose compositional skills were considered when the painter-poet sketched the libretto plan *The Doom of the Sirens* (1869). However, these men were not professional performers, but amateurs, specialists and critics; they were members of other, respectable professions or aligned themselves with specifically masculine aspects of music, thus perpetuating the idea that music as a whole was a frivolous and feminine art. Moreover, the practice of

Figure 2 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Morning Music* (1864). The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
collecting instruments, which was part of a larger practice of collecting antiques and exotic objects that was popular among men at the time, did not necessarily mean enjoyment of these instruments’ sounds. As Henry Treffry Dunn (1838–1899) noted, in all the years he lived with Rossetti at Cheyne Walk, he ‘never heard a note of music’ even though the painter-poet owned ‘mandolins, lutes [and] dulcimers’.48 Instead, the instruments were valued for their visual appeal. Dunn also remarked that ‘[a]s in Rossetti’s house’, Howell’s house was full of instruments ‘only to be looked at, and talked about in a hushed whisper of admiration for their workmanship and adornments’.49

As Rossetti became more integrated into conventional Victorian male culture, his vision of music gradually modified. This modification, which exudes a consciousness of his masculine reputation and music’s potential threat to it, is readily found, for instance, in the 1864 oil painting *Morning Music* (Figure 2). Depicting a woman having her hair combed, the scene is one of sensuality and luxury. First, let us take note of the ideal elements. Paul Spencer-Longhurst has noted how the ‘predominance of white, broken by areas of red, green, blue, and gold reflects … ideas on colour harmony’.50 This use of colour is not isolated from the subject matter. The ‘colourful’ music is part of an intimate scene where the woman’s hair is being ‘played’ upon like a musical instrument by the attendant, whose concentration reminds us of the women players in *The Blue Closet*. The ‘music’ of her hair is mirrored by the music from the male musician’s lute, which possesses symbolic Pythagorean rose decorations.51 But this scene contains other elements. The categories of ‘woman’ and ‘music’ are fused together, reinstating hegemonic discourse on music and gender. More importantly, the male musician – who is actually the focus of this painting as he is the only one who engages the viewer(s) – is not very manly in a conventional sense. Everything about him is secondary to the woman/music; not only is he framed by a slight shadow, but he is also leaning to his extreme right, suggesting that he is either being pushed out of the picture or trying to avoid the woman’s snake-like hair. In addition, he stands behind his mistress and her hair-music, signalling to the implied viewer that he is only a servant who must play an accompaniment – not a solo piece – to his mistress’s hair-combing every morning. Powerless, he can only look at the viewer(s), warning them of the feminised fate of any man who dabbles in music.

Another example which shows Rossetti’s modified attitude towards music is his 1869 ballad ‘Eden Bower’.52 Retelling the Biblical fall of
humankind through the legend of Lilith, the ballad, like *Morning Music*, contains ideal elements. Aside from possessing refrains, it has a trochaic metre that is regularly interrupted by double offbeats, which make the rhythm of the piece more like song than verse. The ballad is also musical in a Paterian sense in that its feminine rhymes at the end of each quatrain create a falling rhythm that mirrors the falling of humankind. However, despite this musicality, the ballad contains material that is disquieting. Again, there is a reinstatement of the woman–music combination; although the word ‘serpent’ in the ballad refers to a slithering reptile, it can also refer at this time to a musical instrument allied to the cornett that was used in militia bands in Britain and abroad until the early nineteenth century. Of course, Lilith’s serpent in ‘Eden Bower’ is significantly more dangerous to men than the hair in *Morning Music*; by playing the serpent, Lilith not only renders men obsolete sexually and symbolically – by enticing the serpent to ‘bind [her] and bend [her]’ (91), she seems to be encouraging bestiality, and by exchanging bodies with the serpent, she appropriates the phallus – but she also renders men obsolete musically. As musical instruments, serpents were almost always played by men because it was believed that women were physically incapable of playing them; by playing the serpent, Lilith usurps the place of a male player. What is frightening is that Lilith’s playing is irreversible and fatal; we know from Genesis 3 that Adam eventually eats the apple, leading to his and Eve’s expulsion from Eden and subsequent mortality.

These are just two examples of the many music-related works produced in the later decades of Rossetti’s life, but they are enough to show that his vision of music changed significantly from the one he possessed prior to the 1860s. Enthusiasm for music can still be found in his works, but it now coexists uneasily with an awareness of its danger to his masculine identity. Fascination and fear of music comingle, producing works that can only be described as ambivalent in tone. Is music ideal or feminising? More importantly, can one create new art inspired by music and yet avoid emasculation? Rossetti does not provide any answers, but his behaviour in life reveals a similar ambivalence to that which he portrays in his works. That Rossetti desired to be an innovative artist is certain; recognising music’s uniqueness, he was one of the first individuals in Victorian Britain to contemplate it and apply it to different arts. But his desire to be a man, that is, to reap the benefits of performing conventional masculinity – recognition, financial stability and a place among his peers – was equally strong. Thus, he is not only to be found portraying the woman–music combination and its feminising
potential as if to show his peers that he has internalised their beliefs, but also catering to Leyland’s taste for such works.\textsuperscript{54}

To say that Rossetti’s construction of a masculine identity from 1860 onwards, under the influence of music, wavered somewhere between unconventional and conventional would not be misleading, for we can observe that Rossetti was concerned with both the advancement of art and retaining some semblance of conventional masculinity. This ambiguous masculine identity as a result of contact with music was not confined to Rossetti; other Victorian men had such an identity as well. Although Frederic Leighton (1830–1896) was an amateur musician and held numerous musical soirées at his house on Holland Park Road, his conventional masculine identity was affirmed by his being President of the Royal Academy and a commanding officer of the Artists’ Rifles.\textsuperscript{55} Although music as aesthetic ideal and music as a feminine art were proposed as separate entities at the start of this article – one associated with art and the other with social reality – they exist in a symbiotic relationship in Rossetti’s work. Hegemonic discourse on gender and music is ‘spoken’ through ideal musical treatments whilst these treatments are allowed expression via hegemonic discourse. An exploration of Rossetti’s later music-orientated works will reveal that this symbiosis obtains symbolic representation in his treatment of the classical siren figure. In such works as the prose sketch \textit{The Orchard Pit} (1869) and the sonnet ‘Death’s Songsters’ (1870), the singing siren embodies a synthesis of the ideal and feminine aspects of music, for it is only when the male listener is in the process of surrendering his masculinity (and life) to her that he also hears her wondrous melodies.

Perhaps it was this synthesis of ideal and feminine music that contributed to the confusion regarding Rossetti’s masculinity in the eyes of his contemporaries. Indeed, in his infamous 1871 essay on the ‘Fleshly School’, Robert Buchanan (1841–1901), aside from accusing Rossetti of writing poems that contained ‘nothing virile’, portrays the painter-poet near the end of the essay as an ineffective singer who misuses the ‘burthen’.\textsuperscript{56} The latter is a detail worth pointing out, not only because it demonstrates that music was perceived as a feminine art by Victorian men, but also because it highlights for scholars of Victorian masculinity the importance of music in shaping masculine identities in Britain. Consideration must be given to this art because of its pervasiveness. Responses to music varied from man to man, and what Rossetti’s case demonstrates is that
reactions to music could change over time and that music could be used as a vehicle for expressing a masculine identity that could be multifaceted. Whether Rossetti was Bohemian or gentleman-like, eccentric or practical, he was a man of contradictions. To avoid making generalisations about him, we should listen closely to his music.

Notes

The images in this article are reproduced courtesy of Tate Britain and The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

4. The phrase ‘das Land ohne Musik’ or ‘the land without music’ was used by many critics to describe Britain until it was repeatedly challenged in late-twentieth-century music criticism.
10. Barry Millington, John Deathridge and Robert Bailey, ‘Richard Wagner’, *Grove Music Online* [25 June 2007], <http://www.grovemusic.com>. Millington et al. are careful to note that Wagner later returned to his previous conception of music, in which music is on equal footing with the other arts.
14. This acceptance was aided by the writings of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). Baudelaire can be regarded as a key successor of Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), author of the novel Mademoiselle de Maupin (1836). The preface of this novel has often been seen by critics as the first complete manifesto of the l’art pour l’art (art for art’s sake) doctrine. See Gene H. Bell-Villada, Art for Art’s Sake and Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology and Culture of Aestheticism 1790-1900 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 54, and The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, William E. Cain, Laurie A. Finke, Barbara E. Johnson, John McGowan and Jeffrey J. Williams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 750. Among Baudelaire’s important writings are Les Fleurs du Mal (1857) and Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris (1861), in which he praises Wagner as a symphonist and highlights the importance of music in dramatic works.


17. For more on Wagner’s influence on Swinburne, see Anne Dzamba Sessa, Richard Wagner and the English (London: Associated University Presses, 1979), 93-95.


20. In this article, the term ‘feminine’ is synonymous with ‘feminising’ and ‘emasculating’.

21. Well-known pre-Victorian written accounts about the dangers of music to men include Phillip Stubbes’ attack on music in his Anatomy of Abuses (1583) and Lord Chesterfield’s warning to his son in 1749 that music is a time-consuming art (see Richard Leppert, Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 22).


30. Highly influential were Plato’s creation of a cosmic scale in *Timaeus* as well as his description of a geocentric cosmos in Book 10 of the *Republic*, and Boethius’s tripartite division of music in *De Institutione Musica* (early sixth century) into *musica mundana* (cosmic music), *musica humana* (human music) and *musica instrumentalis* (instrumental music).
33. Among Rossetti’s favourite poets were William Shakespeare (1564-1616), John Milton (1608-1674) and Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). In Act V, scene i, of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (c.1598), Lorenzo points out to Jessica the harmony of the universe and man’s inability to hear it. Milton touches upon cosmic harmony in *Arcades* (1633), ‘The Hymn’ (1645), ‘At Solemn Musick’ (1645) and his second *Prolusions* (1674). Highly influential, too, were Poe’s ‘Al Aaraff’ (1829) and ‘The Conqueror Worm’ (1843).
35. See note 30 for Boethius’s tripartite division of music.
38. Thanks to Amelia Yeates for pointing out to me Rossetti’s contribution to Seddon’s cabinet. The sofa had cushions decorated with musical notation. Unfortunately, its present whereabouts is unknown.
I am aware that the feminine was not necessarily a negative concept for Rossetti. However, in this article, I show that it was not necessarily a positive one for him either. W.M. Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 122-23.


These works were considered by Rossetti’s contemporaries to be unmanly, but as Sussman has argued, they assert manliness by drawing attention to ‘the erotic power of the male gaze’ and, through the female models, Rossetti’s heterosexuality (Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, 169).

