An invention of the Industrial Revolution, the accordion provided the less affluent with an inexpensive, loud, portable, and durable “one-man-orchestra” capable of producing melody, harmony, and bass all at once. This book considers the accordion and its myriad forms, from the concertina, button accordion, and piano accordion familiar in European and North American music to the more exotic-sounding South American bandoneón and the sanfoninha. Capturing the instrument's spread and adaptation to many different cultures in North and South America, the chapters illuminate how the accordion factored into power struggles over aesthetic values between elites and working-class people who often were members of immigrant and/or marginalized ethnic communities. Specific histories and cultural contexts discussed include the accordion in Brazil, Argentine tango, accordion traditions in Colombia and the Dominican Republic, cross-border accordion culture between Mexico and Texas, Cajun and Creole identity, working-class culture near Lake Superior, the virtuoso Italian-American and Klezmer accordions, Native American dance music, and American avant-garde.

Instruments of Empire

James Q. Davies

in Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1789-1851

This chapter links the island of Java with metropolitan London and rural South Africa. It invokes visions of a “global nineteenth century” in order to present a critical archeology of modern concepts of “sound” and of the “wired worlds” that so characterize global built environments today.
The focus is on geographies of empire, and nineteenth-century musical instruments conceived to achieve that space, or to “annihilate distance,” particularly in the work of Charles Wheatstone. In Wheatstone’s work, sound was reconfigured as an enigmatic force for propagation: a way of collapsing space – extolled as an annihilator, or (more benignly) as a political force for cross-cultural communication and understanding. In the sixth of his popular 1835 “Lectures on Sound,” for example, Wheatstone laid before his audience a free-reed talking machine or vowel synthesizer, a Chinese sheng, Chladni figures, and an oversized Javanese gendèr, which Sir Thomas Raffles, former Lieutenant-General of Java, had recently brought back from the East. The paper draws connections between Wheatstone’s experiments on sound conductance, his telegraphic/telephonic fantasies, popular science, and the liberal-humanitarian search for a truly global instrument – one tuned to the so-called “scale of nature” and capable of “speaking” a supposedly universal musical language.

Napoleon to Parnell

Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin

in Flowing Tides: History and Memory in an Irish Soundscape

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Chapter 2 deals with Clare’s changing traditional soundscape throughout the long nineteenth century. The sattelzeit period from 1770 to 1830, which witnessed the demise of monarchic Europe and the granting of emancipation to Catholics within the British Empire, was dominated by the promethean figures of Napoleon Bonaparte in Europe and Daniel O’Connell in Ireland. It was a time of intense musical traffic in and out of the country. O’Connell and Bonaparte were venerated by Irish musicians in tunes, songs, and dances. O’Connell’s populist Emancipation and, later, Repeal (of the union with Great Britain) Movements created new public soundscapes for marching bands and ballad makers. The centerpiece of the chapter is the Great Irish Famine (1845–1850) and the manner in which it decimated Clare’s traditional soundscape. In its wake, musicians entered an era of sonic withdrawal that remained intact until the re-emergence of cultural nationalism in the 1890s.
The stenographic mind
Hugo Bowles

in Dickens and the Stenographic Mind

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This chapter brings together the descriptions and discussion in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 to summarize the main argument of the book. Drawing on Douglas-Fairhurst’s metaphor of the concertina, the chapter introduces the idea of the ‘stenographic mind’ as the consequence of the intensive mental operations involved in writing and reading Gurney shorthand. These operations include word games and language play (section 4.1), phonotactics (understanding what words are possible in a language) and redintegration (combining parts of words to produce a whole one) (section 4.2), visualization (section 4.3), and vocalization (section 4.4). The chapter argues that the cumulative effect of these operations was to produce a form of stenographic thinking which enabled Dickens to solve the mental puzzle of the Gurney shorthand script and control the relationship between stenographic writability and readability. This is argued to be a new form of literacy which strongly influenced Dickens’s writing practices.