

‘CRISP AS A CREAM-CRACKER’:  
NIKOLAI ORLOFF AND BRITISH MUSICAL JOURNALISM  
*IN MEMORY OF STUART CAMPBELL*

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„ХРСКАВ ПОПУТ БИСКВИТА С КРЕМОМ“:  
НИКОЛАЈ ОРЛОВ И БРИТАНСКО МУЗИЧКО НОВИНАРСТВО  
*У СПОМЕН СТУАРТА КЕМБЕЛА*

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АБСТРАКТ

This article considers the reception of pianist Nikolai Orloff (1892–1964) by the British musical press through an analysis of reviews published by *The Musical Times*, and also by national and local newspapers held in digital archives. A hybrid methodology was used to identify, sift, and code relevant primary source material in a large digital archive within the context of existing Orloff scholarship. Examples of the reviews relating to Orloff’s performances are given, and suggestions for future projects made.

KEYWORDS: Nikolai Orloff, concert pianist, Russian diaspora, digital archives, newspaper reviews.

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## АПСТРАКТ

У овом чланку се испитује рецепција пијанисте Николаја Орлова (1892–1964) у британској музичкој штампи кроз анализу критика објављених у гласилу „The Musical Times“, као и у националним и локалним листовима доступним у дигиталним архивима. У раду је примењена хибридна методологија како би се идентификовао, издвојио и кодирао релевантан примарни изворни материјал из великог дигиталног архива. Истраживање је обављено захваљујући стипендији „Николај Орлов“. Изнети су примери критика које се односе на Орловљеве интерпретације, а начињени су и предлози будућих истраживања.

Кључне речи: Николај Орлов, концертни пијаниста, руска дијаспора, дигитални архиви, новинска музичка критика.

Nikolai Andreyevich Orloff<sup>2</sup> (14/26 February 1892 – 31 March 1964) was a concert pianist, radio broadcaster, occasional recording artist and, for the first decade of his professional career, a professor at Moscow Conservatory. He left Russia in 1921, rapidly establishing a career on the international performing circuit. Newspaper reviews held at the British Newspaper Archive and other digitised archives attest to his popularity with critics and audiences in the two decades between the First and Second World Wars, yet his reputation faded after his death, leaving him known today primarily as a footnote in other musicians' biographies, including those on Lionel Tertis (White 2006) and Guilhermina Suggia (Mercier 2008) and diaries, notably those kept by his close contemporary Sergei Prokofiev (Prokofiev, trans. Phillips 2006, 2008, 2012) and, to a lesser extent Gregor Piatigorski (Piatigorski 1965). His entries in twentieth and twenty-first music dictionaries and compendia, where they exist at all, are brief. Wilson Lyle's *Dictionary of Pianists* states, "Claimed to have no speciality but was noted for beautiful interpretation of Chopin and Scriabin. [...] Tended to be overshadowed by his more famous Russian counterparts" (Lyle 1985: 206–207). *Grove Music Online* states, "A distinguished artist with an immaculately finished technique, Orlov was particularly successful in achieving poetic tonal effects; his elegant style of playing belonged more to the late 19th century than to the modern Russian school. He was especially noted as an interpreter of Chopin, Schumann and Skryabin" (Yampol'sky, revised Methuen – Campbell 2001). However interest in his career has been revived in recent years, partly through the efforts of his great-great niece, Lucja Orlow-Gozdowska, who has instigated the website <http://www.nikolai-orloff.eu/> to celebrate his life and work, and also releases by the British Library in 2018 of some of his test recordings made for Decca between

2 His name is variously transcribed as Nicolas, Nicholas, Nicolai, Nikolaj, Nikolai, Mikolaj, Orloff, Orlow, Orlow and Orlov. Orloff is used here as it is his preferred spelling, and the name by which he is most likely to be found in archival material.

1946–1948 (Orloff 2018), and undated re-releases on Sakuraphon of commercial recordings made for Nuova Academia in the 1950s (Orloff n. d.).

Prior to his departure from Russia he had been a member of the Derzhanovsky circle (founded in 1908) grouped around the journal *Muzika*. Israel Nest'yev, in his biography of Sergei Prokofiev, describes how during the first two decades of the twentieth century the group produced a series of summer concerts in Moscow featuring contemporary music from France and Russia:

Here, at the Sokolniki Circle, symphonic works by Debussy, Ravel, Dukas, Satie, Roger-Ducasse, and Florent Schmitt as well as works by the modern Russian composers S. Vasilenko, A. Krein, R. Glière, V. Senilov, and A. Yurasovsky, were performed for the first time in Russia. Here, too, were presented such young and as yet unrecognised performers as the pianists S. Feinberg, A. Borovsky, and N. Orlov and the singer Nina Koshetz. On the recommendation of Kryzhanovsky, the young St. Petersburgites Prokofiev and Miaskovsky were also introduced into the Derzhanovsky-Saradzhev group (Nest'yev 1961: 52–53).

Orloff thus was part of a dynamic musical grouping that celebrated the modern, the contemporary, and the new. However just a few years later, after the devastation and social upheaval caused in Russia by war, civil war and revolution, the 'newness' espoused by the Derzhanovsky group already seemed out of date. As the music critic Leonid Sabaneyev observed in 1922, "All that took place five years ago – is this not history and legend already?" (Sabaneyev 1922: 51–55). It is understandable in the profoundly changed context of early 1920s Moscow that some participants in that 'historical and legendary' musical world would wish to pursue their art in an environment more aligned with their creative and personal values. Emigration to Western Europe and North America offered musicians the opportunity to continue making music as they had always done, performing both for Russian émigré audiences abroad, and audiences of people from the host community (Bychkova 2013: 155).

Orloff was one of a number of musicians that left Russia in the early 1920s with no intention of returning any time soon. To facilitate this, "Nikolai got Lenin's personal consent only for the needs of the concert tour" (Orlow-Gozdowska 2019).<sup>3</sup> On 4/17 December 1917 Elena Gnesina wrote to Sergei Rachmaninoff with the news that Orloff had left Russia with Glazunov,

Музыкальная жизнь у нас начинает замирать, так как все наиболее видные артисты, музыканты нас покинули. На прошлой неделе уехал за границу последний наш пианист Николай Орлов, вместе с Глазуновым, и теперь остались только наши профессора Игумнов да Гольденвейзер, да еще Елена Александровна Бекман-Щербина<sup>4</sup> (Tartakovskaia 2006: 40).

3 I am deeply grateful to Orloff's great-great niece Lucja Orlow-Gozdowska for sharing her family album, oral histories and collection of concert programmes from her personal archive.

4 *Our musical life is beginning to die down, as all the most prominent artists and musicians have left us. Last*

Mrs. Orlow-Gozdowska's personal collection of concert programmes demonstrates that Orloff was able to sustain a career as a concert pianist outside Russia, starting with the Baltic states in 1922, and moving westwards towards Berlin, Paris, and London in the subsequent years. Her collection is summarised in the website dedicated to Orloff noted above (Orlow-Gozdowska 2006 – date). Orloff's reception in Berlin and Paris lies outside the scope of this article, which will now turn to his performances in the United Kingdom, where he was a frequent visitor between 1924–1939, and citizen from 1951 (see UK National Archives ref HO 334/356/20769).

The British Library, in partnership with commercial genealogy company Find-MyPast.com has made a range of national and local newspapers available online and is one of the biggest collections of journalism available. The newspapers are scanned copies of the original printed documents (including advertisements and photographs) and are a rich source of information about British musical culture as Orloff would have known it during his concert tours of the United Kingdom. The archive does not hold all titles; some newspapers maintain standalone digital archives of their back copies. For the purposes of this paper the British Newspaper Archive (BNA) (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>), *The Times* Digital Archive (<https://www.gale.com/intl/c/the-times-digital-archive>) and *The Musical Times* digital archive held on JStor (<https://www.jstor.org/journal/musicaltimes>) have been consulted. A similar search was undertaken in the *Music & Letters* digital archive (<https://academic.oup.com/ml>). This yielded one result which, on inspection, was a review of Constance Morse's book *Music and Music Makers* rather than one of Orloff's performances; consequently, this archive has not been consulted further (Sc. G. 1928).

Research using the digital, i.e. computer-facilitated, humanities has been practised since the 1980s. According to Michelle Urberg in a survey of digital technologies as used by musicologists and music the earliest projects were studies of “quantifiable parts of literary corpora”, often seeking pattern recognition in linguistic content stored in large-scale databases (Urberg 2017: 136). These were rapidly followed by a range of music-specific programs including “notation software, music information retrieval systems, and digital sound production [...] and digital archiving” (ibid.: 137).

In all disciplines research using digitised archives has increased even more rapidly in the twenty-first century. Andrei Vasiliu has noted that the digital turn in the humanities has opened strands of enquiry to researchers in three significant ways. To summarise Vasiliu's findings, firstly digital archives host a broad amount of data in various formats, and are inexpensive and easy to access with personal equipment (Vasiliu 2017: 50). Secondly, digitised newspapers are readily available to the researcher at any time without restriction, without the need to travel, without risk of damaging fragile paper, and without the need to obtain photocopies or manually

*week, our last pianist Nikolai Orloff went abroad, along with Glazunov, and now only our professors Igumnov and Goldenweiser, and even Elena Alexandrovna Beckman-Shcherbina, are left.*

copy the content (ibid.: 50). Finally, the quantity of data available enables the researcher to address questions different from those the contributors to the archive intended. They are “regarded not only as a modern access gate to primary sources, but also as an innovative method of providing additional interpretation of the content”, enabling non-linear investigations across documents and databases (ibid.: 50–51).

However, use of digital archives is not entirely without risk. Baumgarten & Grauel remind all researchers who use archives (physical or digital) to consider the production and selection biases that will have informed the initial creation of the archive. Production bias applies to all edited content; it is the mechanism through which journalists, editors, newspaper owners etc. decide what is published and what is not (Baumgarten & Grauel 2009: 98). Selection bias occurs if data that existed at a particular point in time is not preserved (ibid.: 100–101). Vasiliu emphasises the significance of selection bias within the digital archive: not all titles, including important national papers, currently have digitised archives (Vasiliu 2017: 54). Furthermore, Vasiliu’s case study demonstrates that the Optical Character Recognition used by digital archivists is not 100% reliable and proposes the text produced by OCR should be used in tandem with the hard copy of the newspaper (ibid.: 54–57).

In the case of the search for Nikolai Orloff the following questions were considered: *How were Orloff’s performances in the United Kingdom received by the critical press, and does the language used justify Yampol’sky and Methuen-Campbell’s assertion that his playing belonged stylistically to the nineteenth century?* To seek an answer, Reason & García’s approach, in which a combination of quantitative analysis in the early stages of the investigation to determine ‘objective’ facts followed by finer-grained qualitative analysis of these results, was found helpful (Reason & García 2007). Their study focussed on the analysis of a collection of over 5,000 press clippings, news stories, articles and comment pieces produced in response to the appointment of Glasgow as European City of Culture 1990, and collected by the Year of Culture Press Office (ibid.: 309). As the dataset under consideration had already been collected and consisted of a substantial quantity of data it was necessary to develop a methodology that allowed analysis of large quantities of text whilst maintaining the ability to record context, nuance, and bias. Reason & García’s solution was to develop a hybrid method of content analysis whereby each press clipping was manually coded to record pre-selected types of data (ibid.: 313). This included objective data, such as the name and type of periodical, and date of publication, and subjective information, notably the opinions of the writers on topics such as themes and issues, images and impressions of Glasgow, and the attitude of the writer towards the Year of Culture, etc. (ibid.: 315).

It was proposed that a similar approach might be taken towards reviews of Orloff’s performances. Texts that might be coded and assessed for information about a range of issues such as technique, interpretation, chosen repertory, audience response, type of event, nature of the audience present or other sociological factors that constituted British musical culture in the interwar period. It is acknowledged that a full assessment of each of these criteria would require a significant level of analysis given the amount of available data, hence this study will examine only the critics’ responses to Orloff’s pianistic technique and musical interpretation.

Unlike Reason & García's study no dataset of Orloff's reviews had been established, so it was necessary to identify suitable source material. Search criteria were set up using the BNA's Advanced Search facility, using a combination of Orloff's name (including its variables noted above), a start date of 1 January 1920 (the decade he left Russia) and an end date of 31 December 1964 (his year of death). A similar approach was taken with the separate digital archives maintained by *The Times* and *The Musical Times*. Several initial sifts of the archive were undertaken between the period 28 May 2020 – 9 July 2021, and where new titles had been added to the BNA, newly-available articles were added to the dataset.

The initial sifts yielded hundreds of results, many of which were immediately discounted as they were not connected with Orloff the pianist. These articles were discounted for two reasons: they were either about different people (or items) with the name Orloff, or they were determined by the OCR to contain a combination of characters shaped similarly to his name; for example, the town of Crieff in Perthshire was frequently mis-labelled 'Orloff'. Two deductions could be made at this stage. Firstly, it was apparent that the OCR was unlikely to omit a possible source that had been scanned and recorded on the database, in fact, it was more likely to include irrelevant material than exclude something of value. Secondly, it was apparent that the BNA's "Article copy and paste" facility was unreliable and likely to produce incomprehensible results (see Image 1 for screenshot). This meant the review texts, although initially sifted by OCR from the digitised archives (over 44,000,000 pages in the BNA alone at time of writing) to a much smaller sample size, still needed human intervention to prepare a dataset that related to the research subject.

A second, finer-grained sift of the relevant articles was then conducted, with each article read and transcribed by hand. Also recorded were the title of the newspaper, date of publication, page, title of article, textual content, nature of the event (private party, chamber concert, solo recital, orchestral concert), a note of the repertory performed (where stated) and name or initials of the writer (where known). A third sift sorted the articles into folders by type; including reviews of past performances, advance notices of concerts, listings for radio broadcasts, and commercial endorsements of pianos. This sift yielded 124 reviews held in the BNA (see Table 2 for titles), 37 in *The Times* archive, and 12 in *The Musical Times* archive, a total of 173 reviews.

Finally, the fourth, 'qualitative', sift coded each review by the attitude of the writer: was the piece a uniformly positive view of Orloff's performance, an entirely negative notice, or a mixed review? Paul Watt's analysis of the 'new criticism' instigated in 1894/95 by John F. Runciman was used as a point of reference. For Runciman, the critic's personal, even emotional, response to a performance was more valuable than rigid 'old style' criticism that compared contemporary performances with historic performances from the past. This study interrogates each review to identify "whether [the performance] gives, or does not give, [the reviewer] pleasure! The new critic, therefore, frequently gives no opinion [...] His criticism is purely an expression of personal feeling" (Watt 2019: 374). This form of criticism, adopted by George Bernard Shaw, Ernest Newman, and Neville Cardus, became increasingly common in the early decades of the twentieth century, to the extent that newspaper critics in the interwar period included personal impressions and subjective opinions about a performance in their reviews as a matter of routine. It therefore seems appropriate

to acknowledge these criteria when assessing review text. Hence if the reviewer enthusiastically praised the performance the review was coded 'positive'. If the writer enjoyed much of it but found some element of the performance unsatisfactory the review was coded 'mixed', and if the writer found very little pleasure or value in the performance it was coded 'negative'.

The coded reviews were tabulated by archival source, type of review, and type of concert (see Table 1). From this table it is immediately obvious that some types of newspaper were more likely to print only positive, or positive / mixed reviews than others, perhaps unsurprisingly reflecting the nature of the publication. 'Lighter' reads such as weekly magazines and Sunday papers (27 reviews) carried entirely positive or mixed reviews; local papers (55 reviews) were similarly positive, with the exception of one negative review. Society and gossip magazines (three reviews) were uniformly positive. The 'quality daily press' represented in this study by *The Times* (37 reviews) and *The Scotsman* (29 reviews) carried mostly positive and mixed notices. The professional and specialist music and theatre press carried more varied criticism, with *The Musical Times*, *The Era* and *The Stage* carrying 22 reviews in total, of which 15 were positive, four were mixed, and 3 were negative.

However, although these figures can tell us that Orloff performed frequently in the UK over several decades, they tell us very little about Orloff's performance style, and what exactly the critics found attractive (or not) in his performances. To gain deeper insight we need to revisit the content of the texts from which the coding was derived. The reviews scan the period 1924–1955, and as such are a document of Orloff's life and career. The remainder of this paper will consider a sample of reviews. It should be noted that many reviews of this period are anonymous or signed by initials only; it should be assumed that a review is anonymous unless otherwise stated.

Orloff's first British performances, of Rachmaninoff's 2<sup>nd</sup> Piano Concerto plus some solo pieces, took place with the Scottish Orchestra in Edinburgh and Glasgow in February 1924. *The Scotsman's* unnamed reviewer was delighted with the performance at the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, on 11 February 1924:

The opening passages for the piano proclaimed him an artist of exceptional qualities, and the conclusion of each movement of the delightful work brought forth an increasing display of enthusiasm on the part of the audience. Mr Orloff possesses a magnificent technique, and he has to a remarkable degree the facility of producing a tone which blends with that of the orchestra (*Scotsman*, 12 February 1924: 6).

However, the *Edinburgh Evening News*, reviewing the same concert, was less impressed:

... a new pianist, Mr Nicolas Orloff, who, while admirably endowed technically, was too much given to under-playing. His climaxes lacked vitality and dynamic strength, and in the first movement, which is rather heavily orchestrated, the piano solo was at time almost swamped. The same impression of underplaying was also given in the group of solos which Mr Orloff later submitted. These were Scriabin's Valse in A flat major, a Chopin study and the same composer's Scherzo in B flat minor (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 12 February 1924: 6).

But the same critic amended their opinion following Orloff's solo recital in Edinburgh's Music Hall:

Mr Orloff was heard under much better circumstances than in the first occasion, with the result that a very different impression was gathered of his technique. His climaxes were magnificent – full in tone and remarkably broad in conception. In everything he did there was a sincere endeavour to bring out every beauty in the music (*Edinburgh Evening News*, 14 February 1924: 5).

While his technical ability was not in doubt, it appears the difference between the reviews is purely a matter of the reviewers' personal preferences. A review of another performance of the Rachmaninoff 2<sup>nd</sup> Piano Concerto assessed Orloff's understanding of the music and the rapport with his orchestral collaborators:

It is one of "the modern type" of this art-form, as might be expected, that is to say, the solo and instrument is treated as an integral part of the orchestra rather than as a filling up of orchestral voids. M. Orloff evidently understands this relationship perfectly for, while maintaining his own part as a carefully studied individual thing, he knows when to subordinate it to the whole. [...] the pianoforte melodies in this were "sung" in poetic vein by the soloist (*Eastbourne Chronicle*, 10 October 1925: 1).

As well as a beautiful cantabile, he was noted for other technical features which the reviewers found pleasing; clean, "crisp" fingerwork was often praised in terms of providing a solid technique which enabled him to convey beauty, meaning, and pleasure, and his use of tone and colour were frequently singled out for praise:

With all his power, his tone was rich and not hard. Of recent comers, he is in the front rank ("Marcato", *The Weekly Dispatch*, 25 October 1925: 5).

His touch is as crisp as a cream-cracker. He has brilliant execution, but at the same time never fails to exercise his temperamental powers, and does not indulge in mere virtuosic display at the expense of the composer he happens to be exploiting (*Aberdeen Press & Journal*, 17 April 1926: 6).

...his performance in two compositions by Debussy revealed him to be a master of pianoforte colour (*Yorkshire Post*, 23 February 1933: 3).

Nicolas Orloff's playing of the Greig Concerto was clean and crisp in the rhythmic passages, and ever ready to turn to a sweet cantabile (*Yorkshire Post*, 18 February 1937: 5).

Very possibly, the group of Chopin pieces gave Orloff his best opportunity of displaying his mastery of tone-colour. He played the F minor Fantasie, Opus 49. The Barcarolle Opus 60 and then six of the twenty-four Preludes, and ended with the gay and nimble Scherzo in E major Opus 54 (*Banbury Guardian*, 14 February 1946: 3).

The reviewer at Eastbourne in April 1926 for a performance of Tchaikovsky's Concerto in B flat minor, observed Orloff's physical mannerisms during his performance, described here in sensual terminology:

As his hands rose and fell on the keyboard so did his body literally bounce on the piano stool, while his head jerked to and fro in vigorous nods of emphasis and determination. Yet there was nothing ungainly or incongruous about his movement; everything he did was rhythmic and natural, like the gyrations of a dancing violinist, and suggestive of a man whose whole being is steeped in his art. This characteristic was further illustrated by his graceful, dreamy swayings from side to side as changed from the pompous fortissimo passages to the lighter and more fluent stanzas, and then he was no longer the stern, commanding disciplinarian, but the gentle persuasive wooer, with a touch that was a caress (*Eastbourne Chronicle*, 1 May 1926: 2).

It is perhaps unsurprising that the reviewer here was somewhat smitten with Orloff. A publicity shot from 1928 styled him as a brooding, somewhat Byronic matinee – idol (see Image 2), even if accounts of his temperament were in fact rather different:

He is modest and self-effacing (*The Times*, 10 June 1927: 12).

...he is interesting for his personality, though so unassuming (*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 10 December 1928: 6).

Many reviews reveal appreciation for the fine balance in which he was able to hold the cerebral and the emotional:

Mr. Orloff's pianoforte-playing shows that nice adjustment of the balance between heart and head, intellect and feeling, which makes for great performances (*The Times*, 10 December 1928: 8).

Here is a pianist with a conscience, one who never palms off on us mere virtuosity, but gives with each composition a considered interpretation – hot from the mint of his mind, but entirely devoid of extravagance (L. Henderson Williams, *The Era*, 19 December 1928: 5).

For an encore to the last we were given the same composer's little waltz in G sharp minor. It is a piece of which nearly every pianist has tried to give an "individual" reading, but Mr Orloff, instead of emphasizing the middle voices, speeding up the final section, or indulging in any other eccentricities, played it exactly as the score indicates, in strict time. This delightful result was a performance that was not only truly individual, but exactly what Chopin must have intended (*Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, 12 February 1935: 6).

Although on at least one occasion the reviewer was displeased with the pleasure Orloff himself took in the music:

His enjoyment of the works should not manifest itself, as it sometimes did, in audible song (*Yorkshire Post*, 18 February 1937: 5).

However, the majority of reviewers clearly found Orloff's performances aesthetically and technically satisfying. The next consideration is whether these qualities were considered representative of a nineteenth century school of performance, as Grove Online suggests. Another sift of the revue texts indicates reviewers described Orloff's performances in terms of newness, modernity, and freshness of interpretation. Table 3 below provides example review texts for the period 1926–1946 which indicate the originality of Orloff's interpretations. These descriptions apply both to his rendering of nineteenth century works, and to his programming of twentieth century composers, many of which were his contemporaries or composed within his living memory, such as Scriabin, Prokofiev, Debussy, Ravel, and Medtner. In contrast, a search for the phrase 'old-fashioned' yields no results, and "hackneyed" produces three, none of which applied to Orloff's share in the performance. The *Banbury Guardian* summed up Orloff's versatility, "Orloff is as great an exponent of the modern school of pianoforte writing as he is of the earlier 'classical' School" (*Banbury Guardian* 14 February 1946: 8).

As Orloff's performances were perceived by contemporary audiences as versatile and well-adapted to modern and older styles of composition, Grove Online's claim that Orloff embodied a nineteenth century performance style seems unjustified. Indeed, his performances appear to have been exactly of his own time, not earlier, and there is no evidence that contemporary British audiences considered his performance style old-fashioned.

A lacuna in the list of Orloff's reviews and concert advertisements between 1940–1945 has been observed in the digitised newspaper archives. The last entry from 1940, six months into British involvement in the Second World War, reveals he had encountered bureaucratic difficulties while touring in Europe:

In the first place Egon Petri was engaged for the concert (a piano recital). He is in America, and in the present state of travelling facilities was probably wise, if he has any choice in the matter, to remain there. When it was known that Petri was not able to fulfil, a substitute was booked in Orloff, another famed pianist, who, travelling on the Continent, has got into visa difficulties; with the result, we hear, that, being booked for months ahead, he lost the Cheltenham and eight other engagements (*Gloucestershire Echo*, 26 January 1940: 9).

Orloff returned to the United Kingdom in 1945 to resume his career with a tour of the provinces. Many of the notices for these performances explain why he hadn't been seen on stage for several years:

It is 14 years since Orloff, the well-known Russian pianist, last played in Derby, and in spite of the fact that until a month ago he had not played the piano for five years he gave a brilliant recital to a large and appreciative audience at the Central Hall last night. [...] Orloff returned to this country in September from the South of France, where he worked during the German occupation. He started a tour of the provinces on October 1, and last night's concert was the ninth he has already given in eleven days. [...] A slender figure with prematurely grey hair, Orloff's spirited interpretations revealed a freshness and vigour which belied his long absence from the concert platform (*Derby Evening Telegraph*, 12 October 1945).

While some of this review seems hyperbolic, particularly the story that Orloff had not played the piano for five years, it could be argued that purpose of the review is as much about creating a narrative of shared struggle, as it is about the music itself. Writing about Orloff's personal wartime experiences and the physical impact ("prematurely grey hair") seeks empathy for him from the reader; describing the concert itself as a great success despite Orloff's personal tribulations mirrors the postwar British self-narrative of victory over evil, linking the ideas of personal and national struggle for a shared cause.

Another local paper made a point of listing Orloff's civic credentials:

[...] comes to the King's Hall an eminent Russian, Nikolai Orloff, regarded as one of the greatest exponents of the Russian School of piano playing. For several years he was a professor of music in Moscow, is a Commander of the Order of Leopold, and had the misfortune to be in occupied France during the war. Orloff's programme includes the Russian composers Rachaminoff and Medtner, with Mozart, Chopin and César Franck (*Newcastle Journal and North Mail*, 26 January 1946: 2).

This review demonstrates a tonal shift between the notices of the interwar period, and those produced immediately after the war. The above review links Orloff strongly to Russia, despite leaving 25 years earlier. Whereas the interwar reviews usually state he was a Russian pianist but not explain what that might mean in terms of his performance style, here he is explicitly presented as an exponent of a National School of playing connected with his former employment as a professor at Moscow Conservatory, observations which went unremarked in his pre-war notices. Given that the alliance between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union during the Second World War would have been a recent memory for the British concert-going public, and in a period just before the onset of the Cold War (commonly associated with the launch of the Truman Doctrine in 1947), references to Orloff's Russian-ness could have served to enhance his appeal as a representative of an Allied power (Dukes 1998: 270–271).

Orloff continued concert performances until the mid-1950s. His last British concert review dates to 1955, when he performed at slightly below his best but was still received with affection by the reviewer:

Mr. Orloff returned to Wigmore Hall on Saturday afternoon to play a programme of Chopin, Mendelssohn, Ravel, Falla and Scriabine in what is to be his only London recital this season. His approach to each composer was warm-hearted and expansive, though his performances were not quite as accurate and clean on this occasion as when he is in best form. More worrying than his lack of care in the use of the right pedal was his excessive rubato; in Chopin, in particular, this was in danger of amounting to rhythmic distortion. Nevertheless it was good to hear the big, romantic B minor sonata opened out to its full stature with so generous an impulse behind the performance, and it was equally pleasant to hear Mendelssohn's Variations Sérieuses in full spate, as it were, instead of just a neat trickle of notes (*The Times*, 19 December 1955: 10).

### Future Possibilities for Digital Archives?

This article has described one approach to using centralised digital archives to obtain information that would otherwise have been very difficult to collate, due to the scattered location of the local newspapers consulted, the material fragility of newsprint, and the time required to consult thousands of editions that may not have contained any relevant data. Lacunae in Orloff's life and touring career have been filled by consulting these digital editions, and information about the nature of his pianistic style and the critical responses to it have been gleaned.

The methodology need not be restricted to critical reception. This study was carried out with basic Microsoft Office applications, notably Word documents and Excel spreadsheets, however there may be scope for the data to be transferred to specialist Qualitative Data Analysis Computer Software (QDACS). This would facilitate a wider range of coding, and potentially enable a deeper linguistic study of critical nuance, and broader range of analysis. This in turn opens the possibility of investigating many other facets of Orloff's life: his professional musical contacts, his international touring commitments, and his links with other Russian musicians within the Diaspora. It may also be possible to address types of journalism other than reviews; *The Times's* Court Circulars have been entirely omitted from this study as they contain no concert reviews or other subjective information, yet it is apparent that they contain a wealth of data about those present, including musicians, at official diplomatic functions. These documents have never been studied as source material for the relationship between music and diplomacy and could provide insight into forms of soft power used during this period. Although Orloff's recording output is very small, reviews from *The Musical Times* demonstrate he made piano-rolls 1920. The BBC's Genome Project is another digital resource which may yield information about Orloff's broadcasting career; both archives are potentially of interest to scholars of early musical reproduction and broadcasting.

A final word on Orloff's legacy. Newspaper publishers survive when they reflect the preoccupations of their readers, writers, and owners, and as such are a testament to the society in which they were produced. Analysis of the copy printed about Orloff demonstrates that, far from performing in an old-fashioned or nineteenth-century style as Grove Online suggests, his contemporary British audiences found his technique and repertory fresh, stylish, modern, and "crisp." While he remains an obscure figure in the field of twentieth century pianism, it is likely that the reasons for this obscurity are connected with factors other than his performance style. A study combining content of digitised archives plus original, unscanned documents is likely to provide other possibilities in this field.

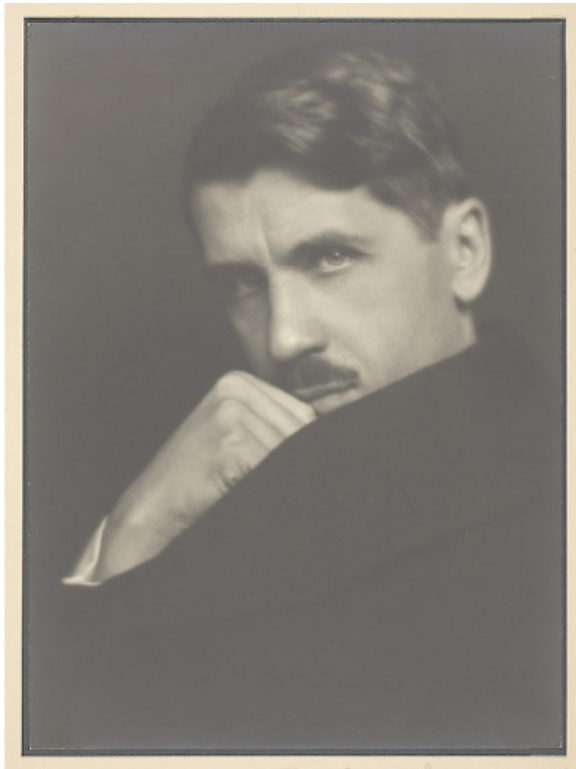
### Image 1. Screenshots from The British Newspaper Archive showing scanned newspaper text, and distorted text produced by Optical Character Recognition software.

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**Image 2: Johan Hagermeyer, Nikolai Orloff – Pianist, 1928. The Art Institute of Chicago.**

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**Table 1. Types of review, by type of paper**

Archive / news-paper type	Positive review	Negative review	Mixed review	Total number reviews
BNA total reviews	105	3	16	124
BNA national daily	26	1	2	29
BNA local newspaper	45	1	9	55
BNA specialist music / theatre	7	1	2	10
BNA weekly	24	0	3	27
BNA Society / gossip	3	0	0	3
Total reviews	105	3	16	124
The Times	28	1	8	37
The Musical Times	8	2	2	12
TOTAL	141	5	27	173

**Table 2: List of Newspaper Titles consulted at the British Newspaper Archive**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Type</b>
Aberdeen Press & Journal	Local
Ashbourne Telegraph	Society Magazine
Banbury Advertiser	Local
Banbury Guardian	Local
Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette	Local
Bedfordshire Times and Independent	Local
Birmingham Daily Gazette	Local
Bournemouth Weekly Post	Local
Cheshire Observer	Local
Derby Evening Telegraph	Local
Devon and Exeter Gazette	Local
Dundee Courier	Local
East London Observer	Local
Eastbourne Chronicle	Local
Edinburgh Evening News	Local
Exeter and Plymouth Gazette	Local
Gentlewoman and Modern Life	Society Magazine
Gloucestershire Echo	Local
Hull Daily Mail	Local
Illustrated London News	Society Magazine
Kent and Sussex Courier	Local
Leeds Mercury	Local
Liverpool Echo	Local
Newcastle Journal and North Mail	Local
Newcastle Journal and North Star	Local
Northwood and Ruislip Advertiser and Gazette	Local
Scotsman	National Daily
Sheffield Daily Independent	Local
Surrey Mirror and County Post	Local
Tatler	Society Magazine
The Era	Specialist Theatrical
The Gloucester Citizen	Local

The People	Sunday newspaper
The Sketch	Society Magazine
The Southern Reporter	Local
The Stage	Specialist Theatrical
The Weekly Dispatch	Weekly
Tonbridge Courier	Local
Truth	Weekly
West Sussex Gazette	Local
Western Mail	Local
Western Morning News and Mercury	Local
Westminster Gazette	Local
Yorkshire Evening Post	Local
Yorkshire Post	Local

**Table 3: Review texts describing Orloff's performances**

Date	Source	Text
1 May 1926	<i>The Musical Times</i> , Vol. 67, No. 999: 451	One enjoyed afresh the romantic and vigorous Etudes Symphoniques of Schumann, in spite of having already listened to many attempts at their interpretation this year.
26 March 1927	<i>The Times</i> : 10	His best playing was, perhaps, in a group of modern Russian pieces, though the Chopin group at the end was also excellent.
1 April 1927	<i>Western Daily Press</i> : 12	There was a good attendance at the Pump Room yesterday afternoon, when a recital was given by Orloff, the new Russian pianist, who played with rare finish and great power. He drew upon olden and modern masters for his programme, and was especially happy in his selection of Liszt's works. It was an interesting programme, varied and never hackneyed...

23 November 1928	<i>Gloucestershire Echo</i> : 1	There are few players who handle Scriabine as much "as to the manner born." These works are vastly difficult technically, but wonderfully brilliant in a way that, mayhap, makes rather large demands upon those nurtured on the tuneful writers of an older school.
16 November 1931	<i>The Times</i> : 10	In a modern group two mazurkas by Szymanowski and Debussy's "Reflets dans l'eau" were beautifully played.
21 February 1933	<i>Western Mail and South Wales News</i> : 9	For his finale Orloff gave many present a new impression of Scriabine.
2 February 1935	G. R. Harvey. <i>Aberdeen Press &amp; Journal</i> : 8	Clean, lovely playing, with as much freshness as is possible he gave us – a personal phrasing here and there, and just a touch of newness in an accentuation. In the more massive passages was a nervous yet controlled energy that re-vivified familiar beauties.
8 March 1935	"M.", <i>Yorkshire Evening Post</i> : 5	A final modern group included a Toccata of Prokofief (as dull and unmusical as the work of any exercise-maker of any period), the very elegant "Jeux d'eau" of Ravel, which was made a fascinating essay in delicacy and changeful tone-values.
13 November 1939	<i>Western Morning News</i> : 4	The Scarlatti sonatas chose were over-familiar, yet seemed new under his crisp treatment...
13 February 1946	<i>Banbury Advertiser</i> : 5	A player with great natural gifts, which flourish under the impress of a highly sensitive imagination and of a perfect, yet distinctive, technique, Mr. Orloff has few equals among modern pianists, and his recital at the Town Hall, Banbury, on Thursday evening, gave a considerable audience a chance to hear some remarkably accomplished playing.
14 February 1946	<i>Banbury Guardian</i> : 8	...but we heard sufficient to know that Orloff is as great an exponent of the modern school of pianoforte writing as he is of the earlier "classical" School.

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Ешли Холдсворт Квин

„Хрскав попут бисквита с кремом“:  
Николај Орлов и британско музичко новинарство

(РЕЗИМЕ)

Руског пијанисту Николаја Орлова (1892–1964) као истраживачку тему првобитно је предложио покојни др Стјуарт Кембел. Рад који описује Орловљев живот и каријеру представљен је на конференцији о руској и источноевропској музици, одржаној октобра 2019. на Универзитету у Дараму, у организацији Британског удружења за словенске и источноевропске студије. Нови чланак испитује рецепцију Н. Орлова као музичара у Уједињеном Краљевству после његовог одласка из Русије 1922. године, и то преко увида у дигитализовани архивски материјал из Британског новинског архива, као и у друге дигитализоване текстове презентне на интернету, нарочито из гласила „The Times“ и „The Musical Times“. Од посебног интереса била је анализа доступних критика, и то с обзиром на слику Орловљеве извођачке праксе коју је сугерисала енциклопедија *Grove Music Online*. Предложили смо и начин коришћења дигитализованих извора који би се могао применити у будућим истраживањима у овој области.

Истраживање критичке рецепције Орловљевог уметничког ангажмана у Уједињеном Краљевству довело је до закључка да је он током своје каријере уживао висок углед. Овај чланак описује како је Орлов био представљен британској концертној публици и како су музички критичари гледали на његов пијанистички стил. Такође, чланак расправља о томе како су Орлова као руског музичара новинари представили својим читаоцима током међуратног периода и после завршетка Другог светског рата.

Кључне речи: Николај Орлов, концертни пијаниста, руска дијаспора, дигитални архиви, новинска музичка критика.