

Migrant Symphonies – the symphonic contribution of resident British composers to Australian musical life

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Abstract

During the period from Federation to 1960 a significant number of British-born composers worked in Australia, some for many decades. Of them, the following composers wrote symphonies which received their first performances in Australia: Joshua Ives, George Marshall-Hall, Fritz Hart and Edgar Bainton. Should these symphonies and their composers be considered British or Australian, or both? Which country should 'own' them, and who has the responsibility for archiving and preserving their heritage? This paper will survey and evaluate these works, with particular focus on the symphonies of Ives, Marshall-Hall, Hart and Bainton.

Keywords

Australian symphonies, British expatriates in Australia, Edgar Bainton, Eugene Goossens, Fritz Hart, Joshua Ives, George Marshall-Hall, National 'ownership' of musical works

SITUATING THE CANON

Deconstructing or reconstructing canons is a significant theme in recent music history writing. However music historians of Australian concert music lack a coherent canon that one can reconstruct. With the exception of Roger Covell's ground-breaking work *Australia's Music: Themes of a new society* of 1967, no one to date has attempted a comprehensive survey of the development of Australian concert music. Covell considered the new Australian music of his own period as the first really significant body of Australian works; works by local composers like Sculthorpe, Meale, Dreyfus, Werder and Butterley who were tuned into the most recent developments in European and American music. Other commentators like James Murdoch (1973), and the contributors to the 1978 compendium *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century* tended to agree. With a few exceptions, the older composers of the previous decades, several of whom were still active in the 1960s, were seen as derivative and old-fashioned. For example, John Antill was hailed for one work, *Corroboree* in 1946; Raymond Hanson was recognised 20 years too late to be influential in the 1940s and 1950s, and Margaret Sutherland was hailed for

showing evidence of her awareness of modernist composers like Bartok and others in her works of the 1940s and 50s and for her continuing development during the 1960s.

Other figures who have been equally neglected are Australian expatriates like Ernest Hutcheson, Arthur Benjamin, Hubert Clifford and Malcolm Williamson who featured strongly in musical life in Britain or America. Australians have 'claimed' as 'Australian' Percy Grainger and Peggy Glanville-Hicks who, like the others mentioned above, spent the majority of their active composing years outside Australia. However, our 'claim' has not extended consistently towards the relatively large number of British-born and trained professors, organists and conductors who were the mainstay of Australian university musical life until the 1970s. Some have written them off as second-raters offering a paler version of British music college education. But amongst them were composers of real distinction whose music deserves revival and representation in editions of scores and recordings. Joshua Ives (1856-1931), George Marshall-Hall (1862-1915), Fritz Hart (1874-1949) and Edgar Bainton (1880-1956) were all here in Australia for more than twenty years each – at the height of their powers. None of them are represented composers with the Australian Music Centre. Eugene Goossens, who is represented with the Australian Music Centre, remains a special case because of the remaining glow of his 1947-1956 stint as conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Nevertheless, his infamous and sudden exit from Australia is far better known than his music, especially his two symphonies which were performed here during the late 1940s. The British immigrant composers have fallen between the cracks of their home country and their adopted country in obtaining recognition for their music. And yet, analysed and set in their context, their works are of considerable artistic merit and in advance of many locally-trained composers.

This paper focuses on the Australian-based British conductors and professors who were also composers of symphonies which were performed in Australia since 1901 until 1956.

How did these works influence the musical scene here and who should take responsibility for maintaining and claiming their heritage today?

BRITISH OR AUSTRALIAN MUSIC?

Five Cases

Joshua Ives came to Australia as the first Elder Professor of Music at the University of Adelaide in 1885. This was the first music professorial position in any Australian university. Ives's musical training was at Cambridge University and he set up the first music degree in Australia modelled on the Cambridge pattern during the 1890s. He supplemented his income as Professor (in contravention of his terms of employment) as the Adelaide City Organist and with private instruction. Unfortunately he was a poor teacher and, during his tenure of 15 years only 7 students completed the Bachelor of Music degree despite strong enrolments. Ives was dismissed from his post in December 1901 (Bridges 1983: 450-1). From there he moved to Melbourne and taught music privately, eventually dying in the Melbourne suburb of Kew in 1931. Unfortunately, his spectacular dismissal and his vilification of both Chancellor and Vice Chancellor and at a large public function is better known than his musical contribution (Bridges 1992: 15-18). On Saturday, July 20, 1901, at the opening of a new organ at Elder Hall, Ives conducted the premiere of his Symphony in D minor, *L'Australienne*, which was hailed by *The Advertiser* as having 'the unique distinction of being the first to be written by an Australian musician' and 'written in honour of the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall' (*Advertiser*, 22 July 1901). The four movement work was hailed as a great success by the capacity audience. Despite the existence of an autograph full score of the work in the Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, the work is largely unknown today despite its closeness to the events of Federation. The somewhat sketchy nature of the 64 pages of full score and the composer's directions to himself about repeating certain bars or adding instrumentation suggests that there was once a final fair copy of the score that was the basis of the orchestral parts. This would require some substantial editing work to get the score in shape for a modern performance or recording.

The status of Ives's symphony as the first written in Australia is open to conjecture. In Melbourne, George WL Marshall-Hall (a protégé of composer Sir Charles Hubert Parry and who was admired by music critic Bernard

Shaw) was appointed the first Ormond Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne in 1890. Like Ives, Marshall-Hall was appointed as Professor as a young man with little established experience in the UK. Marshall-Hall composed two symphonies during his time in Melbourne, one in C minor dating from 1892 and a second in E flat major dating from 1903. Both scores are extant, with the E flat symphony being published in Berlin, perhaps before the London performance of 1907 (Radic 2002). A recording made of the second symphony during the mid 1980s by the Queensland Opera Orchestra demonstrates that Marshall-Hall was far in advance of any Australian-based composer of his period in terms of the quality of his work. Sadly, the controversies behind his dismissal in 1900 (almost contemporaneous with that of Ives) following the publication of alleged licentious verse two years earlier (Radic, 2002), have overshadowed Marshall-Hall's real achievements, like his music and his establishment of a professional symphony orchestra in Melbourne which sustained an existence for over a decade. Although he was absent in the UK from 1912-1914 prior to his short-lived reappointment to the Ormond Professorship in 1915, he was active in Australia for over twenty years.

In recent years, owing to the research of Warren Bebbington, Therese Radic and Richard Divall, there has been some renewed interest in Marshall-Hall in Australia. This may be due partly to Marshall-Hall's reputation as a 'larrikin' – a composer who knocked around with the great Australian impressionist artists Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts and was painted by them, who was a friend of both Lionel and Norman Lindsay, who jostled with authority and the representatives of the status quo, and who was happy to consider himself Australian. Prior to his coming to Australia, Bernard Shaw described him as 'a representative of young genius, denouncing the stalls, trusting to the gallery, waving the democratic flag, and tearing around generally' (Radic 2002: page 7). Consider, for instance, his expansive program note to a 1908 performance of the Symphony in E flat at one of his concerts, as preserved in the Grainger Museum, Melbourne:

This symphony was originally conceived of a summer holiday whilst camping out in Sydney Middle Harbour with a couple of congenial comrades. I found that in it I had unconsciously gathered together as a harmonious whole the many heterogeneous [sic] impressions of Australian life and scenery which my stay in this country had engendered. Hence its buoyant

cheerful tone. For what have we Australians, in this fresh unattempted land which absorbs all our energies, to do with the self-questionings, the too often morbid introspectiveness, that the gloomy climate and cramped-life conditions of our English ancestral home more and more tend to induce? Here we grow up under a genial Southern sun, amid an environment which makes it a delight merely to be alive. In every direction new paths open before us. Our every faculty, every energy, finds countless fields for healthy exertion. For us the world is only beginning (Programme, Marshall-Hall Orchestra, 10 July 1908).

Additionally, the cover of the published score of the work bears the printed inscription 'Dedicated to my friends and comrades under the Southern Cross'.

The optimistic energy and flamboyance of Marshall-Hall's program note is reflected in the outer movements of this three-movement symphony. In particular the first movement is marked by a strong sense of flow and continuity. Its virility reflects the idiom of early Wagner, of Schumann in chivalric mood, of Parry and early Elgar. By 1903 standards, the work is by no means as backward-looking as Alfred Hill's music of the same period. This is music worth hearing now without embarrassment. The work was performed in London in the 1907 Promenade series under the direction of the great British conductor Sir Henry Wood, founder of the Promenade concerts, but after a Sydney performance in 1917 (Orchard, 1952, p.93) was silent until the 1980s.

Fritz Hart (1874-1949) trained at the Royal College of Music at the same time as his friends, Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams, and was one of the many pupils of the composer Charles Villiers Stanford. His musical style immediately sets off resonances with the British compositional generation after that of Marshall-Hall (who was just five years younger than Elgar) – composers like Hart's friends Vaughan Williams and Holst. Hart first came to Australia in 1909 to conduct operas for JC Williamson. From there, he took up the position of Director of the Albert Street Conservatorium that Marshall-Hall founded after being kicked out of Melbourne University. This institution blossomed under Hart and was strongly patronised by Dame Nellie Melba, who supported Hart's leadership. Hart remained in Melbourne as Director until the mid 1930s, was the conductor of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra between 1927 and 1932, and composed prolifically in the genres of opera, concert

song and orchestral music (Radic 1983: 219-20).

Hart left two large-scale orchestral works from his long Melbourne sojourn, his five movement Symphonic Suite *The Bush* of 1923 and his three movement Symphony of 1934. *The Bush* was revived by conductor Richard Divall during the 1990s, its first performance since a partial one in 1945. It can be heard at the Australian Music database, ABC FM website in its entirety. The piece is astonishing in its authority and superb finish. The only orchestral work by an Australian of its general period which approached it was Grainger's *The Warriors*. Who would expect that only three or so years after the premiere of Holst's *The Planets* (first complete public performance 1920) that a work of similar idiom would appear in Melbourne? The fourth movement has some uncanny resemblances to Holst's 'Jupiter' from *The Planets*, although the big tune that emerges twice in the movement ambles along in a 5/4 gait that is intriguing.

Hart was convinced that the future of Australian music was to rest on a strong foundation of British music transplanted here. And yet, the suite is undergirded by a program which attempts to pierce the mystery and the terror of the bush (Forbes, 2007: 207). Hart declares through this work his allegiance and emotional ties to the natural Victorian landscape.

Despite his remarkable legacy to Melbourne musical life, not least his championing of three emerging female composers Margaret Sutherland, Peggy Glanville-Hicks and Ester Rofe and the remarkable flourishing of opera that occurred at the Melba Conservatorium, Hart was elbowed sideways from the centre of Melbourne's musical life by Australian Bernard Heinze, an inferior musician but skilled and ambitious in forwarding his own agendas (Radic 1986). As Heinze muscled in to take charge of the Melbourne Symphony by combining it with the University Conservatorium Symphony orchestra, Hart took on the role of guest conductor of the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra from 1933 onwards and eventually left Melbourne to settle in Hawaii in 1937. He returned to Melbourne once in 1945. The fate of his 1934 Symphony is testimony to his poor treatment in Australia. The autograph score of the work (174 pages of full score) in the State Library of Victoria remained virtually unmarked in 2004-5, suggesting that it has never been heard. By Australian dimensions, the existence of an unknown symphony like this one by a significant composer is akin to the existence of a Vaughan Williams symphony that has never been touched. At the time of writing, Richard

Divall is editing the work in preparation, hopefully, for its first performance. Other champions of Hart at present are Phillip Tregear and Anne-Marie Forbes (for examples see Richards 2007).

Dr Edgar Bainton was appointed to the Directorship of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music in 1934 in preference to local contender, the veteran Alfred Hill (Collins 2001: 78-83). Like Hart, Bainton was a product of the Royal College of Music and a composition pupil of Stanford. From 1901 until 1934 he taught piano and composition at the Conservatorium of Music, Newcastle upon Tyne, and was Principal from 1912 onwards. His long service there was interrupted by a four year internment in Germany during World War 1 owing to his presence at the Bayreuth Festival in 1914 at the outbreak of war. He was also conductor of the Newcastle Philharmonic Orchestra from 1911-1934 (Bainton 1977: 146-7). His role in the development of Australian musical life during the 22 years he lived in Sydney has been grossly underrated: at 53 he was at the height of his powers as a composer when he arrived in Australia, and his music has not been evaluated fairly. Dianne Collins in her account of the history of the New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music suggests that from the start he was considered a 'second-rater' who had been recruited from the English provinces.

No one pretended that he was a musician of the first order. His career was solid rather than inspiring...Bainton arrived in Australia in 1934...A few decades before, Bainton was photographed with Elgar and a group of English musicians, all elegantly assembled in an English garden. When Bainton arrived in Australia, he came very self-consciously as an evangelist of these men and the pastoral musical tradition which they represented. As his friend Neville Cardus later wrote: Bainton belonged 'to a ripe period in English life – a period in which truly English thought and feeling seemed to burgeon to an inexhaustible harvest'. But no amount of overblown tribute could hide the fact that, in 1934, most of musical Australia did not want him (Collins 2001: 80-1).

Collins later lists Bainton's accomplishments in turning around the fortunes of the Con and restoring good relationships between it and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). Nevertheless this paper argues that she underestimated his ability and his status.

Sir Henry Wood, arguably the most important British conductor of the period between 1900-1940, came to a different conclusion in his 1938 book *My Life of Music*.

Edgar L. Bainton is a composer who should have taken a more prominent position than he has. I thought so well of his [tone-poem] 'Pompilia'...I have often met Bainton at Newcastle-on-Tyne where he was Principal of the School of Music (Wood 1938: 174).

Bainton had two major orchestral works selected and published by the Carnegie Trust – his choral symphony *Before Sunrise* and his *Concerto Fantasia* for Piano and Orchestra. His music appears six times in lists of new works performed at the Proms in London between 1903 and 1937 (Wood 1938: appendix). Although he was not in the same ranking as Elgar, Vaughan Williams and Walton, his place in British music as composer was not insubstantial. The trouble was, moving to Australia removed him from the close music network of Britain and, after 1934, he was relatively forgotten there. For Covell, that was not a sufficient sacrifice to merit more than the following in his book:

Dr Edgar L. Bainton...is not a sufficiently distinctive composer to require a claim from Australia...Bainton's more ambitious music, such as the symphony in C minor he wrote in Australia, shows a complete familiarity with the styles of Elgar (as in some of the passages for strings and barking trombones) and with the pastoral reflectiveness of utterance characteristic of a school of English composers; and to these he added a certain modest, woodland grace of his own (Covell 1967: 144).

In fact, he was probably the right person for the job. David Tunley, a student of Bainton, wrote:

The versatility of Bainton's musicianship brings to mind the best qualities of the 17th and 18th century Kapellmeister. Composer, performer, conductor, teacher – in short, a master of his craft and, like so many of these admirable men who upheld the standards of their art, Bainton enriched the repertoire of music without in any way altering the course of its development (Tunley 1963: 55).

Bainton's most important works are, arguably, the ones he wrote in Australia which is why Covell's comments seem so unfair. The one-movement Symphony No.2 in D minor was

composed during the late 1930s, and includes reference to birdsong that he heard at Bundanon while trekking (his principal form of recreation). The work was performed in Sydney in 1941 under the composer's direction and later recorded for broadcasting by the ABC. The British recording company Chandos released a recent digital recording of this work which confirms it as the finest Australian-based symphony of its era in terms of its command of thematic material, its scoring and its sense of continuity.

Bainton's opera *The Pearl Tree* was composed and produced at the New South Wales Conservatorium (more commonly known as the NSW Con) during 1944 and was awarded a glowing review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Neville Cardus (best known as critic for the *Manchester Guardian* who was resident in Australia throughout the war years):

Dr Bainton's score is spontaneously and sensitively composed. I would not risk saying off-hand that any opera by an Englishman since Delius is more continuously poetic in texture than "The Pearl Tree"...All in all, this was probably one of the richest and most potential seeds ever sown for the future of music in this country (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1944, news clipping held in the Bainton Collection, Mitchell Library).

Bainton was vastly overshadowed by his successor at the NSW Con, Eugene Goossens, who commenced his reign there in 1947. Nevertheless, Bainton continued to compose, teach and examine, and was one of the three-member Australian jury of the Commonwealth Jubilee Composers competition. His last work, the four movement Symphony No.3 in C minor, was composed between 1952 and 1956 and only completed weeks before his relatively sudden death at Point Piper beach in Sydney. Although the idiom of the work really belongs to the world of Bax and Walton of the 1930s, it is far more advanced and accomplished in its musical language than the contemporaneous local symphonies of Hughes and Douglas. The symphony is large, of almost 40 minutes duration, and was premiered in Sydney during the 1957 subscriber series of concerts by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and then recorded. Owing to the score being held by the ABC in Sydney, the work never received a performance in Britain. In 2008, the Bainton Society in Britain financed the first digital recording of the work by Dutton recordings and the music received strong reviews. Sadly, the existence of this CD is not widely known in Australia, but my references to it in a

research paper from 2004 (McNeill 2004) are quoted in the record notes. Once again, the music demonstrates that Covell's assessment of Bainton was underdone.

Eugene Goossens (1892-1962) is often considered to be the major architect behind the rise of Australian orchestras and composition during the second half of the 20th century. In many ways this is a fair assessment given Goossens's ability as a conductor. As a composer, Goossens wrote in a more hard-edged idiom than Bainton (although he had the same teacher, he was influenced by Sergei Prokofiev and Igor Stravinsky through his first hand experience of directing their music), but the superiority of his music to that of Bainton is not immediately evident to the listener. Prior to arriving in Australia, Goossens had composed two symphonies for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in 1940 and 1944 respectively, as he was resident in the US for most of the period from 1923 to 1947. Both these works were performed in Sydney during the first few seasons of Goossens's tenure (Sametz 1994) (The only recordings of these works currently available are, curiously, Australian ones). His stature as conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra was a major factor in creating an unsurpassed demand for subscription concerts. By 1950, every concert in the major series was given three to four times to cater for the demand.

Another major contributing factor to this demand was the immigration of non-British European people to Australia, both immediately prior to the Second World War, and after 1946 – especially Jewish refugees. These people were familiar with high culture in their home countries and formed a network of concert-goers, concert entrepreneurs and music critics who backed the recent formation of full symphony orchestras in every state of Australia during the late 1940s.

However, despite the glamour of Goossens's time in Sydney, it is arguable that his teaching was influential or that his compositions had impact on local composers. Sixty years on, Bainton's music compares strongly with that of Goossens and, given Goossens's notably shorter stay in Australia – 9 years against 22 – suggesting the Australian claim to Bainton should be stronger.

In summary, Ives, Marshall-Hall, Hart and Bainton made strong contributions to Australian symphonic repertoire that deserve to be recognised because their mark on Australian musical life was actually stronger here than elsewhere. Their status as British immigrant composers, however, has unfairly stained their reputation and the estimate of their relevance here. From our standpoint of

2010 it is easy to dismiss them as British rather than Australian, but prior to World War 2, Australian people still regarded themselves as 'outriders of the Empire'. British-born and trained professors and conductors were considered essential to lead the relatively new tertiary music institutions. They have tended to be dismissed or resented as part of a 'reverse cultural cringe'. When one inspects the music, however, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they composed most of the best symphonic music on offer in Australia at that time. In the past 15 years, Bainton's reputation has been reviewed positively in Britain as one of the unfairly 'forgotten' composers – probably due to the shifts in musical fashion that have occurred as a result of post-modernism. It is time that Australian scholars, did the same.

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