

The Jubilee of the Royal Albert Hall and the Royal Choral Society. II. The Period of Experiment and Non-Success (Continued)

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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 62, No. 939 (May 1, 1921), pp. 313-320

Published by: Musical Times Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/910562>

Accessed: 25-06-2016 05:16 UTC

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# The Musical Times

AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR

MAY 1 1921

## THE JUBILEE OF THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL AND THE ROYAL CHORAL SOCIETY

BY HERMAN KLEIN

(Continued from April number, page 235)

### II.—THE PERIOD OF EXPERIMENT AND NON-SUCCESS

It will be convenient for the purposes of this narrative to divide the Jubilee period (1871-1921) broadly into, say, two unequal parts—the first, those thirty years of strenuous effort and struggle which brought the chequered history of the Royal Albert Hall down to the beginning of the present century; the second, two pleasant decades of smooth, easy working and comparative all-round success. The story of an uphill fight generally provides the most interesting reading, and it will not be the writer's fault should the climax be followed by a rather lengthy *diminuendo*.

But the Albert Hall is an exceptional case. Its story, like the place itself, is somewhat akin to the tales of fairy palaces in the 'Arabian Nights.' It was mysterious from the beginning. Few people could tell you off-hand how or whence it came, what kept it 'going,' or precisely what it was there for. Nor did its mysteriousness end altogether when the institution had escaped from the dangers of an impecunious childhood, and grown strong (as it was certainly big) enough to support itself. From first to last its fifty years have furnished more or less exciting examples of the unexpected; and now has come the present Jubilee celebration, with its remarkable testimonies of national pride in a national institution which has achieved a destiny and a success rather different from what the original designer had imagined.

*E pur si muove*, as Galileo remarked of something even bigger than the Albert Hall. But if the affairs of the latter are moving to-day, it is precisely because they are not being carried on 'according to plan'—the original plan. The magnificent scheme described last month in these columns was in reality too Utopian for the advancing mid-Victorian age in which it was launched. It was well-meant; nay, it was even grandiose, noble, superb in intention. But it was not feasible—it could not be successfully worked. And we know this, because the whole of the vast experiment, practically every feature of which was tried—tried faithfully, conscientiously, perseveringly, regardless of every commercial con-

sideration—was in too many instances found wanting. It will now be our business to follow, as briefly as may be, the course of this singular and instructive record of endeavour.

#### THE MISTAKES OF THE OPENING YEAR

In the year of the opening very little was done, and that little was unsatisfactory. Things went badly from the start. People did not take kindly to the new building, much less to the music they heard in it when they visited the International Exhibition in the adjacent grounds. Her Majesty's Commissioners had put up a huge and imposing edifice, but neither they nor the Executive Council of the Hall seemed at first to know what to do with it. The opening of the Exhibition in June, 1871, provided the initial opportunity; and a beautiful thing they made of it. The Franco-Prussian war was just ending, and among the French refugees in London was the musician who wrote 'Faust.' Since the death of Mendelssohn he had been the Queen's favourite composer. Why not associate Gounod with the beginning of a new dawn for British music? Accordingly, Gounod completed his cantata, 'Gallia,' and, having formed a large choir, conducted it in the Albert Hall on the opening day in the presence of Her Majesty; while, just to show there was no ill-feeling on the part of a neutral State, a 'Grand Triumphant March' by the German professor, Ferdinand Hiller, and a new cantata, entitled 'On Shore and Sea,' by Arthur Sullivan (also conducted by their composers), were included in the programme.

The choir just referred to was to supply the nucleus for the Royal Albert Hall Choral Society, which was duly formed in the following season and gave altogether four concerts—the first on May 8, 1872—under the direction of Gounod, these being part of the ambitious scheme (for eighteen concerts from May to July, 1872) already detailed in our earlier article. But all of that was after the initial bad impression had been created—an impression whereof the Press was not slow to take notice. For music at the new Hall in 1871 was obviously an afterthought, a minor attraction tacked on to the others; in short, as one journal described it, a 'Daily Exhibition of Musical Art, chiefly represented by well-worn overtures, arrangements of songs [mostly those of Gounod], and scraps from the popular operas, performed by military bands to a few stragglers.' And among the more youthful stragglers on one occasion, just dropping in to 'listen to the band,' was the writer of these lines. On July 18, the last touches having been put to the new organ, the huge instrument was formally inaugurated by William T. Best, the official organist of the Hall, with a recital that was really worthy of its object.

#### SOME RESULTS OF THE GOUNOD REGIME

To the 'errors and omissions' of that opening year many unlucky consequences may be laid; but among the temporary beneficial results was the spate

of rather more decent music that came in 1872, of which, nevertheless, only six operatic concerts (out of eighteen) proved financially successful. H.M. Commissioners were now becoming slightly alarmed. They had guaranteed the Hall against loss, and here was a deficit of £3,140, due mainly to the heavy expenses incurred by the formation and management of the new Choral Society. Gounod's appointment as conductor was openly criticized in strong terms. Said the *Musical Times*, June, 1872 :

That M. Gounod should have been appointed director of an English choir in a building under Royal patronage is of itself a sufficient grievance to those who see around them a number of native professors thoroughly qualified by talent and experience for the task.

And such programmes!—nearly every piece harmonized or arranged by the conductor; miscellaneous selections from the works of Palestrina, Bach, Mozart, and others, including a *Te Deum* by Gounod himself—all performed without orchestra, to the accompaniment of the pianoforte and organ, 'played by Mr. William Carter and his son George.' No wonder there were small audiences.

Obviously this kind of thing could not last long. With the departing summer Gounod 'went' too; not as yet to his native land, but to the retirement of Tavistock Square, whence he emerged only to give some choral subscription concerts at St. James's Hall, in 1873, before finally returning to Paris. Meanwhile, 'struggling against its acoustical defects and its amateur management,' the scene of his labours at South Kensington happily came under artistic direction of a better description. Ignoring their previous loss, H.M. Commissioners offered to guarantee another £600 to keep the Royal Albert Hall Choral Society going for the season 1872-73. With this guarantee in hand the Council called in Messrs. Novello—who had shown great interest in the new Society, Alfred H. Littleton being its first secretary—and the suggestion was promptly taken up. It was arranged that, in conjunction with that firm (Mr. Littleton being also a member of the Council), a series of six concerts should be given under the conductorship of Joseph Barnby, who at once abandoned the Oratorio Concerts at Exeter Hall and amalgamated his choir with the new one at the Albert Hall.

#### THE NEW CHOIR UNDER BARNBY

In December the rehearsals began, and on February 12, 1873, the first season of the R.A.H.C.S., under Barnby, opened with a fine performance of Bach's 'St. Matthew' Passion. The principal soloists were Madame Florence Lancia, Miss Julia Elton, W. H. Cummings, and Foli, with Stainer at the organ. Heard under such extraordinary conditions, the sublime work, then but slightly known in London, created a profound impression; moreover, *mirabile dictu!* it was performed on no fewer than four consecutive evenings during that same Holy Week, the Hall

being better and better filled each time.\* The audiences would join in the chorales, and with no little spirit, being considerably aided in their efforts by the support of a trumpet played at each entrance to the amphitheatre stalls.

Its excessive beauties were so thoroughly revealed to the audience at the Albert Hall that we have every hope, considering the aristocratic nature of the assembly, of real and lasting benefit to the art accruing from its performance.—*Musical Times*, March, 1873.

Later on, in April, 'The Messiah' was given, and after that an interesting revival of Handel's 'Belshazzar.'

That was not all. The Exhibition of 1873 was devoted not only to Inventions, Industries, and Art, but in a special degree to Music. It opened on Easter Monday, and from the first there began a series of daily concerts, orchestral and vocal, with Barnby as conductor, quite different in character from those of two years previously. The programmes contained a goodly proportion of 'classical' items, and improved in quality as the season went on. Altogether, between April and October, no less than two hundred concerts were given, with an orchestra of at least fifty, and sometimes more. When Barnby did not conduct, his place was taken by Mr. Deichmann, a well-known and respected orchestral player; and Mr. Oliver King was the official accompanist throughout.

Here, again, as in the organization of the new choir, we trace the valuable influence of Alfred Littleton, to whose firm the whole of the arrangements for these concerts had been entrusted. They were to lead, as we shall see directly, to a still more important undertaking. Meantime it had been a novel experience to read in an Exhibition announcement such sentences as these :

The performances will be limited to music of a high class. . . . The production of music unknown or unfamiliar in England, will be kept steadily in view. . . . With a special view to the encouragement of musical composition in this country, prominence will be given to the works of English composers. Advantage will be taken of these concerts to bring forward young English artists whose ability may entitle them to the privilege of a public appearance.

It is well, perhaps, to add that daily concerts of this type had never been given in London before.

Unfortunately the balance-sheet issued to the members of the Corporation of the Hall in July, 1873, showed a clean deficit of £5,726, which rose in the following year to £6,115. The loss would have been heavier still but for the substantial profits derived from two State concerts, one given in 1873 in honour of the Shah of Persia, the other

\* In the Council's Report for 1872-73 appeared the following paragraph: The experiment of having the Passion music of Sebastian Bach for four evenings in succession—an experiment which the Council believe had never been tried before with music of this nature—was eminently successful. The audiences increased nightly, and by their manner of joining in the Chorales showed their interest in the subject. The Council consider it only right to record their thanks to Mr. Alfred Littleton, who has acted as manager on behalf of Messrs. Novello, Ewer & Co., for the spirited manner in which he has undertaken this business. Without the co-operation of this eminent firm the Council could not have been in a position to give the Seatholders these advantages.

in 1874 to celebrate the visit of the Emperor of Russia. 'Experience has shown,' said the Council in its Report, 'that but on such exceptional occasions incidental concerts are too costly to be remunerative.' *Verb. sap.*

On the other hand, if entrepreneurs had refused to come forward in sufficient numbers, the Hall had been used for the first time for a large public meeting; the Choral Society was increasing its reputation; the newly-formed Amateur Orchestral Society (its smoking-concerts regularly attended by its President, the Prince of Wales) was doing well; and various series of concerts were being given by Mr. William Carter's Choir, by Mr. Mapleson, by Mr. Frederic Cowen, and even one concert by Mr. Sims Reeves. Slowly but surely, if imperceptibly, the artistic situation began to improve.

#### A CHANGE OF POLICY

It was not, however, the plethora of concerts of mixed types that was to bring salvation. In the first two years, down to July, 1873, a total of a hundred and twenty-six concerts had taken place in the Hall,\* exclusive of the daily organ recitals and Exhibition performances. During the next twelve months, besides the twenty-five comprised in the different series mentioned above, the Council itself, in conjunction with Messrs. Novello, was responsible for seventeen oratorio concerts in which the Albert Hall Choral Society took part. The main anxieties of the Council at this period were to hit upon the right kind of entertainment to attract the public and to provide the seatholders with their money's worth. The latter point was especially important, in view of the fact that the executive was now proposing to levy a 'seat-rate' of £3 a year (reduced to £2, at which sum it was fixed for several years in succession) to help to reduce the growing deficit.

There was another and still more urgent reason for imposing this seat-rate. H.M. patient and generous Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851 were at last growing tired of their burden. They decided first to relinquish the business of giving musical exhibitions; in the second instance, at the end of 1874, they withdrew their support for the maintenance of the Hall, which had been equivalent to a yearly subsidy of about £3,000. This was serious, and when the blow fell the Council was far from being in a position to bear it. On the contrary, its status was weak on every side.

Before beginning to pay a penny for maintenance, its balance-sheet had again shown a heavy excess of expenditure over revenue, and it had been compelled to obtain an advance in cash to carry on the undertaking.

Finally, at this crucial moment, the Executive Council was in the midst of a highly interesting and creditable experiment, which, by the consent

of its Corporation, it had undertaken in partnership with Messrs. Novello during the autumn of 1874. That experiment, the story of which shall now be related, had been the logical outcome of the experiences gained during the so-called Music Exhibition of the previous year, and represented the culmination of the efforts of Alfred Littleton to discover a practical solution for the musical problems that beset the South Kensington scheme.

#### THE GREAT 'NIGHTLY CONCERT' CAMPAIGN

The old axiom 'In for a penny, in for a pound,' tacked on to the advice given by Polonius to his son, may well have been in the minds of Mr. Littleton and his colleagues when they set about organizing their new campaign, which aimed at nothing less than to give concerts every night of the week for as many months in the year as they could be carried on. The prospectus issued by Messrs. Novello, conceived in the broadest possible artistic spirit and couched in the language made familiar by the operatic manifestoes of the period, evidently cherished the idea that the centre of London musical life either had been or was about to be transferred from the neighbourhood of the St. James's and Exeter Halls to a mile or so west of Piccadilly Circus.

Well, they were only a little in advance of their time, that was all. The soil was not quite so ready to be tilled as they imagined. The word 'decentralization' had not yet been invented; neither had motor-cars, motor omnibuses, nor taxicabs—the modern means of transport which have since brought the Albert Hall to within a few minutes of our doors. The nearest point then for rapid access was the South Kensington Station of the Metropolitan District Railway, shortly afterwards to be linked to the Hall by a subway that was never completely 'joined up' at either end. In short, the trip to and from the Royal Albert Hall, in November, 1874, still amounted to a veritable journey. Notwithstanding, on the 7th of that month—the month of fogs, and a Saturday evening—it opened its doors for a series of concerts of indefinite but elastic proportions, to be given 'on a scale of completeness and efficiency [to quote the prospectus] hitherto unattempted in this or any other country.' The following prices were charged: amphitheatre stalls, 5s.; arena, 4s.; balcony, 2s. 6d.; admission (gallery), one shilling; with private boxes at 1, 2, and 3 guineas each.

To dwell at length on the prospectus would occupy columns of space. It was a notable document of several pages, wherein were rehearsed with refreshing emphasis the attributes of the whole gigantic undertaking, and the classification of its varied features under their different leaders—the 'Classical, Orchestral, and Vocal Music' under Mr. Barnby; the 'English Music' under Mr. John Francis Barnett; the 'Modern Orchestral Music' (including the fearful and wonderful compositions of Herr Richard Wagner) under Mr. Edward Dannreuther; the 'Oratorio,' the 'Songs, Ballads,

\* Made up as follows: 40 People's Concerts, 29 Oratorio, 11 Operatic, 3 Operatic and Military, 12 Instrumental, 28 Miscellaneous, and 3 connected with the London Musical Festival.

Madrigals, &c.,’ the ‘Ballet and other Popular Music,’ again under the versatile Mr. Barnby; and, lastly, the ‘Analytical Programmes’ from the pen of Mr. Joseph Bennett. The orchestra was to consist of seventy performers, while the madrigals were to be sung by a new choir and the oratorios, of course, by the members of the Royal Albert Hall Choral Society ‘a body of amateurs now in the highest state of efficiency’ (which it certainly was), with Mr. Barnby as conductor-in-chief and Sir Julius Benedict and Mr. Randegger to assist Mr. Barnett and Mr. Dannreuther.

The works to be performed? None were mentioned by name; they lay, so to speak, ‘in the lap of the gods’ of South Kensington and Berners Street. But in the active mentality of the tutelary genius of the whole business there were germinating ideas which were to prove in execution the precursors of valuable methods and attractive customs which concert-givers of to-day would fain regard as their own. For this was some time before the revival of Promenade Concerts at Covent Garden under Arditi; and never previously had the London musical public read its weekly programme as thus:

Monday	...	...	Ballad Night
Tuesday	...	...	English Night
Wednesday	...	...	Classical Night
Thursday	...	...	Oratorio Night
Friday	...	...	Wagner Night
Saturday	...	...	Popular Night

Here, indeed, was a system of concert-giving so new that, as the sequel proved, only a small percentage of Metropolitan music-lovers were capable of realising its educational value. Fancy such a thing as a ‘Wagner Night’ at this epoch, when very few amateurs knew a note of Wagner’s music, and his name and works were virtually *anathema maranatha* to every leading musical writer in the country! Even the bold Mr. Barnby, strongly backed up as he was, did not dare devote an entire programme to the Master who was just building his Festspielhaus at Bayreuth. Nevertheless, the term ‘Wagner Night’ was sufficiently justified—on the first occasion that it was ever utilised—by a selection that comprised the Overture to ‘Tannhäuser,’ ‘Elizabeth’s Greeting,’ the Prelude to Act 3 of ‘Die Meistersinger,’ and the ‘Kaisermarsch.’ The dose was thought a sensational one, but it proved a hit when little else did; and therewith was established a precedent that dozens of conductors have since imitated.

Remember, this was 1874. The ‘musical young man’ of to-day was not yet born. The term ‘British Music’ was unknown, or at least not in use. The chief protagonists of the home-made article were Sterndale Bennett (who died in the following year), G. A. Macfarren, J. F. Barnett, J. L. Hatton, H. S. Oakeley, Barnby, and others whose names are still less recollected now. Sullivan had not yet come into his own; ‘The Rose Maiden’ had not yet made Frederic Cowen; Edward German was still a boy at school in

Shropshire. Musical progress in this country was ‘going slow,’ and none knew better than Messrs. Novello that everything in the shape of innovation or novelty was being scrutinised with a careful and jealous eye.

But they were in deadly earnest with these concerts. ‘Recognizing the many legitimate forms of music, and appreciating their relative value, the directors have determined to make the concerts representative in the widest sense.’ And they were as good as their word. Even on the Ballad and Popular Nights something ‘superior’ was included—‘not only works of the recognized “great masters,” but also the compositions of those who stand next in order of merit, and whose undoubted genius has not yet met with adequate appreciation.’ The ‘Popular’ programme on the opening night actually had in it, *inter alia*, Beethoven’s Choral Fantasia and the Overture and March from ‘Tannhäuser.’

The soloists comprised every artist of eminence in the kingdom and several from abroad. Among them—names worth recalling—were Lemmens-Sherrington, Edith Wynne, Anna Williams, Patey, Antoinette Sterling, Sims Reeves, Edward Lloyd, Cummings, Vernon Rigby, Lewis Thomas, and Foli; Agnes Zimmermann, Walter Bache, Norman Néruda, August Wilhelmj, Prosper Sainton, Oscar Beringer, Pollitzer, and Charles Hallé; with, as organists, Stainer, George Martin, Stevenson Hoyte, and Alexandre Guilmant. The director of the whole undertaking was the late Alfred H. Littleton, with whom was associated as manager his firm’s able and energetic lieutenant, Mr. Charles Fry.

#### AN ARTISTIC TRIUMPH AND A DISAPPOINTING RESPONSE

Attempted anywhere within easy reach, anywhere in London almost but at the then out-of-the-way, inaccessible Albert Hall, such a large, broad-minded scheme as that just described might conceivably have ‘made good,’ even if it could not wholly snatch success out of the jaws of failure. But at Kensington Gore, as was quickly proved, it did not stand the remotest chance. The attendance, although it marked an average of three thousand, grew smaller as night succeeded night and week followed week. After the experiment had been given a fair trial, the number of concerts was reduced, first to two per week, ultimately to occasional concerts only. Altogether sixty-two concerts were given under the joint undertaking between Messrs. Novello and the Corporation. The receipts averaged £138, and the expenditure £236; a loss of £100 per concert. To be exact, the total deficit amounted to £6,100, despite the fact that no fewer than two hundred thousand persons attended (by payment or right of admission) the whole of the sixty-two concerts.

In every way this remarkable series of concerts constituted a record. The present writer went to several of them and heard some splendid performances—notably, those contributed by the Choral Society under Barnby’s animated leadership.

There will be an opportunity later on to deal more minutely with the admirable achievements of this Society under its famous conductor; but it will be apropos to recall now that the Novello Concerts terminated amid a blaze of glory with the memorable production of Verdi's Manzoni 'Requiem' on May 15, 1875, when it was conducted in person by the illustrious composer. Never to be forgotten was the absorbing interest, the brilliancy, the artistic delight of that glorious Saturday afternoon; the pleasure of listening to music so astonishingly new and beautiful; the joy of hearing incomparable voices like those of Madame Stolz, Madame Waldemann, the great tenor, Masini, and the basso, Medini; the experience of seeing Verdi conduct; and the feeling of pride in the singing of our magnificent English choristers.

That performance of the 'Requiem,' under Verdi himself, was never afterwards to be equalled. What is more, it may now be singled out as the artistic *clou* of the whole fifty years' musical history of the Royal Albert Hall.

So much, then, had been accomplished through the enterprise of the firm of Novello. The pity was that, although the value and repute of the Hall for music on an imposing scale had been sensibly augmented, nothing had been really done to establish its utility as a metropolitan musical centre or its suitability for the various other æsthetic projects that its founders had had in view. The latter, recognizing that they had partially failed, were now retiring gracefully, leaving the entire maintenance and government of the place to its Corporation and Council, whose financial difficulties were troubling them far more than questions of art and science. They proposed an Endowment Fund; they levied a seat-rate of £2 a year, lest the property should 'inevitably fall into dilapidation'; in short, they feared the worst. Happily, the worst did not happen—thanks neither to their wisdom nor their foresight. They began tardily (1876) to perceive that the 'difficulty of access' was a serious obstacle; but though they laid plans for extending their rights and privileges (a necessary proceeding, for that matter), it never seemed to occur to them that the wisest course to pursue, in order to bring people to South Kensington for musical culture, would be to provide them with some good music *free of charge*.

The 'Cheap Concerts for the People' had been a financial failure, but the loss on them had only amounted to £750. They should have been continued in spite of that. The organ recitals had been well attended, but a charge was always made for admission, and on Sundays that charge was always too high. The original plan had contemplated imitating the municipal methods of Liverpool and Birmingham. The highest price charged for admission to an organ recital in 1873-74 at St. George's Hall, Liverpool, given by the Corporation organist, William T. Best, was, as the present writer can vouch, exactly threepence! But what of orchestral music for the people? No one

seems to have thought of such a thing, much less of endowing an orchestra as a permanent institution. It never occurred to the aristocratic Amateur Orchestral Society to perform before any but its own (subscribing) members. Yet what new vein might not have been struck a quarter of a century before Queen's Hall was built, had these exclusive entertainments, or the Sunday afternoon concerts of Zaverthal's Royal Artillery Band, or the organ recitals from first to last been available for the public at a trifling charge for the best seats?

No; no one thought of it; for, as has been said, the monetary question was at this period the main obsession of those who held the reins of government,\*—how to make the place pay and prove that it was not the 'white elephant' the world declared it to be. At length, after the crisis of 1876, when the constitution of the Corporation was altered by the Queen's consent and the Royal Albert Hall Choral Society reorganized, signs of improvement began to be noted. The Hall was let for more varied purposes—bazaars, needlework exhibitions, and even the Cambridge higher local examinations for women. There was a rather better balance-sheet. Thanks to H.M. Commissioners, a debt of £4,000 was wiped off the capital account.

#### THE FAMOUS WAGNER-FESTIVAL

Then, in 1877, came another musical event of the first importance in the shape of the Wagner Festival, which was destined in many ways to exercise a stimulating and unsuspected influence upon musical progress in this (artistically) backward land. Looking back to it as we now can, it is not difficult to perceive in this curious undertaking the birth of many things that were to become salient features in the subsequent development of music in our midst. First of all the Wagner 'craze' itself, which lasted well over thirty years—kindled largely, of course, by the presence of the master *in propria persona*, though not instantly enough to ensure crowded audiences or pecuniary success for a novel and expensive type of concert entertainment. In that respect, had the craze existed in advance of its hero's coming, there might have been a different tale to tell. As it was, the attitude of the British public towards the Wagner Festival was benign, but distinctly hesitant.

Far more important in its after-effects than the *concours* of the master was that of Hans Richter, who came with a reputation just earned at the initial Bayreuth Festival and left us with a much larger one. When he returned here in the following year and started his concerts at St. James's Hall, the London Germans and their musical following were ready for him. Success came then as a matter of course. It was Richter who enacted the rôle of high-priest at our leading Wagnerian

\* Apart from the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh, the leading men in the Council during the 'seventies and 'eighties included Lord Clarence Paget, the Rt. Hon. Lord Playfair, the Earl of Feversham, the Duke of St. Albans, the Earl of Lathom, Sir Dudley Coutts Majoribanks, Mr. Warren de la Rue, Mr. C. J. Freake, Mr. H. C. Rothery, Mr. C. McL. McHardy, and Major-General C. E. Webber.

temples, and for a couple of decades at east he was never known to beat the tom-tom in vain. But it would fill a book to tell the whole story of his achievements in this country, beginning with the historic moment when Wagner, nervous and upset, lost control alike of himself and his huge orchestra of two hundred and fifty (with Wilhelmjas principal first violin), resigned his baton to Richter, and subsided into an armchair. After that, save when he conducted an occasional piece, he sat facing the Albert Hall auditorium for the remainder of the Festival, a sphinx-like but somewhat pitiful figure for his admirers to gaze upon.

Here, again, we have to date the adoption of the large modern orchestra which to-day some of us are inclined to regard in the light of an artistic juggernaut. It would be a little unfair perhaps if this mistake were wholly charged to the Albert Hall. Yet it is an unquestionable fact that the enormous proportions of the orchestral 'pit,' as the Americans call it, so disturbed Messrs. Hodge and Essex and Herr Hermann Franke, the London organizers of the Wagner Festival, that they could arrive at only one conclusion—it would need to be filled with players. Hans Richter was delighted with the sonority of this huge band (he had had a big one at Bayreuth also), and thenceforth saw to it that every orchestra he conducted in England was relatively on the same numerical scale. The Philharmonic followed suit, and since then symphony orchestras of the old Beethoven size have been out of fashion.\*

The entire Festival comprised no more than eight concerts, and there was a loss on all but the last two or three, for which lower prices of admission were charged. It was so contrived, however, that Wagner did not have to go home without a few hundred British pounds in his pocket to swell the funds then being raised to pay for the new Bayreuth Theatre. But, as has been shown, his visit did something more. It contributed a memorable chapter to the history of the Albert Hall; also it drew increased attention to the building by demonstrating its possibilities as a *locale* for orchestral performances on an extensive scale, and by attracting a few thousand people who had never before been there for the purpose of listening to anything but oratorios and organ recitals.

#### USES OF THE AUDITORIUM EXTENDED

Leaving for future review the career of the choir which Joseph Barnby had now brought to so high a degree of perfection, and merely noting that the season of 1876-77 was the first in which it became self-supporting, let us go on to the economic and other developments that followed closely upon the heels of this remarkable Festival. The National Training School for Music—now

\* The tendency to use big orchestras arose in France with the growing popularity of Berlioz, as we had occasion to learn when Pasdeloup and Lamoureux first brought theirs to London, not long after Wagner's visit. We could beat them all, of course, with our Handel Festival orchestra of five hundred, which stood however in quite a separate category.

in running order, yet rather inclined to halt in its stride—was sufficiently dealt with in our previous article.

One of the best features of the year 1878 was an Exhibition of Fine Arts held in the gallery. So successful was it, alike as regards the quality of the pictures and the facilities for viewing them consecutively in a favourable light, that everyone wondered why the show did not become a regular fixture. The Council was very sanguine about the future, and hoped 'that it would take a permanent place amongst the recognized *salons* of the metropolis.' But after a few seasons' trial the Exhibition was dropped, and therewith was wasted a golden opportunity for realising one of the great objects—second only, perhaps, to that of music—for which the Hall had been designed. It was in 1878 also that the question of electric lighting was first broached. Prof. Tyndall and Dr. W. Siemens went into it thoroughly, and certain experiments were made. But they did not prove satisfactory. The whole system was just then too much in a transition state, and for some time longer audiences had to put up with the inadequate illumination afforded by a circle of gas-jets that seemed to be suspended in the heavens miles away. Yet even in this matter the Albert Hall contributed its share towards reform; for the Exhibition of Electric Lighting Apparatus inaugurated by the Prince of Wales in the following year was not only the first ever held, but lent an undoubted impetus to the growth of the new industry.

Followed on this innovation the first military 'assault-at-arms' and the inauguration of the long succession of 'benefit concerts' that has extended from those of Sir Julius Benedict and Mr. William Kuhe (1880) down to the Melbas and Tetrzinnis and Clara Butts of the present day. The initial 'assault-at-arms' had peculiar importance, because it opened up the arena of the Hall for what seemed to be its natural purpose, and led to its utilisation for all those gymnastic displays and celebrations which were to lead in turn to the bazaars, balls, and boxing entertainments favoured by a later generation. The vogue of these things was, however, to grow slowly; and it was only made practicable when it did come by the fact that the Council purchased the temporary floor constructed (in 1904) to cover the whole arena and amphitheatre for a bazaar held in aid of the Victoria Hospital. But for this ingenious process of 'levelling up,' which would have made that worthy architect, General Scott, open his eyes wide with astonishment, it may be taken for granted that nothing would ever have been heard of the magnificent charity and other costume balls for which people are now wont to troop in thousands to the Albert Hall, there to dance and gaze and sup their fill from midnight until early dawn.

For some ten years it had been the custom to hold fancy-dress balls in the arena, the level of which had already been permanently raised two or three feet above its original height. The first was

the ball organized by the Savage Club in 1883—the year of the Fisheries Exhibition—on behalf of the funds of the Royal College of Music, when the Prince and Princess of Wales were present. Encouraged by the ephemeral success of these affairs, annual Exhibitions as well as dances and bazaars on a big scale became of frequent occurrence, and gradually financial conditions began to improve so that for a couple of years (1885-86) no seat-rate was levied. Subsequently, however, this tax, always extremely unpopular with the members of the Corporation, had to be reimposed and has never since been removed. Nor, with the cost of maintenance at its present level, does there seem to be much likelihood that it ever can be. The fairness or unfairness of the seat-rate has given rise at times to much heated discussion, but in the opinion of the present writer it ought never to have provoked either complaint or opposition. At the initial price of £100 the seatholders of the Royal Albert Hall have had their money's worth over and over again. Even during the worst of the experimental seasons they enjoyed some enviable privileges, not half or a quarter of which could they have purchased for the amount of the ordinary interest on their capital, while the property is still theirs and will remain so for the next nine hundred and forty-nine years. In other words, they have much the best of the bargain, and though the purposes for which the Hall is used may not equally appeal to all—how could they except in ideal circumstances?—they have no real justification for grumbling.

The Supplemental Charter granted in 1887 certainly did not realise to the full extent all that the Council expected (few of their sanguine anticipations ever completely came to pass), but it proved a valuable instrument for enabling them to launch out in new directions. It also legalised their right to exclude the seatholders on certain special occasions so many times in the year—a perfectly reasonable provision, seeing that the right in question was only likely to be exercised when it was to the general advantage of the institution. Further improvements were secured by the completion of one of the theatres, a partial installation of the electric light, and the opening of the subway connecting the Hall with the South Kensington Station of the Underground Railway. The use of the subway was, however, soon interrupted by the preparations for building the Imperial Institute. The long efforts subsequently made to secure more direct access to the Hall from the railways proved fruitless. The difficulty thus remained a persistent item of disappointment and regret in the annual reports of the Council.

PATTI CONCERTS: NATIONAL AND MASONIC  
FESTIVALS

What were called 'Operatic Concerts' appear to have filled a prominent place in the Albert Hall calendar almost from the beginning. Plenty of reasons might be adduced to excuse a fact that is something of a humiliation to the artistic mind.

One will suffice: they paid better than any other class of concerts given during the first thirty years of the building's existence—or perhaps the last twenty either. There is a public, as we all know, for every possible description of musical entertainment; and the entrepreneurs who have rented or run the Albert Hall have tried the whole gamut. But when everything has been said, the form of musical entertainment that has brought the largest and most reliable receipts to the place has been neither of the two best suited to its size and shape, but the efforts of the individual artist, the singer, or the pianist with a big name, or else a combination of smaller personalities of similar type capable of going upon the platform and pleasing their audience one at a time. In short, it has been a paradise and a gold-mine for every illustrious exponent of the 'star system'!

It need hardly be said that the most successful pioneer, and also the most lastingly brilliant 'shining light' of this celestial throng, was the adored and adorable *diva*, Adelina Patti. But the term 'Patti Concert,' when she began in June, 1886, had yet to be invented. All such miscellaneous affairs had still to be called 'Grand Operatic Concerts'—probably because they attracted large numbers of people who never went inside an opera-house. As a matter of fact, this preliminary venture consisted of four concerts, under the management of Ambrose Austin, of St. James's Hall, and at each the famous prima donna was supported by an orchestra—quite an unnecessary expense, as was quickly perceived.

The writer remembers the occasion well. The crush was quite unprecedented. Only a month before, Christine Nilsson and Albani—both great favourites—had sung together at an 'Operatic Concert,' and the combination had just comfortably filled the Hall—no more. The magic name of Patti simply crammed it from the arena to the farthest recesses of the gallery; and, as it was now, so was it to be for the sixty-four concerts at which the same distinguished singer appeared here during the next twenty years—that is to say, until she took formal leave of the public on December 1, 1906. Never was there a greater certainty in musical enterprise; and yet, curiously enough, Patti never once shared in the profits of an Albert Hall 'spec.' She was always content to take her eight hundred guinea fee from her manager, and leave him to pay expenses and pocket the balance. The thing is done differently to-day.

The psychology of a Patti audience was unlike that of any other which has been drawn to this vast concert-room by her many imitators. Its sole interest, so far as this retrospect is concerned, lies in the phenomenon of the solo artist's magnetic power, *i.e.*, in the exercise of that extraordinary fascination which superinduced—for example when Patti was singing 'Home, sweet home'—a stranger, deeper silence, a more complete stillness, than any other single performer has ever

created here. Occasionally, but very rarely, we have noted the same degree of stillness during a *pianissimo* in the execution of a choral piece: for instance, when the unaccompanied Evening Hymn in Sullivan's 'Golden Legend' was being sung under Barnby; and again, only last month, when the splendid Glasgow Orpheus Choir was singing Elgar's 'Death on the Hills.' These experiences have helped one to form conclusions as to the form of musical sounds that impress the listener most deeply in this huge auditorium. There can be no question, to our thinking, that it is a case of the human voice first, and the rest—not precisely nowhere, but certainly a long way behind. Speaking personally, we consider that relative beauty of musical effect at the Albert Hall, or, in other words, the suitability of its acoustic qualities for the kind of music that is being performed, should be classified in the following order: (1) Choir; (2) solo voice; (3) organ; (4) solo instrument; (5) orchestra; with (6) military band, quite in the rear.

It should be remembered, nevertheless, that when in the 'nineties the 'free' Sunday concerts (free to a few square feet of the gallery) were gradually becoming established, the sole attraction was either an organ recital by Mr. Bending or Mr. Statham, or else the excellent performances of a *string* military band—that of the Royal Artillery—under Cavaliere Zavertal, who happily, unlike some musicians of a later day, had a wholesome dislike for the noise of percussion instruments.

To round off this chronicle of the closing years of the century and of the management of Mr. Wentworth Cole (who died in 1901), there is very little to add. Memorable farewell concerts include those of:

Prosper Sainton, June 25, 1883.  
Christine Nilsson, June 20, 1888.  
(Also at Balfe Memorial Concert, June 10, 1885.)  
Sims Reeves, May 11, 1891.  
Edward Lloyd, December 12, 1900.

And, later,

Adelina Patti, December 1, 1906.  
Charles Santley, May 1, 1907.  
Emma Albani, October 14, 1911.

Among other great artists who have given concerts here, may be named:

Theresa Tietjens.	Nordica.
Trebelli-Bettini.	Paderewski.
Melba.	Jean and Edouard de Reszke.
Tetrazzini.	Caruso.
Lemmens-Sherrington.	Kubelik.
Patey.	Kreisler.
Clara Butt.	Pachman.

For many years, too, during the lifetime of William Carter and Ambrose Austin, all the National Saints'-day Anniversaries used to be celebrated by Festival concerts, which invariably drew large crowds. They belonged to the ballad order, it is true, but they gave opportunity for hearing the more familiar of our national melodies and aroused the right kind of spirit. There is room for them now if they could be revived in a

better kind of way. Meanwhile the grandest and most spectacular Festivals held at the Albert Hall are those connected with Freemasonry. The most noteworthy have been the following:

Installation of the Prince of Wales as Grand Master of the Freemasons (1875).  
Installation of the Duke of Connaught as Grand Master of the Freemasons (1901)—when the rank of Past Assist. Grand Director of Ceremonies was conferred upon the new Manager of the Hall, Mr. Hilton Carter.  
Bi-Centenary of the Grand Lodge of England (1917).

(To be continued.)

## THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF VINCENT D'INDY

BY M.-D. CALVOCORESSI

### I.—'LE CHANT DE LA CLOCHE'

Vincent d'Indy has written four dramatic works: 'Le Chant de la Cloche' (1885); 'Fervaal' (1895); 'L'Etranger' (1902); and 'La Légende de Saint Christophe' (1915). The first is intended for concert performance only, the other three for the stage. The fact that he has always written his own poems has afforded a foundation for one of the many specious arguments put forward in order to brand him as a mere imitator of Wagner, all of which are founded upon some superficial analogies, and ignore essential points—such as the quality of his motives, of his scoring; his methods of construction and working out; the idiosyncrasies of his harmonies and rhythms—in short, all that constitutes the substance of his music and determines its form and colour.

To the influence of Wagner d'Indy certainly owes a good deal: as much, perhaps, as to that of his own master, César Franck. Indeed, he is one of the very few composers upon whom Wagner's influence, generally dangerous in proportion as it is more direct, has proved beneficial. From all that Wagner teaches he has disengaged the vital principle of organic structure in dramatic music—extending it, and applying it to his own purposes: to the utterance of an artistic message which owes nothing to Wagner nor to any other composer, and is expressed in an idiom which, always free from any tendency to imitativeness, grows with the progress of d'Indy's evolution more and more typically his own.

As may be expected, it is in 'Le Chant de la Cloche,' a comparatively early work, that we find the most direct evidence of Wagner's influence—chiefly manifest in a few general characteristics of colour and movement. But the score evinces sufficient originality and vitality to justify in full the verdict by which it was awarded the Grand Prize of the City of Paris in the year 1885.

'Le Chant de la Cloche,' a dramatised version of Schiller's 'Lied von der Glocke,' consists of a prologue and seven scenes. The action takes place in an old city of Germany. Wilhelm, a