

## CHAPTER 4

### THE LONG DECLINE, 1928-1973

The previous chapters have focused on the first forty-three years of the existence of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney. Although these years were characterised by ups and downs, the evidence and arguments provided have established that the many successes experienced by the Philharmonic outweighed the financial anxieties and occasional artistic concerns. Many of the achievements of these years can be attributed to the leadership and visions of Roberto Hazon and Joseph Bradley. However, after the departure of Bradley, the accomplishments of the Philharmonic lessened and the problems that had nagged the organisation for years took their toll, ultimately leading to the demise of the Philharmonic Society in 1973.

Although many factors led to the Philharmonic's decline, the fact that thirteen different men held the position of conductor from 1928 to 1973 did not help the dire situation that the members of the Society were forced to confront. This constant change in leadership compounded the external difficulties facing the organisation: competition from other entertainments (later including the ABC), negative criticism from members of the press, a change in trends in music performance from choral to orchestral, and ongoing financial neglect from the City of Sydney Council and the State Government of New South Wales. These were the key external factors in the decline of the Philharmonic and will be further delineated in the proceeding chapter. The objective of the current chapter, then, is to document the Philharmonic Society's final decades and demonstrate how the organisation was undermined by the high turnover rate of conductors, specifically reflecting on the contributions and failures of these men in relation to the organisation.

Gerald Peachell, 1928-1931

Following the successes of Philharmonic conductors Roberto Hazon, an Italian national, and Joseph Bradley, an English musician, the committee decided to focus their search for a new conductor in Europe. The general belief in the Sydney music community at this time was that the music talent in Europe, specifically England, far outweighed that of Australia, and this decision indicated that the committee believed there were no suitable candidates in Australia. In some ways, this was an ironic view, as overseas musicians were often far more costly than hiring a local conductor. Society president Alfred Wunderlich commented on this higher cost, claiming it was difficult to interest suitable musicians to move from Europe to Australia unless a “fancy price” was offered.<sup>1</sup> After several months of interviews in England, Wunderlich, in conjunction with W. Arundel Orchard, who was also in London, recommended Gerald Peachell to the position. After receiving approval from the members of the Society, the former conductor of the Winchester City Choral Society and assistant music master at Winchester College was officially appointed to the position.<sup>2</sup> In the interim, Livingstone C. Mote, deputy conductor of the Philharmonic, led the organisation.

During his tenure with the Philharmonic, Peachell conducted only thirteen concerts, including the premiere performances of three works: Stanford’s *Phaudrig Crohoore*, Coleridge-Taylor’s *Tales of Old Japan*, and Parry’s *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*.<sup>3</sup> Although little happened within the Philharmonic during these years, 1929

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<sup>1</sup> “Philharmonic Society. Search for Conductor,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 1928.

<sup>2</sup> “The Philharmonic. Conductor Chosen. Mr. G. Peachell,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July 1928; “The Philharmonic. New Conductor. Mr. Peachell Now in Sydney,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 November 1928; “Philharmonic Conductor. Mr. G. P. Peachell Appointed,” *Australian Musical News* 18:3 (October 1928): 25; Gill, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Gill, 29. Gill describes these works as “small, but of a pleasing nature.”

marked yet another change in the hiring policy for concert space at the Town Hall. The Chief Secretary's office at the Town Hall notified the Society in March 1929 that the unions representing professional performing artists in Sydney had decided that an admission fee could no longer be charged for concerts featuring sacred music, including oratorios, performed in the Town Hall on Sundays, Christmas, and Good Friday. No amateur organisation was represented when this potentially disastrous decision was made.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, the Philharmonic performed Handel's oratorio, *Messiah*, on Christmas Day. Due to the change in policy at the Town Hall, the Philharmonic was forced to change the date of this performance to earlier in December. Fortunately, due to the popularity of this annual performance, this change in date had little impact on the financial success of the work.<sup>5</sup>

The stress caused by this new policy, combined with very difficult economic circumstances, led to Peachell's departure. In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* announcing his resignation, Peachell stated that he was returning to England because "home ties [had] proved too strong."<sup>6</sup> Aside from a plea for public support for the Philharmonic upon his departure,<sup>7</sup> Peachell said or did very little to affect the direction of the organisation. Due to the poor economic situation of the time, the committee decided not to hold an international search. This change to a local search

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<sup>4</sup> "The Philharmonic. No Christmas Night Concert. Government Intervention," *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 December 1929.

<sup>5</sup> In the years that followed, that Philharmonic continued to schedule their annual December performance of *Messiah* in the week or two before Christmas. It is not clear when or if the Sydney City Council altered this policy. However, it was noted in a committee meeting in 1950 that permission to charge admission to a performance of *Messiah* on Christmas Day would be sought from the Town Hall officials. "Minutes Book," 16 October 1950, 124, "Records of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney," NLA MS 5355, box 2; (hereafter material found in this source will be cited as "Minutes Book" with the date and page numbers to follow).

<sup>6</sup> "The Philharmonic. Peachell Resigns," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 July 1931.

<sup>7</sup> "Philharmonic Concert. Mr. Peachell's Farewell," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 September 1931.

reflected the shift in the public's identity from subjects of the British colonial empire to Australian citizens. Howard Carr, a British expatriate musician and current Australian resident, was selected as Peachell's replacement.

#### Howard Carr, 1932-1938

Although trained as a civil engineer, Howard Carr began conducting at age eighteen and later held the position of conductor at Her Majesty's Theatre at Carlisle, England. Before arriving in Australia to conduct light opera for the J.C. Williamson Opera Company in 1907, Carr also served as music director at a vaudeville theatre in England. Appointed permanent conductor of the Philharmonic at the start of the 1932 season, Carr faced profound musical and economic challenges.<sup>8</sup>

Worldwide, the 1930s were characterised by dire economic conditions that affected all aspects of life, with the performing arts being especially hard hit. In Sydney, the Philharmonic was dramatically affected by a lack of public support and experienced a loss of finances, a decline in subscriber numbers, and a lower morale among members. This decade also marked the founding of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. So significant was the ABC in the development and support of music and musical performances in Sydney and throughout Australia, it was suggested the "advent of radio broadcasting threatened [the Society's] very

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<sup>8</sup> Gill, 29; "The Philharmonic. Mr. A. Wunderlich President," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1932.

existence.”<sup>9</sup> The Philharmonic would spend the rest of its existence fighting for recognition, respect, and support from the ABC.<sup>10</sup>

In an effort to conserve funds, Carr abolished the Philharmonic’s policy of hiring professional players to form the organisation’s orchestra and reinstated an amateur orchestra for the specific purpose of performing with the Philharmonic, although professional musicians were needed to supplement the ensemble from time to time.<sup>11</sup> However, this effort was in vain, as the Society was forced to suspend its rehearsals and performances for the better part of 1933, due to a lack of funds. The following year, the members of the Society voted to suspend its activities, with the intent to re-audition its members in the hopes of being selected for association with the ABC.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to re-auditioning members, the Philharmonic also made a public plea for support from the greater Sydney community, particularly those who had been involved with the Society in the past. To that end, a letter, highlighting the Philharmonic’s accomplishments and pleading for public support, was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.<sup>13</sup> Despite their efforts, this reorganised Philharmonic was neither granted immediate association with the ABC nor received an outpouring

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<sup>9</sup> Gill, 31. Although this statement generalises the impact of all radio broadcasting on the Philharmonic, this quote is taken from the section of Gill’s history entitled “1932,” the year the ABC was established.

<sup>10</sup> For detailed information on the early history of the ABC see K.S. Inglis, *This is the ABC* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1983) and Ian Thomas, *Broadcast and Be Damned: The ABC’s First Two Decades* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1980). The direct impact of the ABC on the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney will be further discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>11</sup> “The Philharmonic and Howard Carr,” *Australian Musical News* 24:5 (December 1933): 23.

<sup>12</sup> Gill, 31; “Reorganisation. Royal Philharmonic Society,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 February 1934.

<sup>13</sup> Robert A. Dallen, “The Philharmonic Society,” (letter to the editor) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March 1934.

of public support. Nonetheless, the overall quality of the restructured ensemble did improve as the organisation prepared to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. The milestone was marked by a performance of Haydn's *The Seasons* on 14 November 1935; the concert also commemorated the silver jubilee of King George V. James K. Gill, a member of the Philharmonic, compiled a historical view of the Society for the occasion.

Despite the feelings of goodwill from the public that surrounded the Philharmonic during this celebration, the fact remained that the organisation's amateur orchestra was performing very poorly and the Philharmonic's concerts were not well attended.<sup>14</sup> Additional appeals for public support appeared in the press. To boost the artistic levels of their concerts, and in the hopes of attracting larger audiences, the Society approached the ABC requesting assistance in the form of personnel from the Commission's Orchestra, the Radio Choir, and/or the Wireless Chorus. This bid was successful and members from these ensembles augmented the Philharmonic's chorus and orchestra on several concerts, as noted on many of the Society's concert programmes from this time. This collaboration helped the Society to stay afloat during Carr's final years as conductor of the organisation.

The artistic highlight of Carr's stint with the Philharmonic was the production of a dramatised version of *Elijah* in 1938. Carr collaborated with stage director Humphrey Bishop to produce a staged version of Mendelssohn's oratorio. The production, prompted by the success of the same "experiment" in London in five years earlier,<sup>15</sup> ran for five nights at the end of January and beginning of February.

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<sup>14</sup> "The Philharmonic," *Australian Musical News* 25:11 (June 1935): 25.

<sup>15</sup> "The Philharmonic" *Australian Musical News* 24:9 (April 1934): 24.

Although the performances received moderate praise from the press, most critics agreed that *Elijah* was definitely not suited to the stage.<sup>16</sup>

Although it appears Carr left the Philharmonic on agreeable terms in 1938, the *Australian Musical News* suggested that he may have been forced out because he was not able to draw the large audience numbers required to sustain the Society.<sup>17</sup> Yet, there is no evidence from the Society's records to support this argument.

Nonetheless, Carr had seen the organisation through the Depression and the advent of the ABC. Under his leadership, the Philharmonic was reorganised and formed a provisional association with the ABC. Although the Philharmonic was settling down, the next year would prove to be one of the most explosive that the organisation had yet to face.

#### Curt Prerauer, 1938-1939

When Carr vacated the position of conductor and music director of the Philharmonic, the executive committee once again conducted a local search for his replacement. Carr's successor was Curt Prerauer, a German born Australian resident, organist, and conductor who had left his homeland when the Nazi party gained control of the government. Prerauer's résumé was extensive and included conducting posts at the Germany state opera houses in Oldenburg and Essen, coach and musical assistant at the State Opera in Berlin, vocal coach for the BBC's production of Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck*, and vocal coach and chorus-master to Sir Benjamin Fuller's opera company in Australia. He was also credited with organising studio operatic

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<sup>16</sup> "Elijah. A Stage Spectacle," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 January 1938; "Philharmonic Stages *Elijah*," *Australian Musical News* 29:8 (March 1938): 12-13.

<sup>17</sup> "Minor 'Mussolinis' in a Sydney Squabble: The Clash on Philharmonic Policy," *Australian Musical News* 29:9 (April 1939): 9.

performances for the ABC before accepting the conducting position with the Philharmonic Society.<sup>18</sup> During his concerts with the Philharmonic, he held the musicians to the highest standards; the critic for the *Australian Musical News*, for example, noted at the first concert of 1938 that Prerauer “evidently had made the players ‘stand up’ to the work of real preparation. Judged by ordinary criteria, the playing was very fair; by recent Philharmonic standards, quite brilliant.”<sup>19</sup>

This artistic improvement was not destined to last. In one of the shortest conducting stints with the Philharmonic, Prerauer resigned in February 1939 after only three concerts. This three-concert appearance with the Philharmonic was second only to Max Vogrich’s one concert engagement with the organisation in 1885. A report in the *Australian Musical News* suggested that Prerauer had been hired because his experience with opera performances was desirable to the Philharmonic as they continued their policy of opera performances on the concert stage.<sup>20</sup> Therefore it was ironic that Prerauer often attempted to overrule the committee on operatic programming decisions. He resigned in dramatic fashion at the annual meeting and released the following statement:

I have made many attempts to get a working basis with the committee. However, my hand has been refused on all occasions. Much as I like most of the members of the society, it is impossible for me to continue with the present management. In order to keep in step with the ever-increasing musical demands of Australia, it is necessary to adopt a modern policy. In this respect I did not meet with understanding. My endeavour to raise standards met with a lack of response on the part of executive officers....[I am] glad to say that I succeeded in having only one opera presented this season.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Philharmonic Society. Curt Prerauer Appointed Conductor,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 May 1938.

<sup>19</sup> “Philharmonic Dilemma,” *Australian Musical News* 29:2 (September 1938): 7.

<sup>20</sup> “Minor ‘Mussolinis’ in a Sydney Squabble: The Clash on Philharmonic Policy,” *Australian Musical News* 29:9 (April 1939): 9.

<sup>21</sup> “Philharmonic Society. Conductor Resigns,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 1939.

During the next week, insults were exchanged between Prerauer and members of the committee in the press. The Society's chairman, Edward Wilson, accused Prerauer of wanting to take over the management of the Society. Prerauer submitted his rebuttal the following day, calling Honorary Secretary George Alchin "a dictator."<sup>22</sup>

Since the minutes from the annual meeting are missing, it is not clear which side was at fault; most likely, both sides were to blame. The committee, for example, did not appear to consider Prerauer's suggestion that the Society needed to adopt a policy of programming modern music in order to ensure the organisation's continued existence. On the other hand, the committee obviously found Prerauer's tactics threatening, particularly in light of the ongoing economic crisis that faced the Society.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, according to a confidential internal ABC memo filed in 1940, although Prerauer was widely respected as a musician, he was unpopular in many music circles because of his aggressive personality. The memo also proposed a second probable reason for the Philharmonic's lack of patience with Prerauer. Many in Sydney's music community were suspicious of Prerauer's motives, as he had only recently arrived from Germany at a time when Australia was at war with that country.<sup>24</sup> No matter the motives, the fact remained that the Philharmonic was once again without a conductor.

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<sup>22</sup> "Philharmonic Dispute. Reply to Conductor," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 February 1939; "Conductor Forms New Society," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 February 1939.

<sup>23</sup> The critic for the *Australian Musical News* further investigates which side was at fault in "Minor 'Mussolinis' in a Sydney Squabble: The Clash on Philharmonic Policy," *Australian Musical News* 29:9 (April 1939): 9.

<sup>24</sup> Keith Barry to General Manager [Charles Moses], 22 April 1940, NAA SP173/1, Box 13, Prerauer. For more on this concept of "xenophobia" in reference to people of German descent living in Australia during both World Wars, see Macintyre, 155.

G. Vern Barnett, 1939-1946

Upon Prerauer's resignation, the committee hastily engaged the services of G. Vern Barnett as interim conductor, and the committee began their search for a new conductor

who not only [would] re-build the Orchestra (shaken by recent storms), strengthen the Choir, and conduct inspiringly, but also help the [organisation] back from troubled waters into the full flowing tide of musical progress and high achievement.<sup>25</sup>

By the end of the year, the committee determined Barnett fulfilled these criteria and appointed him permanent conductor of the Philharmonic. Barnett had been involved with the organisation for many years in the capacities of organist and deputy conductor and had a good rapport with the members. Perhaps more important to the committee, however, was that Barnett, a talented musician and leader in his own right, was willing to conduct the works programmed by the committee, usually without question. These works most often included concert renditions of operas, staged versions of oratorios, and the traditional favourites of Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn.

In the past seasons, other choirs had often augmented the choir of the Philharmonic. An interesting alliance was arranged for the 1939 Christmas performance of *Messiah*. As both organisations were experiencing low numbers in their choirs, particularly in the tenor and bass sections, due to World War II, the Philharmonic combined forces with the Hurlstone Choral Society.<sup>26</sup> Although this union produced one of the "most memorable performances of Handel's oratorio...in

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<sup>25</sup> "Sydney's Needs: Philharmonic Seeks Conductor after May 1," *Australian Musical News* 29:10 (May 1939): 23.

<sup>26</sup> The Hurlstone Choral Society was later renamed as the Philharmonia Choir. The details and history of this organisation, particularly concerning the Society's relationship with the ABC, will be described in the following chapter.

years,”<sup>27</sup> these two choral societies were in direct competition with each other, not only for audience members and public support, but also for an association with the ABC. In 1941, the Hurlstone Choral Society was offered a formal association with the ABC. Yet, in the name of music and for an opportunity to experience a sense of “normalcy” on the home front during Christmas, the Philharmonic and Hurlstone Societies set aside their competition.

The war years, the effects of which were compounded by the domination of the ABC in Sydney’s music scene, were some of the most difficult for the Philharmonic. An excerpt from the 1973 historical review of the Society describes the ongoing difficulties facing the organisation during these years.

Before long many names of those in the chorus and orchestra appeared in the programmes with an asterisk beside them. The asterisk denoted ‘On Active Service.’ By 1941 many of the young tenors and basses and a number of members of the orchestra, including the principal violin, Maurice Scott, were in the Forces....The war years were not easy ones for the Society. In addition to its own concerts, the ‘Phil’ and the Small Choir gave many performances for charities such as the Red Cross and in military camps and hospitals. Finances continued to be balanced precariously and the Management Committee had to veto proposals for the presentation of ‘new’ works because of limited funds.<sup>28</sup>

This excerpt makes note of a “small choir” that performed at many of the benefit concerts. The purpose of this choir, made up of selected members of the Philharmonic, was to perform additional concerts as a way to increase the Society’s annual profit, as well as promoting the Philharmonic by performing at charitable events. This summary also recognised the members’ desire to perform contemporary

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<sup>27</sup> “*The Messiah*. Fine Oratorio Singing,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 December 1939; “*Messiah* Strongly Performed. Two Battalions: Two Colonels,” *Australian Musical News* 30:6 (January 1940): 20.

<sup>28</sup> 1973 history, [16].

music, as had been suggested by Prerauer, but were unable due to ongoing financial concerns.

The Philharmonic felt obliged to perform concerts for patriotic causes even though their finances were already stretched, continuing the policy the organisation had established during the Boer War and World War I. Often during these years, concerts had to be reprogrammed, sometimes only a few weeks before a performance, because the committee was never certain how many men would be available to sing. For example, in 1943 Elgar's *Caractacus* was scheduled as the first concert of the season, but it was replaced at the beginning of March in favour of Sullivan's *Golden Legend* because Elgar's work required a strong male section that would not be available for the concert.<sup>29</sup>

Despite such difficulties, the organisation managed to rehearse and perform during World War II. In a letter from 1942, Honorary Secretary W.V. Lees relayed to the Society's president, Sir Ernest Fisk, a recent discussion about the possibility of suspending the Philharmonic's activities. According to Lees, "[o]ne or two suggestions were made to go into recess, but it was felt that 'music is not a luxury but a necessity of everyday human life' and so we have 'rolled up our sleeves,' and got on with the job."<sup>30</sup>

In the face of such difficulties, Barnett led the Philharmonic through the war years. Most likely due to the ongoing anxiety caused by the war, the critics were uncharacteristically kind towards the Philharmonic during this period. And as there

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<sup>29</sup> "Minutes Book," 1 March 1943, 3-4. This effort to reprogram the concert was in vain as it appears that this concert was eventually cancelled.

<sup>30</sup> W.V. Lees to Sir Ernest Fisk, 8 May 1942, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 6275/9. Fisk was also the founder of the Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd, incorporated in 1913. Murray Goot, "Fisk, Sir Ernest Thomas," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, 1891-1939, ed. Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1981).

are few surviving minutes from committee meetings and no annual reports from this period, it is difficult to determine the actual artistic level at which the ensemble was performing. Yet, according to concert reviews, it appears the public continued to support the organisation during this time, particularly as a way to escape the daily pressures of the war.

Despite the many issues that the Philharmonic faced during this time, the organisation managed to emerge from the period financially unscathed, with more than £100 reported in the treasury in late 1945, a surplus credited to Barnett's leadership.<sup>31</sup> At the year's annual meeting, the Society's retiring chairman, W.V. Lees, implored the members of the Society to "maintain the highest standard of music" now that the war was over.<sup>32</sup> Lees understood that although the organisation had weathered the war, it now faced the continuing challenges of the ABC, the changes in musical fashions, and increase in competition from other entertainments.<sup>33</sup> The Society hoped that Barnett was the person to lead the Society into the next phase of the organisation's evolution. However, that was not to be.

On 15 April 1946, less than two weeks before the Philharmonic's second subscription concert of that year, Barnett suddenly died at Goulburn, New South Wales, where he had adjudicated at the Goulburn Eisteddfod two days earlier. Roland Foster, a long time member, leading singing teacher, and, at that time, a vice-president of the Society, described Barnett as "one of Sydney's ablest and most respected musicians, as much admired for his personal qualities as for his knowledge and

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<sup>31</sup> "Minutes Book," 9 November 1945, 60-63. In any case, such success would not have been unusual during this period, as the entertainment industry recorded a financial boom during the 1940s.

<sup>32</sup> "Minutes Book," 2 November 1945, 64.

<sup>33</sup> The impact of these other forms of entertainment will be further addressed in the following chapter.

ability....He was an unfinished symphony.”<sup>34</sup> Under the direction of Livingstone C. Mote, the Philharmonic performed *Elijah* in memory of Barnett.

Barnett’s death raises the question of how the future of the Philharmonic would have been different if he had not died prematurely. His strong leadership and good-natured relationship with the choir and the committee would presumably have benefited the Society for years to come. Fortunately for the members of the Philharmonic, the committee recognised the importance of moving on and did not dwell on the loss of Barnett. The conductor vacancy was advertised in the capital cities in of the Commonwealth; in the end, however, the Society once again appointed the interim conductor to the position on a permanent basis.<sup>35</sup>

#### Livingstone C. Mote, 1946-1949

As with Barnett before him, Livingstone C. Mote was an active member of Sydney’s music community and had been involved with the Philharmonic for many years, often filling in as conductor. Roland Foster, in his autobiography, discussed aspects of Mote’s *curriculum vitae*.

Livingstone Mote, a man of many parts...is in charge of the theory classes [at the Conservatorium], assistant-conductor of the Conservatorium Choir, former headmaster of the Conservatorium High School, permanent lecturer for the Workers’ Educational Association and the present conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Society, one of the best they have ever had.

‘Livvy,’ as he is generally called, is a perpetual fountain of energy. He runs instead of walking, goes upstairs three at a time and makes a piano sound like an orchestra.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “Tribute to Late Vern Barnett,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 April 1946.

<sup>35</sup> “Minutes Book,” 1 May 1946, 75.

<sup>36</sup> Foster, 224.

During Mote's short term as conductor of the Philharmonic, it is difficult to determine the Society's actual financial and artistic situations from the reviews of the Philharmonic's concerts in the local newspapers. During these two years, Sydney's music critics made very few comments about the actual performances and focused instead on the merits and characteristics of the specific work(s) performed.

Fortunately, the minutes from the committee and annual general meetings, although biased in favour of the Philharmonic, shed a bit more light on the years in question. The ongoing concerns surrounding the ability of the Philharmonic's orchestra are evident in the minutes, with the policy of hiring professional musicians to augment the orchestra continuing during the Mote years. The minutes also recorded the poor attendance of the members at choir rehearsals and documented a continuing decline in the Society's finances.<sup>37</sup> These issues alone would have been detrimental to the morale of the Society. In addition to these personnel concerns, Mote's health, specifically his eyesight, was also failing, forcing the Society to appoint Dr. Ernest Toy as Deputy Conductor during Mote's absence for health reasons in May and June 1947. Mote was eventually forced to retire at the end of the 1948 concert season.<sup>38</sup>

However, before his retirement, Mote did experience some difference in opinion with the committee regarding programming decisions. One example involved the programming of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* for a concert in November 1947. At a committee meeting in August of that year, Mote strongly urged the committee to consider abandoning the performance of *Il Trovatore* and suggested replacing it with Wagner's *Lohengrin*. Although Mote's reason for this suggestion was not recorded in

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<sup>37</sup> "Minutes Book," 28 October 1947, 95; "Minutes Book," 11 June 1948, 100; "Minutes Book," 13 August 1948, 101.

<sup>38</sup> "Minutes Book," 2 May 1947, 90; "Minutes Book," 13 August 1948, 101.

the minutes from the meeting, it is likely that he believed the work was not suitable for the concert platform. At any rate, the committee denied his request and instructed Mote to continue rehearsing *Il Trovatore*.<sup>39</sup> As it turned out, the committee probably should have heeded his suggestion, as the *Australian Musical News*, arguably a more reliable critic concerning the Philharmonic's operations during this time than the *Sydney Morning Herald*, agreed with Mote and concluded that the work did in fact not belong on the concert platform.<sup>40</sup>

Despite an occasional difference in opinion, Mote left the Society on amicable terms. Following his final appearance conducting *Elijah* on 21 April 1949,<sup>41</sup> the Philharmonic appointed Dr. Toy as interim conductor until a permanent conductor could be found.<sup>42</sup>

#### Dr. Ernest Toy, 1949-1954

After serving as Deputy Conductor of the Philharmonic and leading the organisation in rehearsals and performances, Toy was appointed to the position of permanent conductor. Apart from his duties with the Philharmonic's large ensemble, Toy had also been conducting a smaller studio choir and orchestra made up of performing members of the Philharmonic on the request of radio station 2CH and

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<sup>39</sup> "Minutes Book," 22 August 1947, 91.

<sup>40</sup> "*Il Trovatore* Concertised [sic]," *Australian Musical News* 38:6 (December 1947): 22. The credibility of the *Australian Musical News* over the *Sydney Morning Herald* will be justified in the following chapter.

<sup>41</sup> Mote is recorded as leading the Philharmonic in the performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in "Royal Philharmonic Society of N.S.W.," *Australian Musical News* 39:11 (May 1949): 9. However, Toy was credited as being the conductor in an article by H.R.F., "*Elijah* at Town Hall," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 April 1949. The conductor of this concert is not specified in the "Minutes Book."

<sup>42</sup> "Minutes Book," 20 April 1949, 21.

Amalgamated Wireless Australasia (AWA).<sup>43</sup> The performances and activities of the studio choir, which was engaged in a limited recording contract with the AWA, had a positive effect on the overall standard of the larger choir, according to the 1949 annual report.<sup>44</sup> The Philharmonic already had an established cordial relationship with the AWA, as the committee held their meetings at the AWA Building and both choir and orchestra rehearsed in an AWA studio. The AWA management, led by Philharmonic president Sir Ernest Fisk, recognised the artistic potential, understood the history of the Philharmonic, and further acknowledged the organisation's need for financial and infrastructural support. In a period when subsidy was indispensable, it was this relationship with the AWA that kept the Philharmonic afloat during the 1940s and 1950s whilst the Hurlstone Choral Society, the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic, the Adelaide Philharmonic, and the Queensland State and Municipal Choir were receiving financial and artistic support from the ABC.<sup>45</sup>

Under Toy's direction, the Philharmonic continued to rehearse and perform, although not nearly at the same artistic level or frequency as years past. According to W. Arundel Orchard, many in Sydney's music community hoped Toy would "succeed in restoring at least some of the former prestige" of the Philharmonic.<sup>46</sup> To that end, Toy managed to maintain the Philharmonic's own amateur orchestra by organising

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<sup>43</sup> The AWA was formed as a result of a merger of the Australian Wireless Company, Telefunken, and the Australian branch of Marconi's Wireless Telegraphy Co Ltd in 1913. As mentioned earlier, Sir Ernest Fisk, was the founder of AWA and also served as president of the Society. Therefore, the Philharmonic's association with the AWA is not surprising. Murray Goot, "Fisk, Sir Ernest Thomas," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, 1891-1939.

<sup>44</sup> References in the Society's Minutes Book to the Philharmonic's studio choir's relationship with 2CH and AWA are found in the following entries in the "Minutes Book": 13 August 1948, 101; 11 December 1948, 104; 11 January 1949, 105; 20 April 1949, 107; 18 October 1949 (Annual General Meeting), 112.

<sup>45</sup> Relevant portions of these relationships will be further discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>46</sup> Orchard, 123.

orchestral rehearsals twice a week, thus limiting the organisation's reliance on professional musicians.<sup>47</sup> However, the committee was constantly forced to alter programmes, occasionally cancelling concerts due to inconsistent attendance at choir rehearsals.<sup>48</sup> Both low attendance and concert cancellations contributed to a low morale among the more committed members of the Society, and these constant changes did not help the already declining subscriber numbers. Subscribers who wished to support the organisation were looking for consistency in the Philharmonic; they wanted assurances that if they paid the subscription fee for four concerts, for example, that the Philharmonic would actually give four subscription concerts. In turn, this poor management of the organisation led to increased financial concerns.

Therefore, the committee was always looking for new ways to attract subscribers. The publication of a newsletter, *Philharmonic News*, was organised in 1949 as a means of involving the subscribers in the activities of the organisation.<sup>49</sup> The Society's "Younger Set," formed in the mid-1940s to promote the involvement of younger musicians with the Philharmonic and to provide an additional source of financial aid, continued to be successful in attracting younger vocalists to sing with the Philharmonic's choir. The involvement of the "Younger Set" was also successful in the long term; in 1952 for example, the *Australian Musical News* reported that the choir had "recently been augmented by the influx of numbers of younger singers

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<sup>47</sup> "Minutes Book," 2 November 1948, 103.

<sup>48</sup> Not all of the cancelled concerts were due to poor attendance. For example, the final subscription concert of 1948 was cancelled because of electricity and transport restrictions. "Minutes Book," Annual Report 1948-1949, 112.

<sup>49</sup> "Minutes Book," 16 November 1949, 113. There are no extant copies of this newsletter in the Society's records at the NLA or the Mitchell Library collection at the New South Wales State Library.

(male and female) and also young talent for the orchestra.”<sup>50</sup> Undoubtedly, this younger look and sound of the Society was a boost for the spirits of the members.

The committee did continue to attract well-known soloists to perform with the Philharmonic, although given the negative reports from the critics it most likely was the name and heritage of the Philharmonic, not the organisation’s current artistic levels, which prompted these soloists to agree to perform with the Society. In a performance of Handel’s *Samson* in 1950, the Society engaged the services of Joan Sutherland, a twenty-four year old soprano who had made her Sydney concert debut in 1947 as *Dido* in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*.<sup>51</sup> Oddly, her appearance with the Philharmonic was not mentioned in the reviews of the concert.

Despite the younger look of the Society and the appearance of well-known soloists, most of the reviews of the Philharmonic’s performance during the Toy years were either negative or neutral. Most common among the critics’ complaints was the low artistic standard of the Philharmonic’s amateur musicians and the organisation’s continuing policy of performing popular operas on the concert platform.<sup>52</sup> Despite the decline in support on various levels, the Philharmonic did manage some memorable performances under Toy’s direction. At a performance of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* in April 1950, the orchestra, which was described as a “stumbling block...in

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<sup>50</sup> “Minutes Book,” 30 September 1945, 67; “Verdi’s ‘Requiem,’” *Australian Musical News* 42:11 (May 1952) 19.

<sup>51</sup> 1973 history, [18]. Sutherland left Australia the following year to study in London.

<sup>52</sup> L.B., “*Samson* Sung by Philharmonic,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1950; H.R.F., “*Messiah* at Town Hall,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 December 1950; L.B., “Philharmonic Sings *Messiah*,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 December 1952; “*Samson and Deliah*,” *Australian Musical News* 42:7 (January 1952): 21; “Debits Outweighed Credits,” *Australian Musical News* 43:8 (February 1953): 19.

recent years,” performed much better than it had of late.<sup>53</sup> On 22 November 1954, the choir of the Philharmonic was invited to perform with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Hurlstone Choral Society, the Sydney Male Voice Choir, and the Conservatorium Select Choir in the premiere of Eugene Goossens’s oratorio, *The Apocalypse*. Although this involvement forced the Society to focus its entire rehearsal time three months prior the performance on Goossens’s work, the fact that the organisation was asked to participate improved the its public image. Reportedly, Goossens himself praised the Philharmonic Society for their help in the performance.<sup>54</sup>

At the end of 1954, Toy resigned from the position of conductor and music director of the Philharmonic. Although the reason for his departure was not given in the Society’s Minutes Book or speculated on by members of the press, the continuous stress of conducting an amateur music society with no real future and recurring financial problems were likely contributing factors. Despite the Society owing Toy more than £100 for services rendered, there were no hard feelings recorded between the departing conductor and the Philharmonic.<sup>55</sup>

#### Dr. Darrell Bailey, 1955-1956

In 1950, Dr. Darrell Bailey was appointed deputy conductor of the Philharmonic and conducted the ensemble on several occasions when Toy was

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<sup>53</sup> L.B., “Philharmonic Sings Bach *Passion*,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 1950. The performance was described as “devoted but uneven” in “*St. Matthew Passion*,” *Australian Musical News* 40:11 (May 1950): 23.

<sup>54</sup> F.H., “*The Apocalypse*,” *Canon* 8:6 (January 1955): 251, 264; L.B., “Oratorio by Goossens,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November 1954; “Hall Packed for Oratorio,” *Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 1954; Eunice Gardiner, “Laurels gift to Goossens,” *Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 1954; “Minutes Book,” 30 September 1955 (Annual Report), 194.

<sup>55</sup> “Minutes Book,” 17 January 1955, 184.

unavailable. Although very little is known about Bailey's qualifications, the committee decided that he would assume the conductor's post upon Toy's departure. When Bailey was named conductor of the Philharmonic in 1955, it was feared that the organisation would not last the year. The bank balance was at very low levels, with only £24 1s 6d in the Society's account prior to Bailey's debut as conductor in June 1955. At the time, it was estimated that his first concert, which featured a performance of Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* and Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy*, would cost upwards of £280.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps encouraged by the energy and spirit of a new conductor, the first concert of the Philharmonic under the baton of Bailey attracted a large and prestigious audience.<sup>57</sup> The *Australian Musical News*, in particular, was complimentary about the concert.

I would hazard a guess that the Philharmonic Society's first choral-orchestral concert for this year was the best in all the 70 years of the society's history. It was certainly the best of the last 10 years. In the past this royal and ancient body has been notorious for its uninspired performances of generally hackneyed and conventional works. Now under a new and youthful conductor, Darrell Bailey, it has taken a new lease on life.<sup>58</sup>

The immediate result of the successful concert was the increase in the funds available for the Society. In turn, this meant that the Philharmonic could continue to rehearse and perform and still afford to spend additional funds on professional musicians and publicity, thus increasing the performance standard of the organisation. This improvement by the Philharmonic was commented on in the *Canon* in 1956.

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<sup>56</sup> "Minutes Book," 18 April 1955, 189; "Minutes Book," 21 February 1955, 185.

<sup>57</sup> "Minutes Book," 30 September 1955 (Annual Report), 194.

<sup>58</sup> "Philharmonic Society" *Australian Musical News* 46:1 (July 1955): 11.

After seventy years of financial, numerical and artistic ups and downs, it is encouraging to note that the Royal Philharmonic Society is again making a significant contribution to this city's musical enjoyment.

Since January 1955, when Mr. Darrell Bailey was appointed Conductor of the Society, there has been a remarkable resurgence of interest and enthusiasm among members, and now, with a greatly enlarged choir and orchestra, the Society is presenting increasingly interesting and varied performances of well-known works.<sup>59</sup>

In spite of these successes and tributes from many of Sydney's music critics, the Society was still struggling to receive any sort of support from city officials. Several letters and requests were sent by the Society to the Sydney City Council, but to no avail. Nonetheless, the Philharmonic continued to perform at this higher standard.

Then in June 1956, the Philharmonic was struck two simultaneous and equally disastrous blows. The first was the sudden resignation of Darrell Bailey as conductor of the Society. Bailey stated he must resign as conductor owing to the pressure of business. According to the minutes from the committee meeting, "this [announcement] came as a great shock" to the members of the Society.<sup>60</sup> The Society's president, Roland Foster, regarded Bailey's resignation as "a very grave crisis in the affairs of the Society" and feared the organisation "might go down the hill unless something is done."<sup>61</sup> To further complicate matters, a formal written notice of resignation was not received by the Society from Bailey until April 1957, despite several attempts at correspondence on the part of the Society.

The second stroke of bad luck was a fire at the AWA Building, where the Philharmonic had been rehearsing, storing its music, and holding meetings for several

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<sup>59</sup> "Royal Philharmonic Society," *Canon* 10:10 (May 1956): 282. The present researcher studied all of the issues of this journal and determined that this was the only article specifically about the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney.

<sup>60</sup> "Minutes Book," 16 July 1956, 205. The nature of Bailey's business commitments is not specified in the Minutes Book.

<sup>61</sup> "Minutes Book," 30 July 1956, 306.

years. The organisation lost a significant amount of music and was forced to find a new venue to rehearse. The I.O.O.F. Building was eventually determined to be the best location and temporary arrangements were organised. A few months later, the Philharmonic relocated to a Commonwealth Bank building where a meeting and rehearsal venue free of charge was arranged.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, in less than a year and a half, the fortunes of the Society were again reversed. Once more, the prospects of the Sydney's oldest amateur music society were in serious doubt.

#### Gerald Williams, 1956-1960

In following with the trend of recent years, Gerald Williams, the former deputy conductor of the Philharmonic Society, filled the vacancy left by Bailey and was officially appointed permanent conductor following the receipt of Bailey's resignation in early 1957. He inherited an ensemble that was homeless, nearly penniless, and significantly down in membership numbers since the departure of Bailey. In the minutes from a committee meeting at the beginning of Williams's tenure, it was reported, "musically the society finds itself in a very good position, if it was not for the fact that it was continually dogged by the spectre of finance."<sup>63</sup> The challenge was issued for Williams to continue to improve the artistic standard of the Society in addition to bettering their financial position. However, under Williams's leadership, neither of these goals was met.

From 1956 to mid-1958, the number of performing members in the Philharmonic dropped from two hundred to eighty. This resulted in a very serious

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<sup>62</sup> "Minutes Book," 16 July 1956, 205; "Minutes Book," (1955-56 Annual Report), 210.

<sup>63</sup> "Minutes Book," (1956-57 Annual Report), 232.

financial situation, prompting the committee to register the Society as a charitable organisation with the authorities in Sydney. This would have then provided the Philharmonic with the opportunity to qualify for certain types of aid from various sources, including the City of Sydney. Despite this change in status, city officials continued to refuse to subsidise the Philharmonic and the organisation's circumstances did not improve.<sup>64</sup>

In 1959, the year that marked the Philharmonic's seventy-fifth anniversary, the committee debated a proposed amalgamation with the Hurlstone Choral Society. It was argued that this partnership would allow the legacy of the Philharmonic to continue in some capacity. Although the Philharmonic would have lost its identity to the Hurlstone Choral Society, the organisation would indirectly gain an association with the ABC. After much discussion, the issue was put to a vote and was defeated.<sup>65</sup>

In lieu of amalgamating with the Hurlstone Choral Society, Williams suggested that the members of the choir be re-auditioned to improve the Philharmonic's artistic levels. The committee determined that individual re-auditions would be demeaning for the members and would require a long and arduous process that the Society could not afford. Instead, the committee decided that the conductor would be allowed to move members of the choir during rehearsals so that he could hear them better as individuals. If Williams was not satisfied with any member, he or she would be required to re-audition. Then, "if members of some years standing failed in an audition they would be supplied with complimentary tickets for [twelve]

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<sup>64</sup> "Minutes Book," 23 June 1958, 244.

<sup>65</sup> "Minutes Book," 2 February 1959, 262.

months.”<sup>66</sup> This offer of a year’s worth complimentary tickets was not worth much at the time since the Society was only giving two or three concerts per year.

The downward spiral faced by the Society was chronicled by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which printed one scathing review after another until 1960, when it stopped reviewing the Philharmonic’s performances altogether.<sup>67</sup> One of the most contemptuous reviews questioned the standard of musical performances in general in Sydney in addition to harshly criticising the Philharmonic’s latest performance. In the review, the critic remarked, “In a community where so much ‘professional’ orchestral playing is amateurish, it is often a little hard to know what standard to apply to unpretending amateurs like these [in the Philharmonic].”<sup>68</sup>

With the incessant burdens of low membership numbers, harsh criticism in the press, poor finances, and low artistic levels taking their toll on yet another conductor, Gerald Williams notified the committee at the beginning of March 1960 of his intended resignation. The decline of the Philharmonic continued.

#### Juan Azaldegui, 1960-1961

Somewhat surprisingly, especially given the poor state of the Philharmonic and the severe recession gripping the Australian economy at the time, the committee received ten applications for the open position of conductor and music director. The

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<sup>66</sup> “Minutes Book,” 22 October 1959, 268.

<sup>67</sup> The present researcher used the indices to the *Sydney Morning Herald* to locate articles concerning the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney, previously the Sydney Philharmonic Society. After 1960, no reference to the Society appears in the index, thus implying that the *Herald* ceased to review the Society’s concerts. The present researcher did survey portions of *Sydney Morning Herald* from the early 1960s, but failed to locate any references to the Philharmonic.

<sup>68</sup> L.B. “Philharmonic Sings *Messiah*,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1957.

committee's choice was relative newcomer Juan Azaldegui. The *Australian Musical News* printed Azaldegui's biography soon after his appointment.

The choice of the committee fell upon a New Australian in Juan Azaldegui (final syllable pronounced "ee"), whose qualifications were backed by personal recommendations from Dr. Nicolai Malko, conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and Mr. Herbert Cannon, the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Federal Music Director....As music master at Riverview College and organist-choirmaster at St. Mary's Church, North Sydney, he has already done excellent work...<sup>69</sup>

With Azaldegui's selection, the committee of the Society was hoping to "enter upon a new and important chapter in its long and eventful history."<sup>70</sup> However, Azaldegui first had to work with the organisation to overcome the massive financial crisis that faced the Philharmonic; this crisis was further exacerbated by the cancellation of what would have been Azaldegui's second concert. By the middle of 1960, the Society's treasurer reported that the organisation had £70 13s 3d cash on hand but had debts totalling more than £265.<sup>71</sup> The organisation approached the Australian Performing Rights Association (APRA) for financial and structural support; unfortunately, the APRA was unable to provide any support to the Society.<sup>72</sup> The Society then decided to approach the City of Sydney officials, despite not receiving support from them in the past. Although the Philharmonic was unsuccessful in their bid for financial assistance from the city, the organisation did receive support from an unexpected corner. The *Daily Telegraph* reported the donation.

Sing loud hosannas! Sydney's Royal Philharmonic Society, now in its 75<sup>th</sup> year, was broke and in danger of extinction a month or so ago. Now it is back

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<sup>69</sup> "Sydney Royal Philharmonic Society Appointment," *Australian Musical News* 51: 6 (December 1960): 12.

<sup>70</sup> President and Past-President of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney to Mr. T. Brown, 22 August 1960, "Minutes Book," 248.

<sup>71</sup> "Minutes Book," 23 August 1960, 284.

<sup>72</sup> "Minutes Book," 15 December 1960, 300-301.

on its feet again – thanks partly to help from an unexpected source. Its major rival, the Hurlstone Choral Society, weighed in with an unsolicited gift of £50, leaving the Royal and ancient ‘Phil’ grateful and slightly shattered.<sup>73</sup>

This welcomed financial assistance was not enough to prevent the Philharmonic from cancelling its 1960 Christmas concert. A four-month recess followed to allow the Society to re-establish itself prior to the 1961 concert season. However, it was the events during this recess that led to Azaldegui receiving the unique distinction of being the only conductor fired by the Philharmonic Society.

In July 1961, Azaldegui spoke with a reporter from the *Sydney Morning Herald* without the permission of the committee. The subsequent article discussed the uncertain future of the Philharmonic, and although the tone of article was not positive, the report offered opinions about how the organisation might proceed. Although Azaldegui’s photograph accompanied the article, he was not directly quoted. Nonetheless, members of the committee and the choir found these comments distressing. It was decided that no action would be taken against the conductor with the provision that the committee must give prior permission to any future release of information.<sup>74</sup>

When rehearsals resumed, the committee noticed a “falling off” of choral and orchestral members, and some committee members blamed this decline on Azaldegui. This general decline in membership, low morale among members, and Azaldegui’s remarks to the *Herald* reporter prompted a heated discussion at a committee meeting called to determine the conductor’s future on 31 August 1961, at which Azaldegui himself was present. Many of those present believed the conductor was individually

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<sup>73</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 12 March 1961.

<sup>74</sup> “What Hope for the Philharmonic?,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 July 1951; “Minutes Book,” 2 July 1961, 328-330.

responsible for maintaining membership numbers and had determined that Azaldegui had been delinquent in this task. After much discussion, the chairman asked Azaldegui if he would consider tendering his resignation immediately; the conductor replied that he would like three or four weeks to consider. Despite Azaldegui's request, the committee voted seven members to two, with two members abstaining, to terminate his services from 1 September 1961.<sup>75</sup> With that vote, Juan Azaldegui became the first conductor ever to be fired by the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney.

H. Clifford Smith was appointed conductor pro-tem in order to finish the 1961 concert season. By March 1962, a replacement conductor had not been selected, Smith had resigned, and the Society had only enough money to operate for approximately four weeks. The committee was forced to once again suspend all activities of the Philharmonic.<sup>76</sup>

#### John Bryan Cranfield and Arthur H. Satchel, 1962-1968

There are only sketchy details available concerning the Philharmonic's activities during the next few years. Since the organisation was not performing on a regular basis and was competing with several other amateur and professional music organisations for publicity and support, no reviews of their concerts were recorded in the major Sydney newspapers. Additionally, notes and minutes from the committee's meetings are not available following a committee meeting on 15 November 1962 until

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<sup>75</sup> "Minutes Book," 31 August 1961, 339-342. An observation of the minutes from this meeting show the beginning of the notes and minutes from this meeting are in the hand of the honorary secretary, while the minutes taken after the departure of the secretary from the meeting are in a different hand. This suggests that the honorary secretary had supported Azaldegui's request and left the meeting in protest of the motion to fire the conductor.

<sup>76</sup> "Minutes Book," 18 January 1962, 357-359; "Minutes Book," 2 March 1962, 361; "Minutes Book," 6 March 1962, 364.

November 1971, and no printed programmes have survived from the end of 1962 to the middle of 1965.<sup>77</sup>

The following history has been constructed from information available in the Society's Minutes Book and the existing programmes. John Bryan Cranfield was appointed conductor of the Society in April 1962, thus allowing the Philharmonic to resume rehearsals and tentatively plan concerts. The organisation continued to struggle with the local and state governments for financial support and subsidies. Rehearsal attendance by both vocal and instrumental members persisted at very low levels, and it appears the Philharmonic only gave one concert in 1962.<sup>78</sup> It is very likely that the organisation may have once again suspended its activities following this concert, as no programmes or other information are extant until September 1965.

Just prior to the termination of the organisation's Minutes Book, there was considerable discussion among the committee members that performances by an amateur choir and orchestra formed by membership, such as the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney, "was out-dated in the musical world" and was a fashion of the nineteenth century.<sup>79</sup> The most viable options available to the Philharmonic were either finding someone who was willing to put all of their time and energy into reconstructing the Society or relocating the organisation to one of Sydney's suburbs to have a better source of focused support.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> "Minutes Book," 15 November 1962, 377-378.

<sup>78</sup> "Minutes Book," 3 April 1962, 366; "Minutes Book," 19 July 1962, 371; "Minutes Book," 20 September 1962, 374.

<sup>79</sup> "Minutes Book," 20 September 1962, 374.

<sup>80</sup> "Minutes Book," 18 October 1962, 375.

It appears that the Society tried the latter option first, as the organisation began to perform in September 1965 in the suburbs of Hurtsville, Ryde, and Marrickville under the direction of a new conductor, Arthur H. Satchel. There is no information available to confirm when Satchel was appointed as conductor, but the programmes indicate that he conducted the ensemble until the beginning of 1968. In addition to performing concerts on a fairly regular basis, Satchel also led the Philharmonic in annual performances in February at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney to mark the anniversary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. However, with little support from the public and no support from the government, a poor financial situation and low morale among members continued to plague the Society.

#### Pierre J.A. Lastelle, 1968-1973

According to the programmes available in the Mitchell Library collection at State Library of New South Wales and at the National Library of Australia, Satchel left the Society at the beginning of 1968 and was replaced by Pierre J.A. Lastelle. Although little is known about Lastelle's appointment to the position of conductor and music director, a limited number of programmes from his first years with the Philharmonic show that he continued the Society's trend of performing concerts in some Sydney suburbs,<sup>81</sup> but cast a wider net than Satchel to also include the suburbs of Drummoyne, Petersham, Bondi Junction, Five Dock, Strathfield, Stanmore, Riverstone, and Mortdale. The Philharmonic performed in a variety of venues in these suburbs, including churches, town halls, and bowling clubs.

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<sup>81</sup> 1973 history, [19]. This historical review suggests that this move to the suburbs was the direct result of a lack of funds. The review does not offer further details the years 1962-1965 when significant information is missing from the Society's records.

Lastelle also appears to have been the person the Society was looking for to reconstruct the organisation. Due to the lack of government support and no alliance with the ABC, and given the very competitive musical environment in Sydney where professional organisations, particularly orchestral and operatic, dominated the concert scene, the Philharmonic faced certain annihilation if they continued on as an amateur choral music club. There was simply not enough funding and support available in the saturated Sydney market. Lastelle recognised this and, presumably with the committee's support, proposed a complete reorganisation of the Philharmonic from amateur status to professional status. Under this change in status, the Society was authorised to pay its performing members in turn for the privilege of demanding a higher level of artistry and musicianship.

Consequently in 1970, the Society once again suspended its operations in the hopes of reorganising as a professional choral and orchestral ensemble. All members were re-auditioned and new members were invited to join in an effort to introduce fresh voices into what had become regarded as an old and worn out choir. The method by which Lastelle cut members from the choir caused many hard feelings among the members. Many of the members who were allowed to remain in the ensemble lost friends who were cut from the organisation following an unsuccessful audition. Several other "loyal" members, mostly men, were allowed to remain in the Society even though the audition adjudicators considered many of them to be "unsuccessful" in their audition.<sup>82</sup>

Following the appointment of a fully professional orchestra and choir, with still a deficiency in the numbers of tenors and basses, the Society began rehearsing for

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<sup>82</sup> The comment sheets from these auditions in 1972 are located in Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7091, box 1, folder 6.

their first professional season. However, a majority of those in the choir were frustrated with Lastelle's inability to improve the artistic levels of the Philharmonic in spite of the addition of fresh voices. In November 1971 for example, Lastelle informed the choir that there would be no concerts the following year, although rehearsals were scheduled to continue. The committee suggested that concerts for charitable causes be organised to help keep choir members interested. However, Lastelle insisted, "at the moment the choir [is] under standard for public performances."<sup>83</sup> Eventually, he did concede that performances at retirement homes and hospitals might be permitted, provided "such performances would not be advertised and the public would not be asked to attend."<sup>84</sup> This must have come as a demoralising blow to the members of the choir who had been assured that the Philharmonic was to make its professional debut in 1972. Furthermore, most of the new members of the organisation joined because of the change in the Society's status from amateur to professional. If the choir did not perform public concerts, the members of the choir would not get paid. Obviously, this would have been a source of considerable tension among the members toward their conductor.

Despite these internal struggles, "substantial financial underwriting of re-establishment costs by Philips Industries Holdings Limited" was secured, according to the 1973 historical review, compiled to commemorate this attempt at professional status.<sup>85</sup> Lastelle and the Philharmonic planned an ambitious first season that included Brahms's *Requiem*, Mahler's *Symphony No. 4*, Beethoven's *Mass in C*, *Symphony No. 9* and *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, Handel's *Messiah*, and additional

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<sup>83</sup> "Minutes Book," 16 November 1971, (loose sheet).

<sup>84</sup> "Minutes Book," 16 November 1971, (loose sheet).

<sup>85</sup> 1973 history, [18].

shorter works by Vivaldi, Mozart, and Bartok. Lastelle also hoped to engage Eugene Ormandy, Georg Tintner, Carl Pini, and Robert Pikler as guest conductors.<sup>86</sup>

Originally, the committee had intended the professional debut of the Philharmonic to take place in 1972. However, on the recommendation of “Public Relations Advisors,” the concerts were postponed to 1973 to allow time for the Society to raise additional funds.<sup>87</sup> During this time, Frank Murphy, the newly appointed choirmaster responsible for rehearsing the choir at several rehearsals, submitted his resignation to Lastelle. In his letter, Murphy cited several areas of concern with the operations of the Philharmonic.

I regret to inform you that it will not be possible for me to conduct the Royal Philharmonic Choir during the next few months. The programme that you have chosen is really outside my realm of interest....Furthermore, the relationship between choir master, and music director/Vice Presidents is hardly satisfactory. Normally members of the public seek advice from members of a profession: here the reverse is true, viz the amateurs are telling the professionals what to do, and this I cannot countenance. In addition, there does not appear to be sufficient space between the concerts planned for next year, and the rehearsals for the remainder of this year seem to have no point; some of the music selected for next year is of questionable merit. For these reasons, I suggest that [you] would be better off with someone else.<sup>88</sup>

Although Lastelle was able to find a suitable replacement in Michael Goodwin, this inconsistency in choirmasters would have been detrimental to the stable atmosphere Lastelle was attempting to establish. In the same way that stability in conductors breeds higher artistic standards, so does stability in choirmasters.

The first concert of the newly reorganised and professional Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney was finally rescheduled for 23 February 1973 and

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<sup>86</sup> 1973 history, [18]; Pierre J.A. Lastelle to [Past] Member[s], 23 August 1972, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7091, box 1, folder 1; Pierre J.A. Lastelle to [Past Members], 1 November 1972, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7091, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>87</sup> “Minutes Book,” 12 October 1971 and 16 November 1971 (loose sheets).

<sup>88</sup> Frank Murphy to Pierre J.A. Lastelle, 5 September 1972, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7091, box 1, folder 1.

was apparently highly anticipated. Roger Covell wrote a review of the first concert, which included performances of Beethoven's *Leonore Overture No. 372A*, Vaughan Williams's *In Windsor Forest*, Kalinnikov's *Symphony No. 2 in A (1898)*, Hill's *Green Water*, and Coleridge Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*. In the fairly lengthy review, Covell clearly stated that although the Philharmonic made a valiant attempt at performing at the professional level, they still had a long way to go.<sup>89</sup>

Thus began the Philharmonic's attempt at professional status. Unfortunately, things did not go according to Lastelle's plan. In February 1973, just prior to the Royal Philharmonic Society's debut as a professional organisation, members of the Society began to resign.<sup>90</sup> One of the earliest recorded resignations offers insight into the frustration felt by many of the members.

I must apologise for my outburst on Tuesday night; it was both ill mannered and uncontrolled. It was an expression of frustration caused by the unbalanced rehearsing times allowed for each piece to be performed....If I might make one comment on the choir it would be (and this is intended as a constructive parting shot) that I understand how frustrating it must be to conduct a choir with considerable amount of dead wood in it. The rehearsal fees might be better employed in many cases to bribe members to keep their mouths closed than to open them.<sup>91</sup>

In referring to the Philharmonic as "a choir with considerable amount of dead wood in it," this former member highlights the fact that although many very loyal members were cut from the Society when the ensemble was reorganised, the problem of worn

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<sup>89</sup> Roger Covell, "Philharmonic's Revival," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1973. Covell's comments will be discussed further in the next chapter.

<sup>90</sup> As the records of the Lastelle years prior to 1972 are incomplete, members may have resigned before this date; however these resignations immediately before and directly after the Society's professional debut would have directly impacted the future, or lack thereof, of the organisation.

<sup>91</sup> Unidentified choir member to Pierre J.A. Lastelle, 16 February 1973, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7091, box 1, folder 1.

out voices that had plagued the Philharmonic for years was still present. Many other members agreed with these observations.

Following the Philharmonic's professional debut in February, which was met with guarded optimism by the public, the press, and members of the Society, several more members resigned from the choir. The resignations continued following the Philharmonic's second, and final, concert series in April. Some who resigned cited previous business commitments and conflicts with school obligations, while others claimed unforeseen personal situations and some offered no reason.<sup>92</sup> One letter simply stated, "There are several reasons why I found membership less than satisfactory and I have reluctantly decided that I would prefer to sing elsewhere."<sup>93</sup> However, one letter of resignation from March 1973 provides the most insight into the internal dissonance that plagued the Society.

Having joined the Choir with enthusiasm and realising the future potential of such an organisation, I am sorry to see this being threatened. The Musical Director, in my opinion, should have his energies directed to an alternative and more appropriate channel. His inability to efficiently and effectively conduct a choral rehearsal is increasingly and painfully apparent. The sooner the Rehearsal Conductor is allowed to assume his role the better for the future of the choir. As there seems to be little hope of this happening in the near future I find myself unable to continue accepting payment whilst in this frame of mind. My sum satisfaction and the rightful enjoyment which singing offers is also suffering. I hereby tender my resignation from the Society.<sup>94</sup>

Although the Philharmonic did manage to perform a second concert, the organisation simply lacked the funding to continue. Consequently, the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney was forced to cease its operations, this time for good,

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<sup>92</sup> This collection of resignation letters is located in the Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7091, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>93</sup> Jean M. Long to Joan Constable (Honorary Secretary of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney), 11 September 1973, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7091, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>94</sup> Patricia Paul to Pierre J.A. Lastelle, 21 March 1973, Mitchell Library, MLMSS 7091, box 1, folder 1.

in April 1973. The long downward slide, which began following Bradley's departure in 1927, finally took its toll on the Society. The once glorious amateur music organisation had literally and figuratively sung its last song.

The final forty-five years of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney were in most ways completely contrary to the organisation's first forty-three years. The slow collapse of the organisation was the result of many factors. One of the most detrimental of these factors, as illustrated in this chapter, was the Society's inability to maintain consistency in its leadership. Other factors, which have been mentioned in this chapter, will be further clarified and justified in the following chapter.

"Time was when the huge spaces of the Town Hall could scarcely accommodate the crowds that flocked to hear the Sydney Philharmonic Society sing. Those were the great days of Roberto Hazon and Joseph Bradley."<sup>95</sup> Although the members of the Society put forth a valiant effort and many continued to support the organisation in the years that followed, it was not enough. Not only did the termination of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney mark the end of a musical organisation, it also represented the last stand of amateur choral ensembles in an era dominated by professional orchestras and opera companies.

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<sup>95</sup> "Philharmonic Fights On," *Australian Musical News* 26:5 (December 1935): 30.