CHAPTER 2
SIGNOR ROBERTO HAZON, 1889-1907

On 13 July 1889, an editorial printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared, “The Art life in this country needs deepening, widening, and elevating.”¹ The Sydney Philharmonic Society, in their quest for a new conductor, found a man who would assist in “deepening, widening, and elevating” the status of the arts, specifically the musical arts, in Sydney. His name was Signor Roberto Hazon, and he was unanimously selected by the Philharmonic’s committee from a field of eleven applicants to succeed Henri Kowalski as conductor of the Philharmonic Society.²

Previously, members of Sydney’s music community may have argued that the activities of the Philharmonic Society had been eclipsed by successes of the Sydney Liedertafel. However, under the leadership of Signor Hazon, the Sydney Philharmonic Society would quickly become the premier amateur choral organisation in Sydney and, according to the annual report from 1890-91, the leading ensemble of its type in the entire Colony.³ During Hazon’s time as conductor, the Philharmonic would perform the Sydney and Australian premieres of several choral works and would attract some of the finest local and international vocal soloists.

Despite these successes, the Society faced some difficulties during the Hazon years. Nonetheless, the conductor helped to firmly establish the Philharmonic in Sydney’s music scene. In addition to leading the Philharmonic through some of its greatest years, Hazon also made a lasting impression on Sydney’s music community.

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July 1889.

² 1889 report. The identities of the other applicants were not disclosed in this annual report or in any of the reports published in the Sydney press.

³ This level of dominance is suggested in *Sydney Philharmonic Society*. *Sixth Annual Report, Season 1890-1891* (Sydney: privately printed, [1891]); (hereafter cited as 1890 report).
He founded the Sydney Amateur Orchestral Society and made several guest
conducting appearances with other organisations in Australia. He also used his
elevated standing in the community to generate support for various charitable causes
and to speak out against a lack of government support for the arts.

The Life of Roberto Hazon

Roberto Hazon was born in Italy in 1854 and attended the Milan
Conservatorium of Music, where he was a classmate of Giacomo Puccini. While
enrolled, with the financial and artistic support of Giuseppe Verdi, Hazon studied
composition and conducting, with an emphasis on opera. He graduated with high
honours, receiving a grand superior diploma for composition as well as three medals
honouring him for his achievements. Before arriving in Australia at the end of 1886
with Martin Simonsen’s New Royal Italian Opera Company, Hazon conducted at the
Dal Verme, Milan’s second opera house, and at the Teatro Filarmonico in Verona.
Upon arriving in Australia, Hazon first lived in Melbourne where he conducted
operas, including several Australian premieres, in addition to making his debut as an
orchestral conductor. These performances earned him the reputation of a successful
and well-respected musician and conductor. In May 1889, at the request of George
Ringold, he accepted the position to conduct a series of concerts at Her Majesty’s
Theatre in Sydney and two months later was appointed conductor of the Sydney
Philharmonic Society. As conductor and music director of the Philharmonic, Hazon
was paid the same salary as his predecessors, £150 per annum.

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4 For more on Roberto Hazon’s contributions to the development of opera in Australia, see
Alison Gyger, Opera for the Antipodes: Opera in Australia 1881-1939 (Paddington, New South Wales:

5 Barton and Thompson, 4-5; 1973 history, [5-6]; “Grand Complimentary Concert,” concert
programme (Sydney: privately printed [1894]); Martha Rutledge, “Hazon, Roberto,” in Australian
Hazon’s First Philharmonic Concert

Roberto Hazon’s first concert as conductor of the Philharmonic, on 2 October 1889, generated more publicity than any previous Philharmonic concert. The main reason for the incredible amount of publicity surrounding the concert was not because this event marked Hazon’s debut as conductor of the Society. Rather the attention was focused on the soloist, Charles Santley, who had been engaged by the Philharmonic for the performance of Mendelssohn’s oratorio, Elijah. Santley, an internationally renowned English baritone, had been performing in Sydney since July; many in Sydney’s music community believed that Santley was the “most cultivated artiste...that ever visited Australia.” Each of his performances created more excitement among the members of Sydney’s music community than the previous, and his appearance with the Philharmonic was no exception. In the days leading up to the concert, numerous advertisements in the Sydney Morning Herald proclaimed Santley’s association with the concert, including an advertisement on 26 September that mentioned his name twenty times.

The concert, scheduled to take place almost exactly four years after the first Sydney Philharmonic Society concert, featured an orchestra of sixty-six members and a 384-voice choir, consisting of members of the Philharmonic augmented by members of the Y.M.C.A. Choir and Sydney Liedertafel. Since the concert organisers anticipated a large audience, the performance was held at the Exhibition Building.

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6 1889 report; Brewer, 90.

7 Sydney Morning Herald, 26 September 1889.
Tickets were colour coded to help patrons find their seats, and the programme announced that special trams had been arranged to run until 10.45pm.\(^8\)

Financially and artistically, the concert proved a success, fulfilling the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* concert day prediction that “the performance…is likely to mark an epoch in the history of music in Sydney.”\(^9\) The concert recorded the largest profit ever for an oratorio concert in Australia: £766.\(^10\) The review of the event printed on 3 October in the *Sydney Morning Herald* covered more than one and a half columns. In that review, the critic praised the concert, the Philharmonic, and Hazon.

Last night’s performance of Mendelssohn’s superb oratorio ‘Elijah’ must be reckoned a memorable landmark in the history of music in this colony….To the Philharmonic Society, under whose auspices the oratorio was given, belongs the largest share of the commendation which must be bestowed for the general success of the performance….To Signor Roberto Hazon special praise is due. As an Italian, whose musical experiences have principally lain in the direction of operas, it is not possible that he can have had much previous acquaintance with works of this class…. It must now be recorded to his credit that he showed last night not only a fine conception of the oratorio as a whole, but also ability to enter into the spirit of details.\(^11\)

The concert was also a major social event, with more than 3000 people attending; “of course, ‘everybody who is anybody’ was there, from His Excellency the Governor and his suite, and Sir Alfred Stephen, the Lieutenant Governor, downwards,” according to the *Herald*.\(^12\)

In spite of the artistic success of the concert, the Philharmonic’s management of the concert upset the patrons of the organisation. In the days immediately preceding the event, the Philharmonic altered its ticketing policy. Originally, the

\(^8\) “The Elijah Performance,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 October 1889.


\(^10\) Barton and Thompson, 5.


\(^12\) “Elijah,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1889.
ticket prices were advertised as reserved chairs 5s, second seats 3s, and balcony 2s,\textsuperscript{13} thus implying that the second seats and balcony were general admission and not reserved. However, the day before the concert, and without an explanation, the less expensive seats were raised to 5s, with early admission from 6.30pm allowed.\textsuperscript{14} Understandably, the Philharmonic was attempting to collect as much profit as possible given the heightened level of public interest and the cost of hiring a well-known soloist.\textsuperscript{15} On the other hand, this decision could have seen the end of the organisation. Many of those who planned to attend the concert but were prohibited from doing so because of the change in ticket prices wrote to the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} to express their anger and disappointment. One letter from a prospective patron read,

I have been long hoping to hear ‘Elijah,’ with Santley in his inimitable part, and now my hopes of taking my family of seven, all over 13 years, has been frustrated by this un-English and unprincipled arrangement. The cost to me would have been 14s., but now it is 35s., which I cannot afford.\textsuperscript{16}

Angry letters from patrons who had attended the performance also appeared in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}. One patron appreciated the musicality of the concert, but suggested the “Philharmonic Society’s musical efforts will be nullified if incompetent management of their concerts be not banished.”\textsuperscript{17} The patron cited the following as examples of “incompetent management” at the concert: young boys selling libretto and programme books during the concert (even during the solos), filthy chairs and floor, and the conclusion of the concert a half hour later than announced. This final

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\item \textsuperscript{13} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 26 September 1889.
\item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 1 October 1889.
\item \textsuperscript{15} The annual report does not specify the amount of money paid to the soloists.
\item \textsuperscript{16} W.B., “The Philharmonic Society,” (letter to the editor) \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 2 October 1889.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Reserved Seat, “The Elijah Performance,” (letter to the editor) \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 4 October 1889.
\end{itemize}
grievance resulted in some patrons having to leave their seats during the National Anthem in order to catch their train, which further disrupted the concert. A second letter expressed disappointment in the method in which audience members were admitted to the concert. The author claimed she was one of several people who had to stand outside in the cold, in evening finery, waiting for the doors to open.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* critic added his personal disdain at one additional aspect of the concert. In an article published 5 October, the critic stated that none of the soloists were from Sydney; more specifically, with the exception of the featured English soloist Charles Santley, the soloists were from Melbourne. The critic claimed Melbourne’s music supporters would boycott a concert in that city if even one Sydney soloist were featured. Ironically, in the original review of the concert printed the day after the performance, the reviewer was highly complimentary of the soloists. However in this later article, the soloists’ singing styles were criticised in the following manner: “It would, perhaps, be hardly an exaggeration to affirm that [these soloists]…never study the written ‘time’ of the notes at all.”

In spite of the numerous negative comments that appeared in the press in the days following the concert, none of the remarks were recorded in the Philharmonic’s 1889 annual report or subsequent historical accounts. Rather, the Philharmonic focused on the success of the concert. This success, despite the public backlash from the poor management of the concert, prompted the Society to produce two encore performances of *Elijah*, on 12 and 17 October, in response to what they considered to

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20 “Music and The Drama,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October 1889.
be the “demand of the public and the Press.” The Philharmonic, however, did receive some encouragement from the music community. In a letter written to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, it was suggested that the *Elijah* performance be repeated at “popular prices.” It was later advertised that tickets for the reserved seats on the main level were 5s apiece or 5 tickets for 20s; any of these seats remaining on the night of the performance were 3s. Balcony seats were 3s and a seat in the promenade was 1s. These lower prices would allow more people, other than Sydney’s social elite, to attend the performance. Such a venture would have been financially possible because the excitement surrounding the recent performance of the work was still in the awareness of potential audience members; thus excessive additional advertising was not required. This was the beginning of the Philharmonic’s efforts to enlarge their audience demographics to include people not members of Sydney’s upper class. In order to reassure the public that the management fiascos experienced in conjunction with the 2 October concert would not be repeated, the Society published explicit ticketing and seating instructions in the press.

At the final *Elijah* concert, Lord Carrington, the patron of the Sydney Philharmonic Society, publicly congratulated Hazon and presented him with a “gold

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21 1889 report.

22 Ex-conductor, “The Elijah Concert,” (letter to the editor) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October 1889. It is not clear exactly who the author of this letter was. It may have been Kowalski, the Philharmonic’s previous conductor, or the author may have been a former conductor of another ensemble.

23 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1889.


25 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1889.
chain and locket on the behalf of the Society and admiring amateurs.” Thus began Signor Hazon’s tenure with the Sydney Philharmonic Society. He had picked up as conductor of the organisation where Kowalski left off. In his first concert with the Philharmonic, he led the musicians to great artistic levels, despite controversy and management problems. His ability to lead the Philharmonic through times of struggle would prove invaluable during his years as conductor of the Philharmonic Society.

**The Philharmonic Society and the Sydney Town Hall**

The Philharmonic continued their busy 1889 season by performing upon request of the civic authorities at the ceremonial opening of the concert hall at the Sydney Town Hall on 27 November 1889. This invitation to perform once again signified the way in which the Philharmonic’s music was integrated into public ceremonies in Sydney. The Philharmonic was one of many ensembles to perform at the event, where they performed the hymn “Old Hundredth” and the “Hallelujah” chorus from *Messiah*. The opening of the performance space at the Town Hall, also referred to at the time as Centennial Hall, was a significant event for the future of all musical performances in Sydney. Thompson and Barton described the importance of the new performance space provided by Town Hall in their historical review of the Society from 1903.

The opening of the Town Hall had a direct and beneficial influence upon musical art in Sydney [and]...provided at once a central chamber and one of noble proportions. It is officially quoted as the largest Town Hall in the British Empire. The dimensions are 166 x 85 feet….When crowded, the Concert Hall

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26 Barton and Thompson, 5.

27 Construction on the Town Hall began in 1869 and was marred by controversy. For more on the history of the Sydney Town Hall, see the chapter entitled “How to Build a Town Hall” in Shirley Fitzgerald’s *Sydney: 1842-1992*. 
at Town Hall could accommodate 3000 audience members and a 400-piece orchestra and chorus.\textsuperscript{28}

Despite the ceremonial opening of the Centennial Hall, the performance space was not yet completed. Thus, the Philharmonic presented the annual \textit{Messiah} performance at the skating rink at Darlinghurst Hall. According to evidence in the Society’s annual report, the reputation of the Philharmonic drew one of the largest audiences ever to attend a performance of Handel’s oratorio, despite the less than ideal venue.\textsuperscript{29} The success of the Philharmonic’s expanding audience is also indicative of the popularity of amateur choral music in Sydney at this time, as well as the public’s insatiable desire to hear a performance of \textit{Messiah}. Unfortunately, the Philharmonic had to wait until 20 August 1890 to give its first concert at the Town Hall. In the meantime, the committee decided that the Philharmonic would not perform at any other venue before the completion of Town Hall because of the great expense incurred by the Society in the erecting of a performance platform at any other location.\textsuperscript{30}

Although the 1890 concert season had a late start, the Philharmonic managed to perform three separate and respectable programmes in just four months. The first performance in August was not only the Philharmonic’s inaugural performance in their new “home” but also marked the first public performance on the new Town Hall organ. W.T. Best, the organist at St. George’s Hall in Liverpool, England, played the Town Hall’s “Grand Organ” in the Philharmonic’s rendition of Handel’s \textit{Judas}

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\textsuperscript{28} Barton and Thompson, 5, 9.
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\textsuperscript{29} Barton and Thompson, 5-6; Gill, 12; 1973 history, [6].
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\textsuperscript{30} 1889 report.
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Maccabæus. 31 As with the Elijah performance of 1889, Judas Maccabæus also received an encore performance at popular prices. 32 Large audiences, undoubtedly eager to hear the Philharmonic in the new venue and further encouraged by the cheaper ticket prices at the second performance, attended both concerts.

In the annual report from 1890, the committee gave their approval of the new facilities provided by the Centennial Hall:

[The performance space] has proved most suitable acoustically, and enabled proper provision to be made for the comfort of subscribers and the general public…. [The] officials of the Town Hall… [have] been most anxious to afford every assistance to the Society, and to meet the wishes of the Committee in every possible way. 33

Ironically, this amicable relationship between the officials at the Town Hall and the Philharmonic’s committee would not be maintained in later years.

Following the Philharmonic’s remaining performances of 1890, the members of the Sydney press noted the improvement made by the organisation since the appointment of Hazon as conductor. 34 As well as improving the overall standard of the Philharmonic, the addition of “popular” ticket prices under Hazon’s leadership allowed more of the public, not just the elite, to attend the Philharmonic’s performances.

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31 According to Ernest Wunderlich, entrepreneur and self-proclaimed supporter of the arts, the organ was tuned at a pitch lower than the standard for an orchestra during this time. Therefore it is likely that the organ would have sounded out of tune with the orchestra, despite efforts on the part of the instrumentalists to tune to this lower “philharmonic pitch.” Wunderlich, 28.

32 Barton and Thompson, 6.

33 1890 report.

The Growth of the Philharmonic

According to the programme from the Christmas performance of Messiah in 1890, the Philharmonic Society included 350 choral and orchestral musicians, a relatively large ensemble at that time. At the same time, the Melbourne Philharmonic Society, for example, consisted of 226 performing members, all of whom were vocalists as there was no longer an orchestra associated with the Melbourne Philharmonic Society. Due to the strong leadership of Hazon and the increasing number of successful performances by the Sydney Philharmonic Society, membership in the organisation grew over the Christmas holiday break. When the Philharmonic resumed its concerts in 1891 with two performances of Arthur Sullivan’s The Golden Legend, the Philharmonic boasted a roster of 408 musicians. It should be noted, however, that not all of the musicians performing with the organisation were paying members, as professional musicians often supplemented the orchestra. Nonetheless, this increase in membership contributed to the recorded annual profit of £3,300. However, only £502 actually came from yearly subscription and membership fees. The rest of the money came from individual ticket sales for single concerts. Since the Philharmonic was a non-profit organisation, this money was used to cover the annual expenses incurred by the Society. Their budget included concert expenses, such as the hiring of Town Hall, the conductor’s salary, a stipend for the rehearsal accompanist, gas and cleaning costs for the rehearsal space, music hire costs, purchases of chairs and music stands, and the “general expenses” of the printing of programmes and advertisements and repairs to the music part books. In order to

35 Carne, 114. The organisation’s amateur orchestra had been disbanded with the formation of the Victorian Orchestra, and the number of performing members in the Melbourne Philharmonic Society was less than originally predicted, most likely because approximately 100 prospective choir members failed to pass the Society’s audition examination.

36 1890 report.
secure a stronger financial situation, the committee again set out to increase membership. As a result, the committee hoped that the Society would be in a more stable financial position, with a more reliable income from membership fees.

The membership drive paid off as the Society’s membership increased throughout 1891: 359 members were recorded at the end of May in the 1890/91 annual report, 423 members performed in a production of Sir Michael Costa’s *Eli* in September, and 500 musicians performed in the annual *Messiah* performances at the end of the year.\(^\text{37}\) Although these numbers are approximate, largely due to the professional musicians and non-members who often performed with the Philharmonic, the trend of an increase in performing members is clear. In addition to boosting the number of subscriptions for performing members, annual subscriptions for non-performing members also grew.

The ongoing success of the Philharmonic was again attributed to the leadership, musicality, and talent of their conductor and music director, Roberto Hazon. In the annual report following the success of the 1890/91 season, the committee expressed its heartfelt appreciation for the work Hazon had done with the organisation and hoped that under his leadership

the Society may, during the coming Season, advance still further on the road to perfection, and maintain for itself the proud position which it now holds of being the principal musical organization of this Colony.\(^\text{38}\)

Much of the support for this self-proclaimed “proud position” was reflected in the soloists who performed with the Philharmonic as well as the organisation’s rise in musical strength and increased financial stability. Hazon understood the artistic and financial benefits of attracting top international vocal talent, oratorio specialists in

\(^{37}\) These numbers were gathered from the printed programmes for those concerts.

\(^{38}\) 1890 report.
particular, to perform in Sydney with the Philharmonic. Not only did attracting such talent generate a large audience, the opportunity for members of the Society to perform with renowned soloists also increased the Society’s morale and artistic output. For many years, it was not a financially viable option for well-known artists to travel to and perform in Australia, particularly when the salaries available in Europe were much higher. However, in the late 1880s, at about the same time Hazon arrived in Sydney, the market for those soloists who wished to visit Australia improved. Not only was the voyage from Europe “discovered to be one of pleasure and recuperation,” visiting soloists also discovered that there was money to be made in Australia. In addition, the level of musical performance in Australia was quickly becoming comparable to many of the European performance venues. In the two years since Hazon had been appointed conductor, the Philharmonic had performed with the internationally renowned vocalists Charles Santley, Madame Patey, and Signora Antionetta Link and English organist W.T. Best, in addition to many talented Australian soloists. In 1892, Hazon and the Philharmonic were able to secure the services of a man considered by many at the time to be one of the greatest basso soloists, Signor Foli.

The Foli Festival Failure

Under normal circumstances, the scheduled concert appearance of celebrity vocal talent practically guaranteed positive financial results. Yet, there was a sizable

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39 Sydney Morning Herald, 13 July 1889.

40 Sydney Morning Herald, 13 July 1889.

41 “Amusements,” Sydney Morning Herald, 6 July 1892. For more information on Australia being part of the touring circuit for entertainers, see Richard Waterhouse, From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: The Australian Popular Stage 1788-1914 (Kensington, New South Wales: New South Wales University Press, 1990).
risk involved with engaging famous artists. Due to the large amount of money required to confirm the engagement of a featured soloist, an organisation could be left financially devastated if the featured soloist failed to perform to the expected level. This was the unfortunate result that the Philharmonic was forced to face at the end of the so-called “Foli Festival.”

Signor Foli, the stage name for Irishman Allan James Foley, was world renowned for his performances of oratorio and opera in England, Austria, America, France, Italy, and Russia. He was engaged to join forces with the Philharmonic for a series of four concerts at Town Hall: two performances of Haydn’s *Creation* in May and two performances of Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* in July. The *Creation* concerts proved an artistic and financial success, as Foli lived up to his reputation, and the excitement and anticipation for the next set of concerts escalated. However, Foli only sang in the first of the *Elijah* concerts. Members of the Philharmonic later recorded the “baritone music of the ‘Elijah’ proved beyond Signor Foli’s powers, which were at their majestic, declamatory height in Haydn’s masterpiece [the *Creation*].” While this may have been true, Foli was also apparently suffering from a sore throat, which further impeded his performance of *Elijah*. Following the first July concert, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported,

> [the production] should have been equal to any that have preceded it. Unfortunately, Signor Foli was not able to do himself full justice. In the first part of the oratorio, indeed, he sang with so much courage that few suspected the pain he was suffering. During the interval, however, the Mayor explained that the famous basso was suffering from sore throat, and craved the indulgence of the audience on that account.

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43 Barton and Thompson, 7.

44 “Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 1892.
Whatever the reason for Foli’s poor performance, the fact still remained that he did not perform at the level expected. As a result, ticket sales for the second *Elijah* concert faltered. To make matters worse, Foli did not perform at the concert, and although no explanation for his absence was given, many believed he was still ill. Mr. F. J. Hallewell, a member of the Philharmonic who had performed as a soloist with the organisation at previous concerts, sang the lead role of *Elijah* in Foli’s stead at the 9 July performance.45 Although Hallewell sang well, the concert was a financial failure, not only because Foli performed so poorly on the first July concert, but also because he was not able to perform at all on the second concert.

In an attempt to rectify the situation, Signor Foli volunteered his services and again sang with the Philharmonic in a third performance of the *Creation* on 5 August. However, inclement weather, compounded by the stigma surrounding Foli’s ability, prevented many people from attending. Signor Foli apparently performed excellently, despite the presence of one of the smallest audiences ever to attend a Philharmonic concert.46 Thus, the Foli concert series was not the financial success hoped for by the Society, and the substantial and undisclosed fee paid in advance to secure Foli’s services further adversely affected the financial situation. As the nation was in the grips of an economic crisis, the organisation was left to face the most serious financial situation of its existence. The Society now had to confront the impending suspension of its activities.

The subscribers and friends of the Society attempted to raise funds for the Philharmonic at a benefit concert held on 19 November. This concert brought together the forces of Sydney’s finest amateur music organisations, including the


46 “Haydn’s *Creation*,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 August 1892.
Sydney Liedertafel, the Metropolitan Liedertafel, and the Sydney Amateur Orchestral Society and featured local talent; Roberto Hazon and John A. Delany shared the conductor’s podium. The purpose of the concert, as described by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was to raise enough money to repay the debt acquired by the Philharmonic. However, the audience was relatively small and the event did not raise enough money for the Society to balance its books.

### The Society Suspends its Activities

As a result, the Philharmonic Society was forced to suspend its rehearsals and performances for one year, in an attempt to regain financial stability. The committee released the following statement expressing this decision.

> The Committee of the Sydney Philharmonic [expresses] its gratitude to the Societies for having generously assisted, as at this time the Sydney Philharmonic Society [has] suffered severely financially in the endeavour to place before the public, music, both old and new, with the best available talent…. [T]he support of the public to a large extent, is the bank upon which such a Society must draw. Failing that, the Society…[must take] a long recess.

The recess lasted until 20 November 1893, when the Philharmonic resumed its public performances with a concert at Town Hall. The abbreviated 1893 concert season included only one other event: a revival of the traditional and very popular Christmas performance of the *Messiah* on 21 December. Although the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic reviewed neither of these concerts, the performances must have achieved an acceptable level of financial success, as indicated by the continuation of rehearsals and performances after only two performances. Thus, the financial situation was not as dire as was originally thought at the end of the 1892 season.

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48 Barton and Thompson, 7. This suspension included the 1892 Christmas *Messiah* performance.
Rather, the Society just needed time to reorganise its budget and replenish its accounts.

Reflecting on the history of their organisation, the committee realised oratorio performances could be successful, despite the financial debacle surrounding the “Foli Festival.” However, the committee also learned that hiring celebrity vocalists was an expensive risk that could lead to financial distress. Nonetheless, when the Sydney music community received the notice that Madame Belle Cole would be in Australia in 1894, the committee decided to engage her services for an oratorio festival.

The Belle Cole Oratorio Festivals

Although the Philharmonic Society was once again on stable financial grounds, the committee knew that the Society could easily be facing another crisis if the organisation took too many chances. Despite the risk, the committee engaged the services of Belle Cole and her opera company, which included Charles McGrath, Philip Newbury, and his wife, Emily Spada, for a series of concerts in June 1894.

This festival was the first of its kind in Sydney, although oratorio festivals on a much smaller scale had been produced by various organisations in the past. Effectively, the future of the Society depended on a positive outcome of the festival, and the committee believed a total audience attendance of ten thousand was required to gain a profit from the festival. In spite of the widespread popularity of Belle Cole, some of the most popular oratorios of the day were programmed for each of the four Town Hall concerts, in the hopes of securing the large audience numbers needed to guarantee a profit. These works included Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* and *Lobgesang*, Handel’s *Samson, Judas Maccabaeus*, and *Messiah*, and selections from Costa’s *Eli*.

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49 Barton and Thompson, 7.
The atmosphere in the Town Hall at the first concert on 5 June was exhilarating, as the “vast chamber thronged [and the choir] formed an imposing spectacle”50 as they performed Elijah. The second concert, only two days later, drew an even larger audience, perhaps because of the variety of pieces programmed. Although the third concert on 9 June featured the immensely popular Messiah, the sold out audience at the Town Hall was attributed to the excitement created by the oratorio festival. According to the Sydney Morning Herald, approximately four thousand people were admitted to the concert and one thousand more were turned away at the door.51 With one performance of the oratorio festival still remaining, the festival was declared a financial success, and the immediate future of the Philharmonic Society was guaranteed. The final concert of the festival included encore performances of the selections performed on 7 June, again to a sold out audience.

Due to the large scale of the festival, the final profits were relatively small; nonetheless, the Philharmonic had succeeded in its goal of making a profit from the venture. More importantly, the organisation gained valuable positive public opinion and criticism in the press. The Philharmonic had re-established its reputation as the leading amateur music society in Sydney. The Sydney Morning Herald critic praised the success of the festival and applauded the efforts of the Society, concluding

[the festival] never could have taken place had not the Philharmonic Society accepted terms which practically put substantial profit out of the question. But, whatever the exact nature of the arrangement, it has sufficed to enhance the prestige of Signor Hazon and our premier musical association.52

50 “The Oratorio Festival,” Sydney Morning Herald, 6 June 1894.
51 “The Oratorio Festival,” Sydney Morning Herald, 11 June 1894.
52 “The Oratorio Festival,” Sydney Morning Herald, 13 June 1894.
Following closely on the success of the Belle Cole Festival, the committee of the Philharmonic Society decided to schedule a second oratorio festival to take place in the Town Hall later the same year. The committee had evidence from the Belle Cole Festival that international celebrity soloists, although more expensive than local talent, had the potential to attract large audiences, particularly when these soloists were engaged to perform the most popular oratorios of the day. Consequently, the services were again rendered of Belle Cole and Charles McGrath, in conjunction with vocalists Madame De Vere Sapio and Jules Simonsen and solo violinist Camillo Urso. Advertised as “Grand Musical Festival,” a three-concert series, featuring *Elijah*, *Messiah*, and Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*, along with a variety of favourites, was organised for the end of September and beginning of October. Fortunately, as with the oratorio festival in June, this festival was a success, and large audience numbers were recorded at all three concerts, despite “many counter-attractions” in Sydney during the same time.\(^{53}\) The *Sydney Morning Herald* placed the success of this festival above the previous Belle Cole Festival, describing the concerts as “the most important musical festival yet given in Sydney.”\(^{54}\)

The success of both of the 1894 festivals, as well as the failure of the Foli Festival in 1892, were the direct result of the Society’s engagement of the services of visiting professional soloists. The outcomes of these festivals continued to demonstrate the dependency this amateur Philharmonic Society had on professional talent. Nonetheless, from November 1892 to October 1894, the Philharmonic had progressed from facing financial crisis and possible dissolution to high acclaim, artistic success, and tentative financial security. Furthermore, the future of this

\(^{53}\) “The Philharmonic Festival,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 1894.

\(^{54}\) “The Philharmonic Festival,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October 1894.
organisation in the Sydney music community was protected, at least for the short term.

**Hazon Takes a Break**

These very stressful two years had taken their toll on Roberto Hazon, who had played an important role in attracting many of the celebrity soloists to perform with the Philharmonic Society during the successful 1894 season. Additionally, the Philharmonic had performed eight different concerts in less than seven months, including the performance of four concerts in one week in June and three concerts in six days during the end of September and beginning of October. This was an amazing feat for the Philharmonic, given that the organisation had performed more than eight concerts in only one other season: in 1891 the organisation gave four two-concert sets in a period of ten months.

In December, Hazon decided to return to Italy with his family to enjoy a “well earned rest.” Not only had he been instrumental in the recent successes of the Philharmonic, he had also been active in other aspects of the Sydney music community. Since his appointment with the Sydney Philharmonic Society in 1889, Hazon had led the organisation in no less than thirty-six performances. He had also been the founder and conductor of the Sydney Amateur Orchestra, conductor of the Metropolitan Liedertafel, and had pursued other professional engagements, including guest conductor appearances and several spells as an adjudicator at music competitions. Therefore, the Philharmonic Society granted him a three-month leave of absence, following the performance of *Messiah* at Christmas.

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55 Barton and Thompson, 8.

In honour of Hazon’s departure and in recognition of the work he had done in the community, the Sydney Liedertafel, Metropolitan Liedertafel, the Philharmonic Society, and the Sydney Amateur Orchestral Society joined forces to present a “Grand Complimentary Concert tendered by the citizens of Sydney to Signor Roberto Hazon prior to his departure for Italy”\(^57\) on 13 December at the Town Hall. The concert, consisting of a variety of favourite works, raised £220 for Hazon and his family. The concert also provided the members of the Philharmonic and others of the Sydney music community the opportunity to thank Roberto Hazon. As a token of their appreciation, the ladies of the Society presented a pair of field glasses to Hazon, and then “seconded the gift by simultaneously waving their scarves of blue and red until the two sides of the choir looked like fields of flax-flower and poppies.”\(^58\)

During Hazon’s holiday in Italy, Sydney Moss, a benefactor of the Philharmonic Society and conductor of the Sydney Musical Union in the 1870s, was appointed interim conductor. Moss led the Philharmonic in the first rehearsals of 1895 and conducted the first two concerts of the 1895 season, when Hazon extended his time overseas. In a generous gesture, Moss donated his five month salary, an amount of £62 7s 5d, back to the Society in an effort to curb the ongoing financial concerns. To recognise his contributions, both musically and financially, the Society presented Moss with the highest honour of the organisation, the Golden Badge.\(^59\)

\(^{57}\) This is the title of the concert as printed on the programme.

\(^{58}\) “Hazon Farewell Concert,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 December 1894. This display by the ladies of the Society was also recounted in the 1903 and 1935 histories of the Society.

Hazon’s Return and Continued Financial Anxiety

Signor Hazon returned to Sydney and his post as conductor of the Sydney Philharmonic Society in time to lead the Philharmonic in their third oratorio festival in less than a year. The committee had organised a three concert “Grand Musical Festival” during a one week period in June at the Town Hall. The visiting artists featured in the festival were Madame Alice Esty, Madame Enriquez, Robert Cunningham, and Alec Marsh, the newly formed vocal quartet of the Esty-Marsh Company.  

The first concert, on 13 June, reportedly began with a period of extended applause as Hazon mounted the podium for the first time since returning from his holiday in Italy. The performance featured Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* in combination with selections from other works and was well received by the critics. However, the second concert, the fourth performance of *Messiah* in twelve months, did not receive the same level of approval from the press. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the performances by the soloists were the weakest part of the performance, specifically citing the performance of Alec Marsh. Perhaps this review discouraged would-be audience members from attending the final concert of the festival, a performance of *Elijah* on 19 June, for despite the apparent artistic success of the 1895 season, the Society recorded a financial loss for the year, ending with a debt of £18. In the season’s annual report, the committee described the season as a “disastrous…state of affairs,” although no further details were provided. Although

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60 Gill, 14. Esty, an American soprano, was known for her association with the Royal Carl Rosa Company


63 1895 report.
membership numbers were slightly higher than previous years, the committee set a goal of enrolling a total of six hundred subscribers by the end of the 1896 season, in the hopes of increasing annual profits. In an attempt to attract new subscribers in the difficult depression years of the 1890s, the constitution of the Philharmonic Society was altered, allowing subscribers, in other words non-performing members, the privilege of holding office, permission to attend all meetings of the Society, and the right to vote on matters of the Society. These privileges had previously been restricted to the performing members of the Philharmonic.64

As the 1896 season of the Philharmonic began under the dark cloud of debt, the committee decided to schedule yet another, albeit smaller, oratorio festival. Planned for June, the 1896 oratorio two concert festival featured the members of the English Concert Company. The soloists of this company, including Miss Thudichum, Miss Marion Mackenzie, Mr. Edward Branscombe, and Mr. Douglas Powell, were very well known throughout England and Australia, and had performed at many English oratorio festivals, including the renowned Handel Festival. The 1896 oratorio festival, again at Sydney’s Town Hall, included two of the most popular oratorios of the day: *Elijah* and *Messiah*.65 Once again, the festival’s success was ensured by a great audience attendance, many of whom were attracted to the concerts because of the visiting professional soloists and the popular choice of repertoire.

Although the June oratorio festival was not a financial debacle, the Society ended the season still in debt after an additional three concerts, largely due to the

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64 1895 report.

65 Both the Annual report for 1896 and the programme collections support the performance of these two concerts. *Sydney Philharmonic Society: Annual Report* (Sydney: privately printed, [1897]); (hereafter cited as 1896 report). The 1903 history also states that there was a third concert in the festival that included a performance of Dvořák’s *The Spectre Bride*. As the 1903 history has proven to be incorrect in the statement of other facts and events, the occurrence of this concert and the suggested dates are simply noted here, but not included in the body of the paper.
continuous economic problems throughout Australia. However, the campaign to recruit more members was successful. The newly formed Ladies Committee, for example, helped to increase the Society’s membership by seventy. But this effort was not enough to save the Philharmonic Society from ongoing financial strain.66

**Berlioz’s La Damnation de Faust**

The subsequent concert season was the first in three years not to include an oratorio festival. Instead, Hazon and the Philharmonic produced the first Australian performance of Berlioz’s *La Damnation de Faust* on 13 May 1897. The work had been premiered in Paris in 1846, but did not reach London until 1880, which most likely accounted for its belated Australian premiere. As with the oratorio festivals, a substantial financial risk was involved with the production of *Faust* because it was a relatively contemporary work. History had shown that the conservative Sydney audiences, particularly the subscribers of the Philharmonic’s concerts, preferred the time-honoured classics, such as *Elijah* and *Messiah*, to more modern works. However, those in touch with the international music world, like Roberto Hazon, understood that the future of music performances included contemporary music as well as the more standard works. Many of these musicians firmly believed that their audiences would appreciate the modern works when performed at a high musical standard. Hazon was a master of understanding what his audiences wanted to hear, and he knew how to create a memorable performance. Among other highlights of the performance of *La Damnation de Faust*, many of the members remembered fondly

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66 1896 report.
“the ‘Ascend on High,’ with double choir at the end, [as] one of the finest achievements of the Philharmonic under the Hazon regime.”

The heightened popularity surrounding the premiere provided the committee with the opportunity to schedule an encore of the work two days later at the popular prices of 1s, 2s, and 3s, with an additional 1s charged for reserved seats. This allowed the general public, as well as the more elite of Sydney’s society, to be exposed to Berlioz’s music, thus continuing the trend started by Hazon in his first season with the organisation. The *Sydney Morning Herald* commented,

> the great demand for seats at the lower rates [for *Faust*] went far to prove that the privilege of hearing the immortal work was widely appreciated by the class to which it was accorded, [that is the middle class]. The enthusiasm was encouraging, and we are of the opinion that Signor Hazon’s untiring efforts have secured for the Philharmonic Society a work only inferior in popularity to the three great oratorios – ‘Messiah,’ ‘Elijah,’ and ‘Creation.’

The extra concert increased the overall profits from the event. The resulting profits of £170 helped to cover the expenses of performing such a large work and ensured at least short-term financial security for the Philharmonic.

The success of *La Damnation de Faust* in conjunction with the other concerts of the season and an improving Australian economy resulted in a credit balance of £120 2s 9d at the end of 1897. This was the first time in two years that the organisation had recorded a profit, and for the first time in the history of the Philharmonic, a concert season had been a definite financial success. As a result, the committee voted to give Hazon “a substantial honorarium in addition to his salary” in

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67 Barton and Thompson, 10.


69 Gill, 14-15.

70 “Philharmonic Society,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 May 1897.

71 Barton and Thompson, 10.
recognition of his duties having been “unusually arduous, and…carried out with characteristic ability and energy.”72 Although this was a generous gesture on the part of the committee and undoubtedly deserved by Hazon, it may not have been the wisest decision, given the recent budget concerns. Fortunately, the Society was free from financial concerns for the next several seasons.

**Increased Popularity and Financial Security**

Roberto Hazon’s tenth season with the Philharmonic began with a reprise of the oratorio festival, although on a smaller scale. Two concerts featuring Madame Albani, a world famous soprano and, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “one of the greatest living advocates of oratorio music;”73 performing with Sarah Berry, Orlando Harley, and William Paull and the five hundred members of the Philharmonic’s orchestra and chorus were scheduled for April. Given the high calibre and celebrity status of the soloists, these concerts would have been an expensive project. Nonetheless, the committee set the tickets at the moderate prices of 6s for reserved seats and 4s and 2s for general admission, allowing members of Sydney’s middle class to attend the performances.74 Both concerts drew immense audiences, with thousands flocking to the Town Hall to hear Madame Albioni in the *Messiah* and *Elijah*. Her performance was “described as the perfection of speech in song, for each

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72 *Sydney Philharmonic Society: Annual Report* (Sydney: privately printed, [1898]). The exact amount of the honorarium was not disclosed in the annual report.

73 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April 1898; “The Oratorio Festival,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 April 1898.

74 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April 1898.
word was pronounced with a justness of emphasis, and with an air of assured confidence in its profound truth, which carried conviction to every heart.”

The 1898 concert season also included two encore performances of Berlioz’s *La Damnation de Faust*. Originally scheduled for only one performance on 28 June, a second performance was added due to the heightened popularity of the work. A 15 December concert featured the Sydney premiere of Danish composer Niels Gade’s cantata *Psyche*. Although *Sydney Morning Herald* critic was not fond of Gade’s cantata, he appreciated the performance by the Philharmonic. In the review of the concert, the critic asserted, “Signor Hazon’s forces gave a strong and confident rendering of ‘Psyche,’ and the interpretation decidedly formed a feather in the cap of both the conductor and of the society.” With that “feather in the cap,” the Philharmonic recorded a profit for a second consecutive season and saw a “satisfactory increase” in membership.

The Society’s Honorary Assistant Conductor, Edward Sykes, carried out the rehearsals at the beginning of the 1899 season owing to the temporary ill health of Hazon. Hazon soon recovered and led the Philharmonic to a season that was more conservative than previous years, including performances of Haydn’s *The Seasons*, Handel’s *Judas Maccabæus*, and Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*. Originally, the committee had also planned to include a concert performance of the third act of Wagner’s opera *Tannhäuser*. However, the publisher required that the entire work, including the score

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75 “The Oratorio Festival,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 April 1898.

76 *Sydney Philharmonic Society: Annual Report* (Sydney: privately printed, [1899]); (hereafter cited as 1898 report). J.J. Cramp, the Honorary Secretary of the Society, had donated the parts to the Society.

77 “Philharmonic Society,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 December 1898.

78 1898 report.
and all vocal and instrumental parts, be purchased, and this was a purchase the Society could not afford.\textsuperscript{79} A performance of Handel’s \textit{Israel in Egypt}, the first for the Philharmonic, was substituted for \textit{Tannhäuser}. The soloists who performed with the organisation throughout the season were mostly local talent, including several members of the Philharmonic who performed at a cheaper rate than visiting professionals from overseas. The financial result of the rather traditional season was a credit balance of nearly £250.\textsuperscript{80} This evidence supports the argument that many of those who attended concerts in Sydney in the late nineteenth century still preferred traditional, time-honoured works despite the recent success of more contemporary concerts.

\textbf{Benefit Concerts}

The turn of the century saw two benefit concerts and a premiere performance for the Philharmonic. However, the outbreak of influenza seriously limited the number of new members who joined during the season.\textsuperscript{81} Despite the epidemic and subsequent restrictions that hampered audience attendance, the patriotic and benevolent spirit in Sydney prompted by events overseas was not dampened.

The first benefit concert was in response to Australian involvement with the English military in the Boer War in South Africa. The Philharmonic Society did its part to support the soldiers by holding a special performance of \textit{Messiah} on 1 March

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\item \textsuperscript{79} \textit{Sydney Philharmonic Society: Annual Report} (Sydney: privately printed, [1900]); (hereafter cited as 1899 report).
\item \textsuperscript{80} Barton and Thompson, 11; 1899 report.
\item \textsuperscript{81} \textit{Sydney Philharmonic Society: Annual Report} (Sydney: privately printed, [1901]); (hereafter cited as 1900 report).
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1900, and thus falling “into line with the public sentiment.”\textsuperscript{82} The net profits from the concert plus an additional £100 from the Society’s budget were donated to the City’s Patriotic Fund. The second benefit concert, an encore performance of \textit{Israel in Egypt}, was held on 4 August to benefit the Indian Famine Relief Fund, an effort that realised £67.\textsuperscript{83} This amount was lower than expected because the more expensive reserved seats were not fully occupied, despite a near capacity recorded in the less expensive general admission seats.\textsuperscript{84} This suggests that the Philharmonic was valued more for its ceremonial and social roles than its musical presence.

In addition to improving Sydney’s reputation as a contributor to music and benevolent funds on an international scale, these efforts by the Philharmonic indicate that the community-at-large held the organisation in high esteem. Although the benevolent cause at the centre of a concert would have been sufficient to draw an audience, a larger audience would likely be attracted to the concert if the performing organisation was well respected. Arguably, the organisation would also need to be in a position of financial security in order to hold a benefit concert, as these concerts presented one major draw back: all of the profits of these performances went to the central cause. As a result of not receiving any profit from the event, benefit concerts could end up being financially detrimental to an organisation that did not have long-term financial security, such as the Sydney Philharmonic Society. However, if a popular organisation chose to secure its own financial situation instead of producing a benefit concert, the organisation could stand to lose popularity and ultimately suffer a financial loss since the public generally gave high regard to organisations that

\textsuperscript{82} Gill, 16.

\textsuperscript{83} 1900 report.

\textsuperscript{84} “Philharmonic Society,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 6 August 1900.
unselfishly produced benefit concerts. The two benefit concerts of 1900 did not have this negative impact on the Philharmonic, as the organisation ended 1900 with a credit balance of more than £256.\textsuperscript{85} However, these concerts led to an expectation of benefit concerts in the following years, during which the Society was not as financially stable.

**Verdi’s Requiem**

The artistic highlight of the Philharmonic’s season was the Australian premiere of Verdi’s *Requiem* on 11 October 1900.\textsuperscript{86} The work had been yet another gift to the Society from Mr. J.C.W. Nicholson, who also paid the royalties on the orchestral parts.\textsuperscript{87} As discussed earlier, Hazon had a personal relationship with Verdi, the latter having financially supported Hazon’s entrance to the Milan Conservatorium of Music. The two men had remained in contact in the years since, and this personal relationship with the composer had a positive influence in Hazon’s rendition of the *Requiem*. The performance was well received by the public and critics alike.\textsuperscript{88} The success of this concert together with that of Berlioz’s *La Damnation de Faust* reinforced the fact that many of the Philharmonic’s members and patrons, as well as the general public, could appreciate the performance of more contemporary works. This was understood by Hazon who continued to convince the committee that the performances of more contemporary works could be as successful as works by the more conservative composers. However, during future seasons, in the absence of a strong conductor who understood his audience, those serving on the Society’s

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\textsuperscript{85} 1900 report

\textsuperscript{86} 1973 history, [10].

\textsuperscript{87} Gill, 16.

\textsuperscript{88} “Philharmonic Society. Verdi’s *Requiem,*” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1900.
committee would repeatedly insist that their patrons wanted only to hear the time-honoured classics. This misunderstanding by the Society of their audience would eventually contribute to the demise of the organisation and will be fully analysed in the final chapter.

The performance of Verdi’s *Requiem* was Hazon’s last concert with the Philharmonic for ten months, as he had been granted a second leave of absence from the organisation. He had been engaged by J.C. Williamson to organise a new opera company.89 Prior to his departure, a banquet was held in his honour at the Hotel Australia; this gesture illustrated the continued high level of respect Sydneysiders had for Hazon.90 As Hazon would not return to Sydney until 1902, the Philharmonic was left in the hands of Sydney Moss and John A. Delany. Moss had conducted the Society during Hazon’s previous leave of absence, and Delany was an organist, composer, and conductor of the Sydney Liedertafel.91

The Philharmonic and the Federation of Australia

Although Roberto Hazon was not present to lead the organisation in 1901, it was a very busy year for the Philharmonic, filled with important engagements. January 1901 marked the federation of the Australian colonies and the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia. This change in status in the British colonial system was greeted with grand celebrations across Australia, especially in Sydney. Federation was also commemorated with a collection of retrospective articles compiled and

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90 1900 report; Barton and Thompson, 12; “Banquet to Signor Hazon,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 1900.

91 Orchard, 62, 123.
published by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In this history of the Colony, the events of
the Philharmonic, as well other major musical events in Sydney, were fondly
recalled.92 The Philharmonic’s inclusion in this encompassing history of the colony
emphasised the high regard that the public had for the organisation, particularly in
terms of the Philharmonic’s ceremonial value.

The Philharmonic was invited by civic authorities to participate in the
inauguration ceremony at Centennial Park on New Year’s Day 1901.93 Although this
was an important concert, the highlight of the Federation celebrations for the
Philharmonic was the special performance of *Messiah* on 3 January 1901 under the
baton of Sydney Moss. In addition to members of the general public, the audience
also consisted of two thousand distinguished guests invited by the newly installed
federal government, many of whom were dignitaries from overseas. The
Philharmonic’s official involvement in the Commonwealth celebrations further
supported the organisation’s well-respected standing with civic officials.

Although the performance of the *Messiah* was praised as “an exceptionally
fine one,”94 the concert was instead remembered for the disruptions caused by
celebrations going on outside Town Hall. James K. Gill later described event.

The spirit of carnival and joyous festivity was everywhere evident in the
crowds thronging the streets, especially so within the environs of the Town
Hall, illuminated for the occasion, but the constant explosion of fireworks
from its entrance steps had...a decidedly disturbing effect upon the concert
proceeding within, performers and audience alike suffering annoyance and
discomfiture to the point of exasperation.95

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92 “Music,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 January 1901. For more on the inclusion of music in
the federation celebrations, see Thérèse Radic, “Federation: Music in Service to National Ambition,”

93 Gill, 17.


95 Gill, 16-17.
In the days following the concert, members of the Philharmonic demanded an apology from municipal officials for allowing such disturbances to occur during such an important performance. However, no apology was recorded and no mention of the rocket-punctuated concert was made in the Society’s 1901 annual report.96

Following the honour and excitement of the events surrounding the Commonwealth celebrations in January, the regular season of the Philharmonic, conducted by John A. Delany, opened on a sombre note. The first concert, which included Mendelssohn’s cantata *Walpurgis Night*, Handel’s *Death March*, Verdi’s “Borne by Memory” from *Nabucco*, and Gounod’s lamentation cantata *Gallia*, was dedicated to the memories of Queen Victoria, who died on 22 January 1901, and Giuseppe Verdi, who died 5 days later.

However, the excitement of Federation returned on the Philharmonic’s next concert. On an official visit to Sydney to witness the opening of the first Federal Parliament at the end of May, the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, later King George V and Queen Mary, attended a State Concert that included performances by the Sydney Philharmonic Society, Sydney Amateur Orchestral Society, and the Sydney Liedertafel.97 Governor-General Earl Hopetoun, New South Wales Premier Mr. John See, and Lord Mayor Sir James Graham also attended the concert. Identified in the review of the concert as “that splendid choir of which Sydney is so justly proud,”98 the Sydney Philharmonic Society performed the “Hallelujah Chorus” from *Messiah*.

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96 Although no mention of these events was made in the 1901 report, details were recorded by Barton and Thompson, Gill, and in the 1973 history.


98 “Music at the State Concert,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 June 1901.
An oratorio festival was once again on the Philharmonic’s schedule for September with the return of soprano Belle Cole to Australia. She joined the Philharmonic for *Elijah* on 18 September, a concert that also included a tribute to the recently assassinated American president, William McKinley. Madame Cole made a second appearance with the Philharmonic in a performance of *Messiah* on 21 September. Although the festival was popular, it was acknowledged “the cost of this festival to the Society was £252, whilst it realised only £168.”\(^9^9\) The reason for the great expenses accrued by the festival was the high fee required to engage Belle Cole.

Nonetheless, the Philharmonic ended the year with a credit balance of £331, which included the donations of one month’s salary, £16 13s 4d, from John A. Delany, and Sydney Moss’s Commonwealth Concert fee of £21.\(^{100}\) Despite Hazon’s absence, which was extended beyond the original ten months, the Sydney Philharmonic maintained a busy and respectable schedule in 1901 and continued to attract large audiences to its performances. The performances at the state concerts emphasised the Philharmonic’s position in the community, and as the Society continued to improve financially and artistically, this position strengthened in the years to come.

**The Build-Up to the Philharmonic’s 100th Concert**

Roberto Hazon returned from Italy and resumed his duties with the Philharmonic Society in 1902. The concert season was relatively short and uneventful, owing to the hectic schedule of the 1901 season. Financially, the highlight of the concert season was the Christmas *Messiah* performance, which netted

\(^{99}\) Barton and Thompson, 13.

\(^{100}\) 1901 report.
£230 in profit as the tickets were set at popular prices of 3s, 2s, and 1s.\textsuperscript{101} The concert was also an artistic highlight; the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic indicated that the performance of Handel’s oratorio was one of the finest ever conducted by Hazon.\textsuperscript{102}

Despite the financial success of the final concert, fiscal anxiety continued to plague the Philharmonic, with a loss of £170 recorded for the 1902 season. At the annual meeting in January, the committee reported that seventy-two per cent of the year’s subscription fees had been allocated to pay for professional instrumentalists to supplement the orchestra. Additionally, the Society’s president, William P. Manning, accused the public of not doing their part to support the Society, specifying “that whilst the society had carried out its contract, those of the public who were well able to support a society like this had not given adequate support.”\textsuperscript{103} A few days following Manning’s statement, the *Sydney Morning Herald* printed a plea for public support of the Philharmonic. The article posed the following questions.

Would any intelligent Sydney citizen care to see the city left without a Philharmonic Society? And how many music lovers would willingly part with the prospect of …such performances as it gave us last year?\textsuperscript{104}

The article also suggested possible solutions to the Philharmonic’s ongoing financial problems. These solutions included the launch of a public appeal to benefit the Philharmonic and a request that professional musicians not charge such high rates for their services. The article also refuted claims that the standard of soloists was lower

\textsuperscript{101} Barton and Thompson, 14; Gill 18.

\textsuperscript{102} “Handel’s Messiah,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December 1902.


\textsuperscript{104} “Philharmonic Society,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 January 1903.
than it had been previously, but suggested the engagement of vocalists of a higher standard would increase public support for the Society.  

On 9 September, the Sydney Philharmonic Society celebrated its 100th concert with a performance of *Elijah*. Robert Barton, the Honorary Secretary of the Society, collaborated with G. Marr Thompson to produce a programme insert, *Oratorio in Australia: A Short History of the Sydney Philharmonic Society*, to commemorate the event. A large audience, including Governor Admiral Henry Rawson, attended the concert, and the reviews of the concert stated that the performance of *Elijah* was one of the best ever rendered. However, the critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, contrary to the views expressed in an article in January, voiced concern that the Philharmonic was slackening in its efforts to secure the top vocal talent available. A few days later, a letter from the Philharmonic Society’s Honorary Secretary Barton, printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, refuted the claim. Barton explained that the task of securing sought after soloists was increasingly difficult because many international vocalists were under strict contract and time restrictions during their visits to Sydney. Making reference to the failed oratorio festival in 1892, which featured Signor Foli, Barton acknowledged that some attempts made by the Philharmonic to attract such talent in the past had led to near financial ruin.

Perhaps in response to the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s demand for a higher quality of vocal soloists, the Philharmonic secured Watkin Mills as featured soloist for two concerts in July. Mills was scheduled to perform with the Philharmonic again in


106 “Music and Drama,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 1903.


October in a production of *Elijah*; however, “owing to indisposition, Mr. Mills failed, and Mr. Charles Rosenthal undertook the part” quite successfully.109 Fortunately, this replacement of a major soloist did not result in the same financial ruin as the Foli Festival.

The 1904 season opened with the Society in a satisfactory financial position, a subscribing membership of 483, and a performing membership of 205 women and 112 men.110 Since the Sydney Liedertafel and the Metropolitan Liedertafel, two male choirs, were also active in Sydney during this time, and as there were no female choirs in the city, it is understandable that there were more women performing with the Philharmonic than men. As the season continued, membership numbers continued to grow, prompting the committee of the Society to set a total membership goal of one thousand by the beginning of the 1906 season.111

**A Change in Policy at the Town Hall**

The recent successes and the increase in membership numbers was overshadowed by a directive handed down by the officials at Sydney’s Town Hall. In mid-1904, the committee of the Philharmonic was notified that in the future, the Society would be required to compete against other organisations for the use of the facility on Christmas Day. In the past, the Philharmonic had been allowed to produce its traditional Christmas *Messiah* concert without question or competition. The City Council was further considering the inclusion of a clause that would require


111 1904 report.
organisations to not charge admission to the hall for performances on public holidays. Although it turned out that the Philharmonic would continue to perform the *Messiah* on Christmas Day in future seasons, at the end of 1904 it was uncertain whether this tradition would be allowed to continue.

At the same time, the rental rates for Town Hall were also increased, although the services provided by the Town Hall, such as more comfortable chairs, heat in the winter, and additional staff, were not improving. In principle, the Town Hall officials raised the rates in hopes of making more money from visiting acts. However, the new rates, which were double that of the previous fees, would prevent many local amateur organisations from using the facilities. Prior to the rate increase, the Sydney Philharmonic Society, Sydney Liedertafel, and Sydney Amateur Orchestral Society paid a discounted rate for the privilege of performing in Town Hall because of their amateur and non-profit status. The city officials now claimed “it was not fairly possible to make any distinction” between professional and amateur groups, and the City Council felt they had no choice but to discontinue the discounted rates for amateur organisations.

Members of the Sydney music community were outraged at the fee increase and new policies. The increase in rental rates meant that the organisations would need to charge higher admission prices. Hazon stated his dissatisfaction with the Sydney City Council in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The City Council is doing a great injury to music. I can only suppose unintentionally, because so many of my best choristers and players are the sons and daughters of working men, whose best chance of hearing music is through the three societies [the Sydney Philharmonic Society, the Sydney Liedertafel, and the Sydney Amateur Orchestral Society]…. I am of the

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opinion that the change will greatly diminish our prospects of hearing new artists of the first rank. In years past the Sydney Council did something to assist music by slightly reducing the rent for the amateur associations. Now they not only do nothing, but even propose to tax future enterprise….I can only remind all such that in attempting to make the municipal concert hall of the city a means of profit at the expense of this humanising art, they are doing what is reprobated by every municipal body in the old world.114

Hazon’s Final Seasons with the Philharmonic

The 1905 season began much later than was traditional for the Philharmonic because of the need for additional rehearsals to prepare the opening concert, which paired the second and fourth acts from Gounod’s Faust with the first act of Wagner’s Lohengrin on 5 May. Although the performance was respectable, the Sydney Morning Herald critic suggested that the Philharmonic was not heard “to the same advantage in operatic music as in the great oratorios,” and further implied that the Society should refrain from performing concert versions of opera in the future.115

The remaining concerts of the season drew large audiences, including a performance of Elijah in October, which officially recorded the largest attendance at a concert in Town Hall.116 At the annual meeting at the end of season, the committee reported 343 performing members and 584 subscribing members, for a total membership of 927, nearly reaching the goal of one thousand members set by the committee in 1904. However, most of the performing members were vocalists, and the orchestra was often supplemented by costly professional musicians.117

117 Sydney Philharmonic Society. Annual Report and Balance Sheet, Season 1905 (Sydney, privately printed, [1906]).
The following season was relatively uneventful; however, the concert season of 1907 turned out to be one of the most memorable of recent years. That year marked the deaths of two active and important members of the Society: J.C.W. Nicholson and John A. Delaney. Both men had led the organisation in varying capacities during their time with the Society. The year also brought an end to the Roberto Hazon conductorship with the Sydney Philharmonic Society. He had been with the Society as conductor for eighteen years and had decided to retire and return to Italy because of failing health. The *Sydney Morning Herald* was only one of many to pay tribute to Hazon.

Truly Signor Hazon is a modern Columbus, carrying his hearers into new worlds of sound and harmony….But the general has grown weary with the struggle, and will soon retire, leaving the memory of many victories to sweeten the bitterness of parting. The man goes, but his work remains; a fair monument of unflagging, fiery zeal, and devotion to the best-beloved of the arts in this southern land.

Hazon’s final concert with the Philharmonic was a performance of Handel’s *Israel in Egypt* on 22 August at the Town Hall. In his historical review of the Society from 1935, James K. Gill described Hazon and his final concert with the Philharmonic.

Handel’s *Israel in Egypt* was given…before a great audience, whose presence was indicative of the honour they wished to do Signor Roberto Hazon upon his last appearance before them….Handel’s massive dramatic work was probably never heard with greater elevation and grandeur than on this night of Hazon’s farewell. The combined forces of chorus and orchestra…was the most eloquent tribute they could pay to the one who was conducting them for the last time after the happiest of associations over a period of eighteen years.

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119 1907 report.


121 Gill, 19.
A month later, the Sydney music community organised a concert to honour Roberto Hazon. Despite the numerous performances led by Hazon in the Town Hall, the city officials would not offer the concert space free of charge. Nonetheless, Hazon’s two ensembles, the Sydney Philharmonic Society and the Sydney Amateur Orchestra, along with other organisations performed a variety of works in a concert billed as “A Citizen’s Complementary Concert – Tendered to Roberto Hazon.”

During the concert, Robert B. Barton, on behalf of all those who performed under Hazon’s baton, stated,

Now that you are returning to the beautiful Italy to which Australia, like the rest of the world, owes much of what it values in Art, we trust that it will gratify you to feel that your memory will be cherished by those you leave behind, and that your name will remained engraved on the hearts of hundreds of the older and younger generations of musicians in Australia.

At the conclusion of the concert, the Governor-General Admiral Sir Henry Rawson, on behalf of the citizens of Sydney, presented Hazon with a cheque for £600 and a gold watch.

When he returned to Italy, Roberto Hazon left behind a substantial musical legacy. During his eighteen years as conductor of the Sydney Philharmonic Society, Hazon not only improved the artistic quality of the performers of the Philharmonic, he also initiated many performances that brought art music to the middle class. By performing concerts at popular prices, Hazon and the Philharmonic made available to Sydney’s growing middle and working classes high quality oratorio and cantata performances by an amateur choral society that once belonged exclusively to Sydney’s elite. Under Hazon’s direction, performing membership in the Society was

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123 “The Hazon Farewell,” Sydney Morning Herald, 26 September 1907.

124 Gill, 19; 1973 history, 8.
also extended to those of the working class in addition to those from Sydney’s upper class. Only a few decades earlier, members of the working class would not have been able, or indeed allowed, to perform with a leading amateur choral society in Sydney.

Although the Philharmonic faced financial destitution and adversity on more than one occasion during Hazon’s leadership, most of the causes of these problems were out of Hazon’s control. Instead of placing blame, Hazon strove to find ways to overcome these difficulties. He possessed the unique gift of understanding what his audiences wanted to hear; he knew when to suggest the programming of conservative and traditional works, such as *Messiah* and *Elijah*, and knew when to schedule performances of more contemporary works, including Berlioz’s *La Damnation de Faust* and Verdi’s *Requiem*, even when the members of the Philharmonic’s committee did not agree.

In the years before his death in 1920, Hazon remained in touch with the Sydney music community, frequently corresponding with the Sydney public via the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He visited Australia only once more, in 1910, as conductor of J.C. Williamson’s Grand Opera Company’s productions of *Madame Butterfly*.125

Hazon’s departure from the conductorship of the Sydney Philharmonic Society left many members of the music community feeling as though he was abandoning the Philharmonic at the peak of its development.126 The committee knew that they had a large void with high expectations to fill, and fortunately for the Philharmonic Society, their choice of Hazon’s successor was up to the challenge.

125 Martha Rutledge, “Hazon, Roberto,” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 9, 1891-1939; “The Late Signor Hazon. A Notable Personality,” *Musical Australia* 1:6 (October 1920): 23. In an interesting sidenote, the orchestra that Hazon conducted for the Sydney performances of *Madame Butterfly* was led by Ernest Toy; Toy would serve as conductor of the Philharmonic from 1949-1954. Gyger, 142.