At the announcement of Hazon’s retirement in 1907, the committee advertised
the open position of conductor/music director for their organisation in newspapers
around the world. More than one hundred applications were received from England,
America, Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. This high level of interest
demonstrated the popularity of amateur choral societies across the British Empire and
around the world as well as the high opinion many in the international music
community had for the Sydney Philharmonic Society. Furthermore, the high number
of applications from England indicates that the journey from Europe to Australia was
not as arduous as it once was, thus leading many in the performing arts to include a
spell in the antipodes as part of their respective careers.

Following extensive reviews of the applications, Joseph Bradley, the
conductor of the Glasgow (Scotland) Choral Union, was selected to take Hazon’s
place. The Philharmonic’s president, Sir William Manning, while visiting England,
had interviewed him for the position and gave Bradley a very high recommendation.
Due to prior commitments, however, Bradley was not expected to arrive in Sydney
until 1909. During the interim, W. Arundel Orchard, conductor of the Sydney
Liedertafel, was appointed acting conductor.¹

¹ 1907 report; for more information on Orchard’s qualifications see John Carmody, “Orchard,
William Arundel,” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 2, 1891-1939, ed. Bede Nairn and
Bradley’s Arrival in Sydney

Orchard led the Philharmonic in just three concerts at the end of 1907 and the beginning of 1908, as Joseph Bradley and his wife arrived in Sydney much earlier than originally expected; they landed at Darling Island wharf on 23 March 1908.² This was only two days before the Philharmonic’s first subscription concert of the 1908 season, too late for Bradley to conduct the concert; nonetheless he and his wife attended the Society’s performance of Handel’s *Judas Maccabæus* at the Town Hall.

There was no doubt that very high expectations awaited Bradley as conductor of the Sydney Philharmonic Society. Roberto Hazon had been one of Sydney’s best-loved conductors of recent years. However, Bradley had the experience and qualifications to adequately fill the void left by Hazon. Bradley was awarded a Bachelor of Music from Oxford in 1875 and was a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists. As a conductor, he had led Manchester’s Hallé Choir (1881-1887) and the four hundred member Glasgow Choral Union (1887-1907). At one point during his years with the Hallé Choir, he conducted seven performances of the *Messiah* in one week. As conductor of both of these choirs, he had produced performances of traditional as well as more contemporary works by English composers. In an interesting coincidence, the orchestra of the Glasgow Choral Union was under the direction of Henri Verbruggen, who, in 1914, would be appointed the first director of the New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music.³

In his first interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald* after arriving in Sydney, Bradley admitted he had given up a great deal, specifically a number of private

---


students, in moving from England to Australia. However, he was excited to begin as conductor of the Philharmonic and had signed a two-year contract. In his first season with the Philharmonic, Bradley did not lead the choir in the standard traditional oratorios most often performed by the organisation. Instead, he began to incorporate more orchestral music at the Philharmonic’s concerts. As an auxiliary body, the organisation’s orchestra had often “squeaked by” with the assistance of professional musicians. Bradley now attempted to place the orchestra on the same artistic level as the choir. Unfortunately, while the committee believed Bradley’s initiative was a positive one, some of Sydney’s music critics did not approve.

Bradley’s First Season

Bradley made his first appearance with the Philharmonic on 11 June 1908 at the Town Hall. A very large audience packed the concert hall, most likely not to hear the works that had been programmed, but rather to witness the debut of Hazon’s successor. The programme included Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* and Beethoven’s *Choral Fantasia*, two works with very significant orchestral parts, in addition to a few miscellaneous works. James K. Gill later made the following observations about Bradley’s debut performance with the Philharmonic:

> [Bradley] afforded a striking study in contrasts, from the florid emotionalism inherent in the Southern European peoples to that more placid restraint so characteristic of the British schools of thought and culture. Nevertheless, when occasion demanded, as when going through an animated movement calling for dramatic fervour and expression, he could “whip” up his forces with an almost unbelievably passionate energy.

---


The *Sydney Morning Herald* recorded similar remarks, describing Bradley’s conducting style as incorporating a “quiet but significant ‘beat,’” and further observed “his alertness in ‘calling up’ the instrument or orchestral section immediately in request, and in his care in ‘keeping down’ the ensemble during the vocal solos.” Bradley’s “quiet but significant beat” would have been understood by the audience to be in direct opposition to Hazon’s characteristic fiery manner.

Bradley continued the concert season on 16 September with a performance that once again featured the Philharmonic’s orchestra in Dvorák’s *Symphony No. 9 “From the New World,”* the Australian premiere of the work, and Liszt’s *Symphonic Poem, “Les Préludes;”* the concert also included Brahms’ *The Song of Destiny* and Mendelssohn’s *Walpurgis Night.* The committee was very proud of the orchestra’s accomplishment and stated in the annual report, “We have had for the second and third Concerts of the past season important orchestral works which were received with acclamation, and were a source of attraction to the public.” The committee also expressed its desire that these orchestral concerts continue.

However, the critics were not as impressed. The critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald* strongly urged the Philharmonic to permanently avoid the orchestral genre because “throughout its long history the Philharmonic has been supported by amateurs who prefer choral music and love to hear the great oratorios.” The critic further cited the presence of two unidentified orchestras in Sydney and asserted that one of

---


8 1908 report. The programme for this concert located in the manuscripts collection at the National Library of Australia indicates that *Les Preludes* was on the programme, although no mention of it is made in the annual report.

9 1908 report.

the main purposes of the Philharmonic was to provide contrast to these orchestras. Concluding the review, he expressed his hope that this orchestral “experiment” was simply an effort to show supporters of the Philharmonic that the orchestra was capable of performing at a high level.¹¹

Bradley finished the 1908 subscription season with the Australian premiere of Elgar’s Caractacus. Despite the claims made by the committee in previous years regarding the numerous difficulties involved in securing international talent for performance with the Philharmonic, the organisation succeeded in engaging the services of baritone Andrew Black. Black had sung the title role under Elgar’s baton at the world premiere of the work at the Leeds Festival ten years earlier.¹² Although a contemporary work, the performance was well received. Most of the critics expressed their appreciation of the Philharmonic’s efforts to keep “the great body of concert goers in touch with the art movements of the day in Europe.”¹³ The critics’ comments and the positive response from the public further demonstrated that Sydney audiences enjoyed contemporary works as well as the more traditional.

Thus, despite negative press in mid-season, the Philharmonic finished their first season under the direction of Joseph Bradley on a positive note. The first few performances under a new conductor were probably going to be difficult in any circumstances, especially since the members of the Society and the greater music community were very fond of Hazon. However, the members of the chorus and


¹³ “Elgar’s Caractacus,” Sydney Morning Herald, 4 December 1908.
orchestra responded well to Bradley’s efforts, and the committee warmly and publicly thanked the members at the end of the season.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{1909-1913: Traditional Yet Progressive}

In the years leading up to the First World War, the Philharmonic was in the same difficult position of believing, often incorrectly, that their audiences wanted the ensemble to perform only the traditional works, while aiming to be seen as progressive and contemporary by the music critics. Bradley succeeded in programming concerts that satisfied both traditionalists and progressives.

In one of the earliest starts to a season of the Philharmonic, Bradley commenced his first complete season with the organisation in 1909 in a very traditional manner with a performance of Mendelssohn’s \textit{Elijah}. The performance, which would have been compared to Hazon’s many successful productions, also commemorated the Mendelssohn centenary.\textsuperscript{15} The concert was repeated on 24 February in aid of the Lord Mayor’s Italian Disaster Relief Fund to help the people of Southern Italy rebuild after a massive earthquake.\textsuperscript{16}

Bradley switched to a more progressive programme with the second subscription concert and continued the trend begun by Hazon at the end of his engagement with the Philharmonic by producing a concert version of an opera. However, Bradley took the venture to a new level, programming an entire opera, not simply a portion of an opera as Hazon had done. The opera he chose was Wagner’s \textit{The Flying Dutchman}, and it was an expensive project, as the vocal parts and full

\textsuperscript{14} 1908 report.

\textsuperscript{15} Gill, 20.

orchestral score of any Wagnerian were costly. Fortunately, the concert was well
received by the public and generated a healthy profit, even though the performance
was met with tentative approval by the press.17

Although 1909 marked the first complete concert season under the direction of
Joseph Bradley, it is for a different reason that this year is of great importance in the
history of the Philharmonic. At the beginning of December, the Sydney Philharmonic
Society received word from the Governor-General of Australia that the Society’s
application to include the prefix “Royal” in the title of the organisation had been
approved.18 The organisation was now officially known as the “Royal Philharmonic
Society of Sydney.” Although the addition of “Royal” did not bring any additional
financial or artistic benefits, the title did imply a high level of public recognition.
This ensemble was one of the first of its kind to be allowed to use “Royal” in its title.
The London Philharmonic Society added “Royal” to its name in 1912, and the
Melbourne Philharmonic Society was granted the use of “Royal” in 1946.19

The Royal Philharmonic Society began the 1910 subscription season with a
moderately progressive concert. On 21 April the Philharmonic performed the first
English rendition in Australia of Saint Saens’s Biblical opera, *Samson and Delilah,*
with the English translation from the French libretto by Bradley’s wife, Mary.20
Andrew Black reprised his role as *Caractacus* in the second subscription concert; the

---

17 1909 report.

18 Official Secretary of the Governor General to the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney, 9
December 1909, Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney official records, NLA MS 5355.

Rider and Company, [1946]), 7; Carne, 223.

20 Gill, 21. It is believed that this was the first performance of the work by the Philharmonic
in either French or English, as this is confirmed by various programme collections and annual reports.
remaining two concerts of the season featured the more traditional *Creation* and a concert of miscellaneous works.

Again, the Philharmonic began their 1911 season uncharacteristically early with two consecutive performances of *Elijah* in February, to accommodate visiting soloist Madame Mary Conly, who was soon departing for England. Conly, who appeared as soloist with Andrew Black at both concerts, was a well-known English soprano and had sung with the Society at their *Messiah* concert at the end of the 1910 season. Her association with the Philharmonic resulted in large audiences and respectable profits.²¹

Although the season was successful in terms of new membership, with the Society recording more than two hundred new subscribing members, bringing the total to almost nine hundred, and “immense audiences” at the subscription concerts, the highlight of the 1911 season was the visit of England’s Sheffield Choir, under the direction of Henry Coward.²² The Sheffield Choir arrived in Sydney on 12 June and was greeted by a delegation led by the Acting Premier of New South Wales and included civic and arts leaders, with Joseph Bradley and Honorary Secretary W. Johnson representing the Royal Philharmonic Society. Later that evening, the Philharmonic hosted a reception for the visiting choir at the Town Hall for more than one thousand guests.²³ The Philharmonic also had the honour of performing *Elijah* with the Sheffield Choir on 19 June; Sheffield Choir conductor Henry Coward led the united choir of more than five hundred voices. In addition to this performance with

---


²³ Gill, 22.
the Philharmonic, the Sheffield Choir performed nine additional concerts in Sydney, before touring other parts of Australia.24

As in previous seasons under Bradley’s direction, this season alternated between traditional and progressive, with the performance of Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman* in October. The performance, like its first performance in 1909, was enthusiastically received by the public and regarded rather cautiously in the press. The *Australian Musical News* summarised the view of most critics who did not approve of concert operas but recognised the need for opera performances in Sydney.

The policy of presenting a stage work in concert form is, as a rule, questionable. Nevertheless the opportunities of hearing regular stage performances of Wagnerian opera, or indeed any opera, are so rare with us that the productions of such works by our premiere choral society is a distinct gain to the community.25

The first performance of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* by the Philharmonic opened the 1912 season on 3 April at the Town Hall. The work had not been heard in Sydney in over thirty years, as it was last performed by the Sydney Musical Union in 1880.26 A boys’ choir from the Cleveland Street Superior Public School joined the Philharmonic in the performance. The concert was highly praised, and the critic from *Australian Musical News* declared the “big choir of the Philharmonic was seldom heard to better advantage than in the majestic ensembles of the Bach classic....Taking everything into consideration, the Philharmonic in its rendition of the Bach masterpiece has added…to its reputation.”27

---


Bradley’s alternation between traditional and progressive continued when the Philharmonic produced a complete concert version of Wagner’s opera *Lohengrin* in July. The event was recorded by the Society as “a very successful rendering” in the Annual Report,\(^{28}\) even though it was the middle of the opera season in Sydney and the Quinlan Opera Company had scheduled a performance of *Lohengrin* closely following that of the Philharmonic.\(^{29}\) Unfortunately, the critics did not take such a kind view of the performance. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, in addition to declaring the work “too heavy” for the Philharmonic, reiterated the opinion that operas belonged on a stage and not a concert platform.\(^{30}\) This increasing divergence between the reports in the press and the audiences’ reactions to the concerts was curious. Although the public would continue to hold its own positive view of the Society for some time, eventually the negative press would take its toll on the public’s opinion. But for the time being, this inconsistency in opinions between the press and the public would cause programming problems for the Philharmonic.

Bradley’s programming trend continued with the committee’s apparent approval in 1913. Madame Mary Conly returned to Sydney for an oratorio festival, the Philharmonic’s first under Bradley’s leadership. The festival included the performances of *Elijah* and *Creation*. The second subscription concert featured the more progressive alternatives of Brahms’s *Requiem*,\(^{31}\) the first complete performance

---

28 1912 report.

29 “Royal Philharmonic,” *Australian Music News* 2:2 (August 1912): 57. According to Ernest Wunderlich, the Quinlan Opera Company was a “splendid organization [sic]” but was not financially successful, “owing to the lukewarmness of the public.” Wunderlich, 52.


31 T.R. Johnson, Esq., the Chief Commissioner for Railways and Tramways, had donated the orchestral and vocal parts of this work at the conclusion of the 1912 season, according to the 1912 report.
in Sydney of the work, and the “Grail Scene” from Wagner’s opera *Parsifal*, the Australian premiere of the work.\(^{32}\) The critic from the *Australian Musical News* confirmed the Philharmonic’s opinion that the concert was a success, declaring the “work of the orchestra...remarkably good throughout the [Grail] scene [and] as regards to the choristers, they did generally well.”\(^{33}\) The *Sydney Morning Herald* conceded that the “Grail Scene” lent itself well to a concert platform.\(^{34}\) The season continued with scenes from Samuel Coleridge-Taylor’s *Hiawatha*.\(^{35}\) The Philharmonic had previously performed “Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast” in December 1899 under the direction of Hazon, and this concert also included “The Death of Minnehaha” and “Hiawatha’s Departure,” heard for the first time in Sydney. The performance was sold out; this success was credited to the appearance of Madame Conly, who had performed the work under the composer.\(^{36}\)

Although 1914 marked the start of World War I, the repercussions of which created many obstacles for performing arts ensembles worldwide, Bradley managed to continue this balance of traditional oratorios and cantatas with progressive performances of operas and contemporary English choral works. Fortunately, the Philharmonic was entering the war years with a credit in their bank account. However, as was the case around the world, the physical and financial demands of wartime took their toll on the Society.


\(^{33}\) “Royal Philharmonic,” *Australian Musical News* 3:2 (1 August 1913): 45.

\(^{34}\) “Royal Philharmonic Society,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 July 1913.

\(^{35}\) A photograph taken at this performance is currently available in the Mitchell Library collection at the New South Wales State Library, PXE 843/38.

A Lack of Financial Support

Over the years, the Philharmonic had repeatedly asked for funding assistance from the city, state, and federal governments. Despite the presence of the Society’s president, William P. Manning, on the City Council, the organisation had consistently been denied financial support. The change in the hall hiring policy at the Town Hall added to the lack of support felt by the Philharmonic. Although the organisation had voiced its concerns in the past, the members, supported by the press, continued to present their case to the civic authorities.

At the annual meeting of the Society held on 25 January 1910, the Society’s president reported that the organisation had excelled artistically in the past few years, and the Society was in an acceptable financial position, with a balance of £177.38. At the meeting, the committee also released a statement criticising the state and federal governments for not providing what they considered to be comparable financial assistance to that received by similar musical organisations overseas, particularly in Europe. The committee expressed their further disappointment that the visual arts were more strongly supported than the musical arts by the governments in New South Wales and throughout Australia. In an excerpt from the lengthy statement, the frustration felt by the Society is evident.

The members of the Committee from year to year and the performing members of the Orchestra and Chorus have rendered to the Society and the community at large a great service; this, however, has only been achieved by assuming financial responsibilities of much too onerous a character for such executive officers to be expected to undertake….In referring to these past matters the Committee desires to emphasize the fact that in Europe and elsewhere musical art receives at the hands of the Government ample and


38 “High Class Music. Sydney Philharmonic Society,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1910. Interestingly, the “Royal” distinction was left out of the title of the Society.
regular financial support for the purpose of enabling classical music to be
produced by large societies in the most perfect manner and with every
accessory to secure the highest artistic results, without financial loss or anxiety
and at prices for admission within reach of the humblest.

The Government of New South Wales…[has] expended large annual
amounts upon painting and sculpture through the medium of the Art Gallery
and the Art Societies, but so far claims of musical art have been overlooked;
and the Committee feels that the time has arrived to approach the Government
with a request that the claims of the Royal Philharmonic Society, to financial
assistance in their efforts to raise the standard of the musical education of the
people, should receive consideration at their hands.39

Neither the state nor federal governments responded to the Philharmonic’s
pleas for financial support. Nonetheless, as the organisation continued to face
impending financial crisis, a special sub-committee was formed in 1910 to submit a
formal request to the City Council and the state and federal governments asking for
special consideration. The members of the executive committee believed that due to
the recent success of the Philharmonic and the continuing increase in membership
numbers, the organisation was in a position to ask these governmental bodies for
assistance. The members argued that the contributions made by the Philharmonic to
the greater Sydney community warranted support from civic authorities. Regardless
of these arguments, and despite the state government establishing the New South
Wales State Conservatorium in 1914, the Philharmonic was continuously denied
support without explanation. Nonetheless, civic authorities requested the
Philharmonic to perform on the solemn occasion of the memorial of the death of King
Edward VII on 20 May 1910 in Centennial Park. The following year, the government
of New South Wales again invited the Philharmonic to perform at the State concert
celebrating the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary. The invitations to
perform on these occasions represented a continuing irony: although the presence of
the Society was often requested by the City of Sydney and the state of New South

39 1909 report.
Wales, these officials were not willing to provide financial support to the
organisation. This lack of support, compounded by the outbreak of the First World
War, would become one of the factors that led to the organisation’s eventual demise.

The Great War

On 30 July 1914, Australia waited with the rest of the world as Austria, Hungary, and Russia mobilised for war. Four days later, the Prime Minister Joseph Cook announced that if needed, twenty thousand Australian troops would aid the British forces, and all Australian naval vessels would be under the command of the British Admiralty. The next day the British government declared war on Germany, and Australia was thrust into war.\(^4\) However, the season for the Philharmonic started in peacetime. Bradley’s drive to include more contemporary music by British composers in the Society’s performances was evident in the preview to the season published by the *Australian Musical News*.

The announcements for this year are Bach’s St. Matthew ‘Passion’ for the first concert; the dramatic cantata ‘King Olaf’ (Elgar) – first performance in Sydney – 2\(^{nd}\) concert; Verdi’s ‘Requiem,’ 3\(^{rd}\) concert; ‘Sea Drift,’ ballad for chorus and orchestra (Delius), ‘Wanderer’s Storm Song,’ for chorus and orchestra (Strauss), overture ‘Hansel and Gretel’ (Humperdinck), motet ‘Be Not Afraid’ (Bach), and ‘The Jolly Goshawk,’ ballad for chorus and orchestra (Hamish McCunn), for the fourth concert.\(^4\)

The Society had performed the first and second subscription concerts before Australia entered the war. As a result of the Australian involvement in the war, the Philharmonic quickly reorganised the remaining portion of the season to reflect the patriotic fever that was sweeping the nation. The Philharmonic performed three

---


patriotic concerts in as many months. The first, a “Grand Patriotic Concert” on 15 September that featured Stanford’s setting of Lord Alfred Tennyson’s *The Revenge* and the first performance of the Australian National Song, with music by Theodore Tourrier, words by Arthur H. Adams, and arranged by Joseph Bradley. Although this concert featured patriotic music, it was not a benefit concert; therefore the Philharmonic was able to keep the profits.\(^\text{42}\) Eleven days later, the second concert, and the highlight of these patriotic performances, starred Dame Nellie Melba in a “Monster Patriotic Concert.” This event included several national and patriotic songs, the proceeds of which benefited the Red Cross Society and the Lady Dudley Field Hospital. The third concert, in November, was billed as “Monster Patriotic Concert; Promoted by the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney, in aid of the Belgian Relief Fund.” In addition to the British, Belgian, French, and Japanese National Anthems and Australian and British National Songs, the concert included patriotic favourites.

Thus, the Philharmonic did its part to support the war effort. Although its budget may have been able to handle the financial strain of one patriotic benefit concert, the organisation was most likely not prepared for the financial toll that accompanied two such benefit concerts. Even the *Sydney Morning Herald* recognised the risk of performing two benefit concerts in close succession.\(^\text{43}\) Whilst no mention of financial concerns were made by the organisation at the time, the presence of monetary strain within the Philharmonic was alluded to in the 1973 historical review: as “considerable sums of money were raised...the Society’s own funds were dangerously depleted.”\(^\text{44}\) For both of the patriotic benefit concerts, the Philharmonic

---


\(^\text{43}\) “Royal Philharmonic. Belgian Relief Fund,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 1914.

\(^\text{44}\) 1973 history, [10].
was not able to record a profit, as all the proceeds went to charity. Additionally, although some of the soloists gave their services free of charge, the organisation still had to pay the remaining soloists as well as the professional musicians in the orchestra.

Following the patriotic concerts, the Philharmonic resumed its subscription series with a performance of miscellaneous music in November and two concerts on Christmas Day. For these concerts and the two that occurred prior to the outbreak of war, the committee reported that “no expense has been spared to obtain the best available principals,” a practice which perhaps should have been avoided, given the financial history of the Society and uncertain times in the world. Nonetheless, the Society managed to secure a substantial profit and was able to continue its rehearsals and performances.

Berlioz’s *Grande Messe des Morts* and More Orchestral Concerts

Following a financially stressful season, the Philharmonic made two daring and perhaps financially dangerous programming decisions for the 1915 season. First, Berlioz’s massive *Grande Messe des Morts*, which had never before been performed in Australia, was scheduled for July. Second, Bradley programmed two orchestral concerts, despite the criticism the Philharmonic received for attempting orchestral concerts in 1908.

The performance on 29 July of *Grande Messe des Morts*, which was paired with a rather unlikely partner of “Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast” from Coleridge-Taylor’s larger work, was dedicated to the memory of Sir William P. Manning, who died in April 1915. Manning had been president and chairman of the Society for

\[45\] 1914 report.
twenty-four years and was remembered by the Philharmonic as a person who “took a very keen, active and personal interest in all its affairs, [with] his own great influence doing much to keep the Philharmonic well in the forefront of public thought and sympathy.”

He had also been an active member of the Sydney City Council, having been elected in 1887 and serving for fifteen years. In spite of his passion for the Philharmonic and presence on the City Council, Manning had been unable to secure any type of financial support from the Sydney city government.

The concert was also performed in honour of the “Australians fallen on the battlefield, never to return, never to be forgotten.”

Despite the sizeable risk, the concert was considered a success. The critic from the *Australian Music News* reported,

> The performance, indeed, made a profound impression, and…I heard a gentleman [remark] when leaving the hall: ‘Were I a rich man I would pay the entire expenses of another performance of the work to-morrow night.’

However, the concert did reveal some of the on-going artistic weaknesses that plagued the Philharmonic. In the same review, the *Australian Musical News* critic cited a “number of worn-out voices” heard in the chorus and recorded serious deficiencies in the woodwind and brass sections of the orchestra, including the substitution of

---

46 Gill, 23.

47 “Death of Sir William Manning, Distinguished Public Career,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April 1915; John M. Ward, “Manning, Sir William Patrick,” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10, 1891-1839. It is not clear from the available information if Manning did in fact make appeals for financial support directly to the City Council on behalf of the Philharmonic.


saxophones for bassoons. The *Sydney Morning Herald* also reported weaknesses in the chorus, specifically in the tenor section.50

The second financial risk taken by the Philharmonic was the programming of two concerts that solely featured the orchestra, in addition to the standard four subscription concerts and two concerts on Christmas Day. Bradley’s commitment to the development of the Philharmonic’s orchestra was noted earlier. Although the orchestra had often been criticised in the press for not being of the same high standard as the choir, Bradley worked hard to raise support for and improvement in the orchestra.51 Most likely, Bradley recognised “the very gradual decline” of choral music, as suggested by Orchard,52 and hoped that the orchestra of the Philharmonic could help to preserve the organisation.

The first orchestral concert, on 10 June 1915, included ninety instrumentalists, from the Sydney Amateur Orchestral Society, which had replaced the Philharmonic Society’s own orchestra, augmented by professional players. The tickets were set at popular prices, with special rates for students, to encourage a large audience to attend.53 The Society’s annual report claimed “this concert was proclaimed by the Press to be one of the most enjoyable concerts given during the year.”54 The critic from the *Australian Musical News* was a little less generous: “There was one

---


51 Gill, 24.

52 Orchard, 35.


satisfactory element in the work of the night and that was that in all the renditions there were evidences of sufficient rehearsals.\(^{55}\)

The second orchestra concert, on 25 August, included Cesar Franck’s *Symphony in d minor* and the Australian premiere of Stanford’s *Irish Rhapsody*. Although many people attended the performance, the critic for the *Australian Musical News* believed that the audience was not large enough to make the orchestral venture worthwhile. However, the Society believed the orchestral “experiment” to be fairly successful.\(^{56}\) The *Sydney Morning Herald*, who had repeatedly criticised the efforts put forth by the Philharmonic’s orchestra, supported the Society’s opinion, referring to the performance as one “which placed all who were present under a debt of gratitude to the Philharmonic and their conductor for the introduction of so fine a work.”\(^{57}\)

Although both orchestral concerts and the performance of Berlioz’s *Grande Messe des Morts* were risky decisions, especially given the wartime atmosphere in Sydney, both proved to be successful ventures. At the annual meeting for the Society, it was further noted, “the Society has been able to carry on fairly successfully the financial operations of the past year.”\(^{58}\)


\(^{58}\) 1915 report.
The New South Wales State Conservatorium

That same year, the New South Wales State Conservatorium was established in Sydney, and Henri Verbruggen was appointed the school’s director. Many hoped that the state-funded Conservatorium would raise the standard of music in the city and produce well-educated musicians. In the beginning, the Philharmonic had a good relationship with the Conservatorium. Some members of the Philharmonic’s chorus and orchestra taught at the Conservatorium, including Joseph Bradley who was appointed lecturer in theory and solfeggio in 1916. In an effort to promote its orchestral programme, the Philharmonic also provided scholarship money to pay the fees of two students enrolled in the Conservatorium’s orchestral studies course. The organisation also performed at the opening of the Conservatorium.

An excerpt from a brief historical review of the Society from 1951 described the Society’s view of the relationship between the Philharmonic and the Conservatorium.

Henri Verbruggen…found music in Sydney to be well organised and thanks to the ‘Phil,’ an efficient orchestra. Under the baton of Henri Verbruggen, that body of instrumentalists who had received years of experience with the Philharmonic, became known as the ‘State Orchestra.’

Despite the statement suggesting that the Philharmonic’s orchestra was the main orchestra in Sydney prior to the establishment of the Conservatorium and further implying that the Philharmonic’s orchestra became the State Orchestra, this was not the case. Most likely, this statement refers to the experience gained by the

---

59 For more on the history of the New South Wales State Conservatorium, currently renamed the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, see Diane Collins, Sounds from the Stables: The Story of Sydney’s Conservatorium (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2001).


instrumentalists who performed with the Philharmonic in their performances of oratorios and cantatas. As mentioned above, the many of the instrumentalists who played with the Philharmonic were professional and these professionals would have contributed to the Verbruggen State Orchestra. Although this amicable association lasted for a few years, the Conservatorium and the Society eventually started competing for financial and artistic resources, tainting their relationship in later years.

An Attempt at the Conservative

Following the artistically demanding and daring 1915 concert season, Bradley, apparently “conforming with the style of the society,”62 elected to perform works considered to be more traditional and conservative in 1916 and 1917. This trend, dictated by the programming decisions of the conservative majority of the committee, dominated the remainder of Bradley’s conductorship with the Philharmonic. The organisation made their intentions known publicly, and the *Australian Musical News* stated that the Philharmonic would “not…break any new ground this year, but rather [would] stick to the well-worked oratorio masterpieces,” such as *Elijah*, *Creation*, Rossini’s and Dvorák’s *Stabat Mater*, and Berlioz’s *La Damnation de Faust*.63 Although safer, the organisation lost £100 in 1916, despite respectable performances and positive reviews. The *Australian Musical News* suggested in addition to the continuing lack of support from the government,

the decline in the revenue of the year has been mainly due to a falling off in subscribers and to a tightness of money that led members of the general public

---

62 “Bradley, Joseph,” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 7, 1891-1939. The article suggests that while Bradley was able to introduce more contemporary works during the early years of his career with the Philharmonic, beginning in approximately 1916, he started “conforming with the style of the society,” which led to performances that were “safe rather than adventurous.”

to purchase tickets for the cheap parts of the house rather than for the reserved seats at the different concerts.\textsuperscript{64}

The financial duress imposed by the wartime economic situation only compounded the Society’s fiscal problems. It is also likely that the committee did not understand what the Philharmonic’s audience wanted to hear, mistaking their own personal opinions and preferences of the ensemble for that of the public. This inability to recognise the decline of choral music in favour of orchestral performances was one of the factors which contributed to the Philharmonic’s demise and will be further discussed in a later chapter.

Furthermore, the Philharmonic was losing audience members to the student concerts at the Conservatorium and the professional concerts of the State Orchestra. Henri Verbruggen, the director of the New South Wales State Conservatorium and music director of the State Orchestra, possessed “extraordinary personal appeal,” according to Diane Collins.\textsuperscript{65} Bradley could not compete with Verbruggen’s dynamic and energetic conducting style, which closely resembled that of Roberto Hazon, who had been much loved by the Philharmonic’s audiences of years past. Verbruggen’s resemblance to Hazon would have attracted many Philharmonic patrons to the Conservatorium’s director.

The Philharmonic’s Popular Concerts

With the conservative seasons 1916 and 1917 a financial failure, and the ongoing pressures of the war, the Philharmonic looked for a new way to raise funds. The solution was a series of Popular Concerts in 1918. The series included eleven


\textsuperscript{65} Diane Collins, \textit{Sounds from the Stables}, 23.
Saturday night performances during the summer holiday, from February to April, with the tickets at the popular and affordable prices of 2s and 1s.\textsuperscript{66} In an effort to save money and attract large audiences, most of the music performed on the concerts was selected from the traditional and conservative favourites of the Philharmonic accompanied by an amateur string orchestra; thus the organisation did not need to supplement its orchestra with professional players or arrange extra rehearsals. Despite the conservative trend of these concerts, Bradley managed to programme Ravel’s “ultra-modern” septet on one concert, which had been premiered in Sydney only the year before.\textsuperscript{67}

The concerts featured both visiting and local talent; the celebrity status of these soloists was often the reason many of the members of the audience attended the concerts. The concerts were successful, despite the constant anxiety caused by the war in Europe. One explanation for the popularity of these concerts was that the performances provided a shelter away from the strain of the war and its restrictions, at least for a couple of hours. Another characteristic of these concerts was the prohibition of encores in order to ensure that the performances were of the proper length as to avoid conflicts with Sydney’s wartime curfew.

One of the most memorable of these popular concerts was the tenth performance of the series. This concert on 13 April featured visiting soloist Signor Tino Cappelli, who had been performing in Sydney with his opera company. The concert was sold out a twenty minutes before the programme began, and more than two thousand prospective patrons were reportedly left standing in the street outside

\textsuperscript{66} Gill, 24.

\textsuperscript{67} “Philharmonic Popular Concerts,” \textit{Australian Musical News} 7:10 (1 April 1918): 276.
the Town Hall “in the way of the George Street electric trams.” Cappelli, who was the obvious draw at the evening’s concert, performed at the end of the first half of the programme. As he approached the stage, he was met with thunderous applause. The critic from the *Australian Musical News* recorded the events that followed.

When calm at length fell on the audience, the Italian tenor sang Pensutti’s ‘Lolita,’...When he had finished the storm [of applause] broke out with redoubled fury. The tenor was brought on the platform again and again, and as no encores were allowed at the Philharmonic pops, and as that fact was plainly printed in large type on each of its programmes, he intimated by gestures and smiles that he would if he could, but he couldn’t. But the storm of applause continued fortissimo, and many minutes of the programme were wasted. Then the honorary secretary of the society, a mild-looking man in glasses, came on the platform, smiled his most winning smile and attempted to speak. But they laughed the poor man to scorn. Then Mr. Joseph Bradley mounted his rostrum and faced his orchestra, as an intimation that he was about to proceed with his programme. But that only increased the clapping and the thunder of sticks and feet on the floor. Mr. Bradley sat down with grim determination written on his face, and sat and sat while agitated young men brought him messages from the Italian headquarters at the back. At the end of a quarter of an hour a final message resulted in Mr. Bradley rising and holding up his hand as a truce signal to the noisy besiegers. The truce was granted, and Mr. Bradley announced that Signor Cappelli would now sing his second programme song and nothing else. He did so, and the remainder of the programme was allowed to go on its way.

The 1918 series of popular concerts was so successful that the Philharmonic decided to donate the proceeds from their final concert to the Red Cross. In the hopes of another financial success, the popular concert series was scheduled to return during the 1919 summer holidays. However, the Philharmonic was unable to hold its first three concerts because of the influenza restrictions that immobilised the city. As a result, the organisation only produced two popular concerts, choosing to share the

---


69 “Thou Shalt Not Encore,” *Australian Musical News* 7:11 (1 May 1918): 307. Although the events of this concert were recorded in other Sydney publications as well, this report from the *Australian Musical News* was the most comprehensive and accurately represents the view expressed in the other articles.

70 Macintyre, 188.
Town Hall performance venue, which had been “specially cleaned and fumigated” when the restrictions were lifted,71 with the ensembles from the Conservatorium that were also forced to cancel concerts during the influenza outbreak. Despite the public knowledge that the Society faced a dire financial situation, the civic authorities again refused assistance. The Philharmonic “cheerfully, like good and true musical Christian soldiers, paid the city fathers the exorbitant fees demanded for the hire of the civic hall of melody.”72 This unfortunate turn of events and the high Town Hall fees, resulted in a major financial loss on the year.

The Armistice, 200th Concert, and Post War Years

On 14 November 1918, the Philharmonic celebrated both its 200th concert and the signing of the Armistice that ended the Great War with a concert of miscellaneous music.73 The organisation had been planning the concert before the Armistice was signed in Europe; however, the focus shifted from the celebration of the Philharmonic’s 200th concert to a triumphant concert commemorating the end of the war. Patriotic music was added to the programme that had already been planned for the concert, and the concert was billed as a “Great Victory Concert.”74

The Armistice and the end of the war began a new era for the Philharmonic Society and other performing arts organisations in Sydney and around the world. Although members of these organisations who had been fighting overseas began to return home to resume the lives they had left behind, everything was not as it once

71 “Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney,” Sydney Morning Herald, 9 November 1918.
72 “Philharmonic Pops,” Australian Musical News 7:9 (1 March 1918): 244.
74 “Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney,” Sydney Morning Herald, 15 November 1918.
had been for amateur choral ensembles. One important reason was that the audiences had changed. During the war, people attended concerts as a way to escape from the continuous strain of war. Now that the war was finished, and the soldiers who had been fighting overseas returned home, jobs became scarce. The people who had been able to afford a ticket to a concert before or even during the war no longer had the money to support the arts. The worldwide economy was also starting to slip; 1920 was marked by an economic recession in Australia.\textsuperscript{75} This downward slide would eventually lead to the Great Depression. Although the repercussions would not be felt for several years, the popularity of amateur choral ensembles was also decreasing; orchestral concerts and operatic performances were slowly attracting the audiences that had once thronged to the performances of the amateur choral ensembles. The post war years also brought a rise in other forms of entertainment, including professional sports, the cinema, and the radio.\textsuperscript{76}

These changes in public opinion, compounded by a very poor start to the 1919 season because of influenza restrictions, had a major impact on the Philharmonic. However, that concert season was revived with the Australian premiere of Cesar Franck’s oratorio, \textit{Les Beatitudes}, with an English translation of the libretto by Mary Bradley. She had translated the work in 1900 for its English premiere in Glasgow, which was conducted by her husband.\textsuperscript{77} Although the concert was well received, the Philharmonic was criticised for not singing in the proper style required by the genre of French sacred music. Nonetheless, Bradley was credited with continuously bringing

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{75}] Macintyre, 200.
\item[\textsuperscript{76}] This change in public opinion concerning musical tastes and the impact of these new forms of entertainment on the Philharmonic will be further evaluated in a later chapter.
\item[\textsuperscript{77}] Gill, 25.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
new music, albeit by English composers or in English translation, to Sydney.\textsuperscript{78} The performance of \textit{Les Beatitudes} also marked the beginning of the relationship between the Philharmonic and the State Conservatorium Orchestra; this was a logical alliance given that many of the members of the Philharmonic’s amateur orchestra were also members of the State Conservatorium Orchestra. The State Conservatorium Orchestra now replaced the Society’s amateur orchestra on all concerts.

Although many favourite works and previous financial successes, such as Berlioz’s \textit{Faust} and two performances of Handel’s \textit{Messiah}, were produced in the 1920 season, the concerts did not deliver the fiscal security needed by the Philharmonic. The economic impact of the war years, the concerts lost because of 1919 influenza restrictions, and the financially weak 1920 season culminated in a debt of nearly £200 at the end of the season. The Society had also recorded a significant decrease in membership, likely due to the nationwide recession, resulting in a loss of approximately £700. Since 1915, membership numbers had dropped from the record high of more than one thousand members to just over four hundred members at the beginning of 1920. In the hopes of saving the organisation, a proposed suspension of “all operations until a test was made as to whether the public would come to its aid or allow it to go on the rocks” was put forth.\textsuperscript{79} The motion was not passed and it was decided instead that pleas for public support would be made in the press.

Fortunately, the public came to the aid of the Philharmonic, and the 1921 concert season continued uninterrupted. In appreciation of the public’s support, the Philharmonic performed Saint Saens’s \textit{Samson and Delilah}, reportedly one of the

\textsuperscript{78} "The Beatitudes," \textit{Australian Musical News} 9:7 (1 January 1920): 216.

most costly works to produce. The organisation received very positive reviews in the press; however, it is likely that any negative opinions would have been softened by the on-going need for public support for the Philharmonic. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported the “enthusiasm [at the concert] showed that the public has no intention of deserting ‘the old Phil,’ and...the hon. [sic] secretary (Mr. Herbert Fry) was able to announce a large increase in the list of subscribers.” Concerning the performance, which was attended by Governor-General and Lady Forester, the critic for the *Australian Musical News* praised the efforts put forth by the choir and the State Orchestra. Thus, the Philharmonic was back on its feet, and Bradley convinced the committee that the Society was financially secure enough to again attempt producing concert versions of operas.

**Operas on the Concert Platform**

Although some critics did not agree with this decision, the audiences responded positively to the performances of operatic works on the concert stage. The two operas performed in a concert setting by the Philharmonic in 1922 were Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman* and Verdi’s *Aida*, the latter being honoured with an encore performance. The reception to these performances from the public was very positive, most likely because very few operas had been performed on any stage or concert platform in Sydney in recent years. However, the reviews from the critics were mixed. On the one hand, the *Sydney Morning Herald* critic applauded the

---

80 1973 history, [14].

81 “Samson and Delilah,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 April 1921.


Philharmonic’s initiative to perform such works and enjoyed the performances. Contrary to previous opinions expressed in this newspaper concerning the Philharmonic’s productions of operas, this *Herald* considered the performance of *Aida* to be a “triumph” and very much looked forward to the encore performance.\(^8^4\) The critic from the *Australian Musical News*, however, was not impressed with the organisation’s decision to include performances of such works in their repertoire. Following the performance of *The Flying Dutchman*, he wrote,

> Why the Royal Philharmonic should hitch its musical waggon [sic] to the evil star of ‘The Flying Dutchman’ is a question that has been agitating the minds of people who take their music seriously.\(^8^5\)

Instead of performing concert versions of operas, the critic suggested that the Philharmonic attempt an oratorio festival, like those produced during the Hazon years, despite the fact that the operatic performances generated the much needed revenue required by the Society. Furthermore, the critic believed that the Philharmonic should focus on the production of new choral works, and he stated that it was the duty of the organisation to perform such works.\(^8^6\) He did concede one point, admitting “from time to time it is wise to have concert performances of opera” but suggested that perhaps “performances of famous works that have never been heard in Sydney, and that in all probability shall never be heard here on the operatic stage” be produced instead.\(^8^7\)

---

\(^8^4\) “*Aida. Philharmonic Success,*” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 1922.


\(^8^6\) “Philharmonic *Dutchman,*” *Australian Musical News* 11:10 (1 May 1922): 455.

\(^8^7\) “Philharmonic *Dutchman,*” *Australian Musical News* 11:10 (1 May 1922): 453. The critic suggested the following operas as those that would not be heard “in all probability” in Australia: *Magic Flute* (Mozart), *Fidelio* (Beethoven), *Norma* (Bellini), and *I Puritani* (Bellini).
Thus, the Philharmonic was facing the nearly impossible task of programming concerts that would draw a large audience while simultaneously selecting works that would stimulate positive reviews in the press, thus encouraging patrons to attend future events. Also during the 1920s, the New South Wales State Conservatorium, under the direction of W. Arundel Orchard, began staging student opera productions. Although these performances were often “undistinguished [and] amateur,” they provided competition for the Philharmonic’s concert operas.

During 1922, the Philharmonic suffered a personal loss, with the death of their president, Alderman William Johnson. The Philharmonic performed the “Dead March” from Handel’s Saul at the concert on 20 April, and members of the organisation under Bradley’s direction sang at Johnson’s memorial. Professionally, the Philharmonic also experienced the loss of the New South Wales State Orchestra, which had been disbanded due to lack of financial support from the state government. The year ended with the Philharmonic performing the Messiah at Christmas in the Town Hall, as dictated by tradition. However, the organisation’s deputy conductor, G. Vern Barnett, led the organisation as Joseph Bradley was on holiday. This concert was the first Bradley had missed in his twelve years as conductor of the Society.

Amalgamation with the Sydney Choral Society

Supported by the growing middle and working classes, the musical environment during the 1920s began to shift from amateur choral societies to

88 Diane Collins, Sounds from the Stables, 58.
89 Gill, 26.
90 Diane Collins, Sounds from the Stables, 50.
professional orchestras. In turn, this influenced the number of choral societies that could be sustained in Sydney. Therefore, in what was described as “a fusion of forces,” the Sydney Choral Society was amalgamated with the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney at the beginning of the 1923 concert season. Traditionally, the title Sydney Choral Society was associated with high quality choral music performed by men and women, and ensembles under that name had been performing in Sydney since the 1850s. During the early twentieth century, this organisation was one of the few in Sydney to compete directly with the Philharmonic. For example, during the 1922 Christmas season, the Sydney Choral Society and the Philharmonic performed the Messiah within two days of each other, both in the Town Hall.

An agreement between the two amateur choral organisations was reached on 13 February 1923, and the announcement was made at the Philharmonic’s annual meeting at the end of the month. On behalf of the Sydney Choral Society, W. Reginald Gooud, former conductor of the Choral Society, accepted the amalgamation and “promised the heartiest co-operation for the successful merging of the two societies.” As the members of the Sydney Choral Society were absorbed into the Philharmonic Society, it was decided the amalgamated ensemble would retain the title

---

91 Gill, 26; 1973 history, [14].

92 “Sydney Choral Society,” Sydney Morning Herald, 24 March 1856. This advertisement for an upcoming concert also gave information about the history of the Sydney Choral Society: “This Society was instituted in the year 1845 under the patronage of the Bishop of Sydney, and under the auspices of the Clergy, for the purpose of cultivating amongst the members of the Church of England a taste for sound ecclesiastical music, with a view to the improvement of the musical portions of our public worship in the Parochial Churches of the city.” James Forsyth also discusses the importance of the Sydney Choral Society during the middle part of the nineteenth century in “Music of the Anglican Churches in Sydney and Surrounding Regions: 1788-1868” (Ph.D. diss., University of Sydney, 2002), 255. Although it is uncertain, it is very unlikely that this was the same Sydney Choral Society that amalgamated with the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney. Nonetheless, the Sydney Choral Society was a part of a strong tradition of amateur choral music. Due to the restrictions of time and space, the historical details of the Sydney Choral Society will not be further discussed in this study.


“Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney.” The Philharmonic was excited about the possibilities that this union brought. Many involved with the organisation believed the amalgamation “should be the solution to all [the Philharmonic’s] financial difficulties; should give them greater ability to render the works of the great masters, and perhaps, in the future, enable them to have an orchestra of their own.”95 In recent years, according to the *Australian Musical News*, the Philharmonic Society had been on the down grade…in the quality of its voices, owing to its constitution preventing it shedding itself of the old voices that had become used up in its service, and [had] the difficult [task] of obtaining young members of the right vocal and musical quality.96

The Sydney Choral Society brought an increase in numbers and fresh enthusiasm to the choir of the Philharmonic.97 However, in yet another example of the management’s continuing ineptitude, the members from the Sydney Choral Society were not allowed to perform with the Philharmonic on their first subscription concert in March because there were not enough parts of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* available for rehearsal. Unfortunately, when the members of the Sydney Choral Society were finally allowed to rehearse and perform with the Philharmonic, a number of the male members of the Sydney Choral Society had resigned from the organisation, and therefore the new Philharmonic choir was still in need of male voices. Nonetheless, their first season together was acknowledged by patrons and critics alike to be a success.

---

95 “The Philharmonic. Annual Meeting. Amalgamation Scheme,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 February 1923. Initially, it was decided that a committee made up of six members of the Philharmonic Society and two from the Sydney Choral Society would govern the combined choir.


Bradley’s Final Years, 1924-1927

During the summer of 1924, Bradley and his family went on a short holiday, missing only his second concert in 16 years. Bradley returned to Sydney to conduct the Sydney premiere of Elgar’s oratorio *The Apostles*, in November. Although the reviews published in both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian Musical News* focused on the merits of the oratorio itself, the general impression was that of a satisfactory performance.

That was the final new work that Bradley would conduct in the remaining three years of his tenure. Although he told nobody, not even his wife, Bradley was losing his eyesight. Though his public commitment to new choral works continued, he began programming works he could conduct from memory. In the Philharmonic’s repertoire, such works included Verdi’s *Requiem* and the concert version of *Aida*, excerpts from Coleridge-Taylor’s *Hiawatha*, Saint Saens’s *Samson and Delilah*, Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, and Handel’s *Messiah*. Ironically, at the annual meeting, Bradley acknowledged that the Society was most often criticised for not performing contemporary choral works; at the same time, he would not have been able to study new scores, since his eyesight was failing.

In 1927, Bradley led the Philharmonic in the organisation’s first performance of Beethoven’s *Mass in D, Missa Solemnis* as part of the celebrations of the

---

98 While Bradley was away, G. Vern Barnett, the Society’s Deputy conductor, led the organisation.


100 “Bradley, Joseph,” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 7, 1891-1939; Wunderlich, 59. According to Wunderlich, Mrs. Bradley learned her husband was going blind only after they returned to England.

centenary of the composer’s death. Although this was the premiere performance of
this work by the Philharmonic, Bradley was familiar with the Mass, having led a
performance of the work earlier in his career. At about the same time, the seventy
year old Joseph Bradley announced his retirement from the Royal Philharmonic
Society of Sydney. There are conflicting reports surrounding his departure from the
organisation. According to one account, Bradley offered no explanation, and
apparently felt he had no other option when the committee asked him to produce an
unidentified work with which he was unfamiliar. The records from the proceedings of
the Philharmonic suggest that Bradley left his post as conductor on amicable terms.
Certainly, the Society considered Bradley’s announcement of his resignation rather
abrupt. The Philharmonic “gave [Bradley] only a lukewarm farewell and meagre
cheque,” when compared to the send-off the Philharmonic gave Roberto Hazon.
This was disappointing for Bradley since he had been with the organisation for 19
years, and had led the Society in 129 concerts and only missed two performances.
The Society did hold a farewell banquet in his honour. During the evening’s
speeches, Bradley apologised for being hard on the choir from time to time, but he
said he was “always guided by the aim of securing fine performances.” Bradley led
the Philharmonic in two final performances of Messiah, and he left Sydney in January
1929 for England. Shortly thereafter, he underwent an operation to reverse the
damage of a cataract; the operation was unsuccessful and he was left totally blind.

Wunderlich, 59.


105 Wunderlich, 59.
In 1935, the year James K. Gill wrote his historical review of the Philharmonic Society, Bradley died of cerebral vascular disease. By this time, members of the Society and the Sydney music community had learned the truth about Bradley’s abrupt departure from the organisation. Bradley was fondly remembered and honoured in Gill’s article, and the reasons for the conductor’s resignation were identified as “advancing years and failing eyesight.” Bradley was further eulogised in Gill’s article.

His vast scholarship, culture and profound knowledge were always at the service of advancement of all that was best in music....A peer in his own realm, he had certain characteristic features distinctive to what is usually found among those of his profession, the chief of which, perhaps, was that he never used a baton....His arms, hands and fingers were used in giving expression to varying rhythm and emotion, be the work what it may.

The End of an Era

With the resignation of Joseph Bradley, the “Golden Years” of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney came to end. These years, although far from perfect, were dominated by the leadership of Hazon and Bradley. These two men led the Philharmonic to artistic levels that were greater than any previously reached by such an ensemble in Sydney. The Philharmonic often performed for sold out audiences, and though severely criticised in the press at times, membership also increased through much of this period. At a time when amateur musical societies flourished around the world, the Philharmonic Society was widely recognised as the pre-eminent choral group in Sydney and New South Wales and among the most important musical organisations in Australia.


Yet, while these years were highly successful for the Philharmonic, many of
the seeds of failure were also planted during this time. The ongoing financial
hardship faced by the Society was compounded by the lack of fiscal support from the
city and state governments, despite repeated requests for help. The unreasonable
policies set by the authorities at the Town Hall, the economic depression of the 1890s,
influenza outbreaks, the Great War, and subsequent benefit concerts also contributed
to monetary worries. The slow change in the Sydney musical culture and popular
opinion from amateur choral societies to professional orchestras and opera companies
put increasing stress on the Philharmonic. The impact of all these factors will be
further analysed and evaluated in the final chapter of this study.