CHAPTER 5

EXTERNAL FACTORS IN THE DECLINE OF THE PHILHARMONIC

The decline and ultimate demise of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney can be attributed to many factors. The evidence in the previous chapter has shown that the absence of a strong and long-term conductor during the second half of the Philharmonic’s existence hampered the organisation’s advancement. This artistic deterioration was further worsened by an increase in internal arguments, specifically among members of the committee. Later, during the Lastelle years, this conflict was felt between members of the choir and their conductor.

These internal issues were further compounded by other significant factors. Externally, the Philharmonic faced a change in musical trends, increase in competition from several sources, specifically the ABC, and an ongoing lack of support from the city and state governments. As the Philharmonic faced artistic decline, the response from the press became more negative and public support for the ensemble waned. A close examination of these external factors will reveal the part they played in the collapse of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney.

A Change in Musical Trends and an Increase in Competition

The amateur choral music society was an institution of the nineteenth century. These societies originated in Europe, specifically England, in the tradition of performances by amateur musicians encouraged by the Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century.¹ The social elites in Australia in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries strove to assert cultural authority by establishing and supporting organisations that reflected high society in England. One of these cultural organisations was the Sydney Philharmonic Society, founded in 1885 in the tradition of amateur choral societies that had been supported by members of Sydney’s upper class since the 1830s. For the first several years of the Philharmonic’s existence, the performing members, subscribers, and supporters of the Society were mainly those of high social standing. As societal structure changed and a middle class emerged in Sydney, membership in the Philharmonic began to change as well. Encouraged by Roberto Hazon’s policy of “popular” ticket prices for encored concerts, those of the middle class were able to afford to attend concerts. Soon thereafter, members of the emerging middle class began singing with the choir.

At the same time, early in the twentieth century, professional orchestra and opera companies started to gain popularity. The social elites in Sydney found the performances of these professional ensembles to be more satisfying than those of the amateur choral ensembles. Former Musica Viva Chairman Ken Tribe, as quoted in Phillip Sametz’s book on the history of the Sydney Symphony, discussed this shift in musical preference in Sydney in the years between the World Wars.

[T]he big events of Sydney’s local music-making then were choral concerts. The tradition of massed choral singing was still very strong in the twenties, and there were regular concerts by the Philharmonic Society and their orchestra. But that orchestra didn’t play so well. The coming of a properly established symphony orchestra eventually put the choral scene in retreat. Once orchestral performance in Sydney became professional the cult of the voice began to wane. There are fashions in music, after all, and the voice went out of fashion. During the thirties orchestral music became the thing.²

Although orchestral and operatic music gained popularity, professional orchestras and opera companies were not always available to perform in Sydney, for a

²Phillip Sametz, *Play On! 60 Years of music-making with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra* (Sydney: ABC Enterprises, 1992), 7-8.
variety of reasons. Thus, the concert-going public turned to the amateur music societies for performances in these genres. Both Hazon, with the Amateur Orchestral Society, and Bradley, with the Philharmonic’s orchestral concerts, attempted to satisfy the public’s want for orchestral music. However, due to the low artistic standards of these amateur ensembles, the high cost of supplementing the orchestra with professional musicians, and eventual competition from state-funded professional orchestras, neither venture achieved permanent success.

Thus, during the 1930s public preference shifted from amateur choral music to professional orchestras. By the 1950s, orchestral music had been firmly established as the preferable genre in Sydney. An editorial in the *Canon* reflected on this instrumental domination and implored the music community to establish or reorganise a choral organisation capable of collaborating with the professional Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

In an earlier Editorial I stressed the fact that Australians were symphonically minded. After twelve months’ careful observation I can see no reason for withdrawing this statement….Our successes have been in the orchestral field rather than in the choral; in fact, so far as choral music is concerned we have retreated rather than advanced.

It is obvious to every thinking music-lover that we have no choral body in Sydney, amateur or professional, capable of standing beside the Sydney Symphony Orchestra….Our most immediate need, therefore, is the formation of a choir of amateur or professional singers (it is immaterial which) under the direction of a professional chorus master. This would eventually bring our choral music into line with our achievements in the orchestral sphere and lead to performances of such masterworks as require both choral and orchestral forces for their presentation.4

By this point, the Philharmonic had sunk to very low artistic and financial levels and was not in a position to rise to the challenge of undertaking a reorganisation that

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3 The first Sydney Symphony Orchestra (conducted by Bradley, 1908-1914), Verbrughen’s State Orchestra (1919-1922), and the ABC-funded Sydney Symphony Orchestra (established 1946) usurped the attempts at orchestral performances by amateur ensembles conducted by Hazon and Bradley.

would result in the Society being able to collaborate with the Sydney Symphony. Had
the Society been able to undertake a major restructuring, the Philharmonic rather than
the Hurlstone Choral Society, might have become Sydney’s top choral organisation.

The Philharmonic also attempted to benefit from the public’s desire to hear
operatic performances.⁵ As discussed earlier, the Society performed many concert
versions of the more popular operas of the day. Although dire financial circumstances
forced many of Sydney’s amateur choral societies to “[adopt] opera programmes so
that they might live to fight another day in the cause of art,”⁶ many critics deemed that
these concert operas were not artistically satisfying. Despite being supportive of the
Philharmonic decision to perform popular operas, the editors of Musical Australia did
warn, “there is always the danger that the popular opera in concert form may become
a habit” for amateur choral societies.⁷

While the Philharmonic attempted to satisfy the orchestral and operatic desires
of their subscribers, musical fashions worldwide were shifting to professional
organisations, as suggested by Ken Tribe. Amateur organisations like the
Philharmonic, which had previously been supported by Sydney’s social elite, were left
facing a shortage of members and subscribers, which resulted in a financial crisis.
This lack of support from the upper social class was exacerbated by the
Philharmonic’s inability to perceive the type of music their audiences wanted to hear.
Both Hazon and Bradley, as argued earlier, were proficient at reading their
prospective audiences and were often successfully able to determine which works

⁵ For more on opera in Australia, see Alison Gyger’s Opera for the Antipodes and John
Cargher, Bravo! Two Hundred Years of Opera in Australia (South Melbourne: The Macmillan


would attract a sizable crowd. Furthermore, these two men were usually able to create concert seasons that featured both traditional and more contemporary works. Their heirs and the committees of later years did not seem to possess this gift. In 1936, the *Australian Musical News* reflected on the decline of oratorio in favour of opera, and suggested

> an extension of the Philharmonic repertory to include many choral works by modernist composers as a solution of the Society's problems….Certainly, the Philharmonic could and should perform representative modern works. But it should also bring forward many great things from the past – works by great masters that have been done but seldom or never in Sydney. There are masses and oratorios by Bach, Leonardo Leo, Handel, Haydn, and Mozart that Sydney audiences would be glad to hear – if assured of their worthy performance.8

The leadership of the Philharmonic did not understand that although some members of their audiences wanted to attend performances that solely featured the traditional conservative oratorios, a significant number of established and prospective audience members also desired to hear new music. However, the majority of the Philharmonic’s subscribers, who greatly contributed to the organisation’s finances, were conservative in their music preferences. Consequently, the Philharmonic continued to perform the “safe works” from the trinity of Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn. The editors of the *Triad* blamed the subscribers in part for the organisation’s inability to produce performances of new music.

> The Society’s clientèle, with its queer mental make-up, demands an annual debauch of Handel and Mendelssohn, and though the Society would fain wander along quite other paths, at least temporarily, they always end by striking their colours – to the horde of dull Philistine subscribers.9

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8 “The Philharmonic Revives,” *Australian Musical News* 27:1 (1 August 1936): 11. This was not the first time the *Australian Musical News* offered these suggestions. As early as 1921, similar solutions were put forth in “The Onlooker. Oratorio – Or What?” *Musical Australia* 2:5 (September 1921): 27.

As the Philharmonic struggled to compete against professional orchestras and opera companies in an effort to hold on to their audience members and attempt to programme music that satisfied both their subscribers and members of the press, public support for the live performing arts in general was declining. In 1936, Roland Foster, then president of the Philharmonic, released a statement expressing the concerns of many in Sydney’s music community.

Although population steadily increases year by year, patronage for the higher forms of art as steadily diminishes. Artists complain that purchasers can no longer be found for their pictures; opera and serious drama are unprofitable speculations. Concert-givers lose money by their efforts. Symphony orchestras and choral societies can be kept alive only by urgent and reiterated appeals. All the while picture theatres are packed; cabarets and dance halls multiply and flourish; bridge is the most important obligation and accomplishment, and radio sets satisfy musical inclinations (if any) of the multitude.

In other words, in addition to competition for audiences from professional performing arts organisations, the Philharmonic Society also had to fight against theatres, cinemas, radio, and, in later years, television for public support.

Theatrical productions had been a popular form of entertainment in Sydney, practically since the founding of the city as a colony. Sydney’s first theatre was built in 1796, and “Sydney’s most famous theatrical ‘entrepreneur,’” Barnett Levey, continued the tradition in the 1820s. Many of these early theatres catered to the lower classes in the Sydney social structure and were not direct competitors of the Philharmonic during the organisation’s early years. The twentieth century saw the rise of the Tivoli Theatre and by the middle of the century there was no shortage of theatrical venues in Sydney. Although the music and theatre communities often

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10 Roland Foster, “The Philharmonic Appeal” (letter to the editor), *Sydney Morning Herald* 17 June 1936.

worked together as promoters of the arts in Sydney, these institutions also competed with each other for audiences. In the years following World War II, the theatrical community “enjoyed a period of vitality.”\(^{12}\) As a result, many prospective concertgoers chose the theatre over the concert hall, a decision that obviously affected the Philharmonic in an adverse manner.

Another competing entertainment was the movie theatre. According to The Sydney Scene, cinema was the “medium of mass magic...which put the ‘legitimate’ theatre and the unpretentious music hall out of business.”\(^{13}\) First there were the silent films, and in the late 1920s the “talkies” reached Sydney. Both types of films fascinated audiences and were in direct competition with the live theatrical and musical performances that had been immensely popular only decades earlier. The cinema was soon established in a “dominant place in middle-class as well as working-class recreational culture,” and in 1927 it was estimated that one in three Australians saw at least one picture show at the cinema each week.\(^{14}\) The following year, the film industry in Australia was worth approximately £25 million and employed twenty thousand people.\(^{15}\) Although the years following World War II saw a decline in the public’s interest in the cinema, it only deepened the problems of competing entertainments for the Philharmonic.

\(^{12}\) Birch and Macmillian, 325.

\(^{13}\) Birch and Macmillian, 244-245.


\(^{15}\) Diane Collins, “More Than Just Entertainment,” 69.
The advent of radio, and later the television, gave prospective audience members the opportunity to enjoy a concert in the comfort of their own homes.\textsuperscript{16} By 1929, there were more than 300,000 licensed radio listeners in Australia.\textsuperscript{17} The radio and television broadcasts also provided a variety of non-music programming that also competed for audience members with live concert performances. From 1932, the Australian Broadcasting Commission led the way in radio broadcasting in Australia; its impact, both positive and negative, on the amateur choral societies of the country warrants further in depth study.

\textbf{The ABC}

When the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) went on the air for the first time in July 1932, the Philharmonic was facing a dire situation. Howard Carr had just been appointed permanent conductor of the Society and had inherited an organisation wrought with financial problems; these problems would force the Society to suspend its activities in 1933. The organisation also faced serious artistic concerns. Yet, its members had not given up hope for its future. Although members of the committee did not state their opinions publicly, many believed that if the organisation were able to enter into a contract as the choir for the ABC, the future of the Philharmonic might be secured. In retrospect, they were probably correct.

During the 1930s, the Philharmonic was not the only amateur choral organisation in Australia facing financial concerns. A change in the public’s


\textsuperscript{17} Macintyre, 219.
preference from choral music to the operatic and orchestral genres following the First World War had put pressure on many of Australia’s amateur choral societies. The financial concerns of the Depression only worsened the situation, and choral societies around Australia struggled to survive. In the present day, some seventy years later, only one large choral society survives in each Australian state and territory; these choirs are the descendents of those choral societies that entered into agreements with the ABC in the 1930s and early 1940s. Although these agreements with the ABC may have seemed restrictive to the respective choral societies over the years, these contracts may have saved the choirs from collapsing. In order to understand the importance of a contract with the ABC, an examination of the ABC’s involvement in and commitment to music in Australia is necessary.

Early in the existence of the ABC, Commission officials set a goal of providing the highest standard of musical performances to their audiences around Australia. In what became known as the Act of 1932, the ABC set out to establish “groups of musicians for the rendition of orchestral, choral and band music of high quality.” According to Alan Thomas, in his book examining the first twenty years of the Commission, the ABC’s first annual report concluded that “music accounted for nearly 53 per cent of all broadcasts during the 1932/33 year…music was safe…[and] musical programmes were relatively easy to produce.” In order to accomplish the goal set forth in the Act of 1932, the ABC recognised that they needed

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18 Sametz, 9.

19 The choirs chosen by the ABC included the Adelaide Philharmonic Society in South Australia, the Melbourne Philharmonic Society in Victoria, the Hurlstone Choral Society in New South Wales, and the Queensland State and Municipal Choir in Queensland.

20 Inglis, 28, Thomas, 66.

21 Thomas, 33.
orchestras and choruses that would be “on-call” to serve the Commission’s requirements occasionally throughout the year.\textsuperscript{22}

In response to the desire for choirs of their own, the Commission formed the ABC Wireless Choruses in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, and Hobart between 1933 and 1937.\textsuperscript{23} Whilst these ensembles met the needs of the ABC, the small studio choirs raised serious concerns among the amateur choral societies around the country, particularly in the capital cities.\textsuperscript{24} As the Wireless Choruses were designed to sing in a broadcasting studio, many of the amateur large choral societies were understandably concerned that these choruses would prove to be a source of competition. Moreover, the Wireless Choruses filled the void at the ABC that many amateur choral societies hoped to fill. As the Wireless Choruses were owned and operated by the ABC, the Commission had the right to determine who sang with the choir and what music was performed. The ABC could afford to employ the top vocal talent in each city and had the resources to produce the music that the public wanted to hear; this made these studio choirs key competitors of the local amateur choral societies.

Despite being one of the Philharmonic’s strongest competitors, the Sydney Wireless Choir augmented the Philharmonic’s choir on more than one occasion during the 1930s. It is likely that the ABC loaned their Sydney Wireless Chorus, as well as

\textsuperscript{22} For more on the ABC’s formation of professional orchestras in the Australian capital cities, see Sametz, Inglis, and Thomas.

\textsuperscript{23} Covell, 125. An announcement that the ABC had formed its own choir, specifically in New South Wales, was made by H.G. Horner, the manager for the New South Wales branch of the ABC, in “Choral Music Not up to Standard,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 6 February 1933.

\textsuperscript{24} These concerns about the formation of the ABC’s own choirs are raised by the leaders of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney in “Musical Societies. Fears for the Future,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 8 February 1933. Kathleen Nelson discusses similar concerns among members of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic in her forthcoming article, “The Melbourne Philharmonic Society under Contract to the Australian Broadcasting Commission: Preservation and Triumph;” the present researcher has been granted access to this article by Dr. Nelson.
their orchestra, to the Philharmonic in exchange for borrowing music from the Society’s extensive library. The minutes from several of the Society’s committee meetings refer to this practice of loaning music to the ABC, as well as to other local organisations, either free of charge or for a nominal fee. Since the Philharmonic was more established in the music community than the choirs of the ABC, the Philharmonic’s music library would have been more extensive than that of the Commission.

Although employing their own studio choir for most broadcasts, the ABC was still interested in engaging larger choirs for the production of major choral/orchestral works, such as cantatas and oratorios. The Commission was also interested in occasionally broadcasting concerts performed by local amateur choral societies. In Sydney, however, the music officials at the ABC believed that the standards in choral music were too low to merit broadcasting. In February 1933, H.G. Horner, the ABC’s Manager in New South Wales, released a statement summarising the ABC’s view of the state of choral performances in Sydney.

The commission has recently decided to reject applications for broadcasting engagements from most of the choral societies in Sydney. It is not a question of policy…. It has been found that the standard of choral music, with exceptions, of course, has been declining, and at present is very much below par. We cannot give engagements in those circumstances, but [as soon as] they put their house in order we shall be only too pleased to restore them to our programmes….We [at the ABC] have been giving [these choral societies] engagements quite frequently, but our contributions have not stemmed the tide of deterioration. I want to make it quite clear that we have not decided to exclude these organisations as a matter of policy. We are not laying it down as a hard and fast rule. At present we do not consider the choral music up to standard, and until it is we cannot include it in our programmes.”

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25 Presently, it appears that most of the music from the library of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney is located at the Library of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

26 The inclusion of the ABC ensembles in the Philharmonic’s concerts is listed on the concert programmes from this period.

27 “Choral Music Not up to Standard,” Sydney Morning Herald, 6 February 1933.
As early as the 1920s, many different radio stations, some of which became part of the ABC, had been broadcasting concerts by local ensembles throughout Australia. Even though these broadcasts did not generate a large profit for the musical organisation involved, it was, nonetheless, a welcomed source of income and public exposure. When the ABC threatened to take these broadcasts away from Sydney’s amateur music societies, many involved in these organisations were outraged. Shortly following Horner’s statement, the Philharmonic’s committee met to discuss the organisation’s response. It was determined that a lack of broadcasting revenue would be detrimental to the Society’s finances, and the Society agreed to accept the challenge put forth by Horner. Encouraged by remarks made by Roland Foster reminding the Society’s members that the ABC would be willing to broadcast concerts again in the future, the organisation began to look for ways to raise the Philharmonic’s artistic and performance standards.

At the Philharmonic’s annual meeting a year later, the members voted to suspend the organisation’s activities in an effort to reorganise “in the view of impending events of musical importance in which the Royal Philharmonic Society will be called upon to take part,” referring to any type of broadcasting agreement with the ABC. In 1935, Gill summarised the circumstances and outcomes of the Philharmonic’s reorganisation.

With due regard to the future and with experiences of the past, the executive had the necessity impressed upon them of instituting a scheme of reorganisation which would ultimately raise the Society to that high standard of choral and instrumental expression modern conditions demand, both in respect

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28 Thomas, 7.


of tonal quality and balance. To carry out the scheme effectively, the members were called upon to submit to a re-test....

As was to be expected, the Committee, in the course of their re-testing, found themselves forced to terminate the membership of several whose qualifications, regretfully, were not what they once were. With this task accomplished, the Committee set about increasing the Society’s membership...31

Although an agreement with the ABC was not specifically mentioned in Gill’s version of the events, press reports from the period clearly state that the comments made by the ABC were the stimulus for the re-audition of all the Society’s members. The restructured Philharmonic must have satisfactorily “put their house in order,” as requested by Horner in February 1933, since the ensemble signed a limited broadcasting agreement with the ABC shortly after its reorganisation. However, the Society did not manage to acquire the more exclusive contract with the ABC.

Unfortunately, this relationship between the Philharmonic and the ABC in New South Wales proved to be a temporary one. As indicated earlier, a long-term association would have most likely saved the Society from ultimate demise. To demonstrate the importance of such an alliance with the ABC, the case studies of two amateur choral societies, the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic and the Hurlstone Choral Society, now the Philharmonia Choir, and their respective agreements with the ABC will be put forward.32

Before discussing the specifics of the respective agreements between the ABC and the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society and the Hurlstone Choral Society, it is

31 Gill, 31.

necessary to emphasise that although it is likely these agreements saved these choral societies, there were major problems with the agreements over the years. Roger Covell, in his book *Australia’s Music*, offers his opinion of the situation. Referring to the situation as “one of the saddest tales of Australian music,” Covell suggests whilst these agreements saved the respective choral societies from impending financial concerns, overall the organisations’ standards declined as the average age of their members rose; their absorption into the A.B.C. concert structure helped dissipate the loyalty of a specific public; the failure of the Commission to make choral music a consistent and integral part of its general subscription concerts…did not foster a newer public for choral music at anything like the same rate at which these concerts grew new and younger audiences for orchestral music.33

Nonetheless, these agreements did preserve selected choral societies around Australia. Founded in 1853, the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society is Australia’s oldest amateur choral society, and, according to the Society’s website, the country’s “oldest surviving cultural organisation.”34 As with other amateur choral societies in Australia during the 1930s, the Melbourne Philharmonic Society was in financial distress and possible dissolution due to an inability to attract audiences. Given the Society’s financial concerns and widely held belief that the organisation could offer a “particularly high standard” of performances,35 the governing members of the Society decided to approach the ABC in 1936 to propose an association between the Society and the Commission. Most likely, the stimulus and significant support for this proposal came from Bernard Heinze, the Society’s conductor and Music Advisor for

33 Covell, 122.


35 Carne, 202.
the ABC, and William James, the Society’s choirmaster from 1929 to 1935 and Federal Controller of Music for the ABC in Sydney from 1935.36

During 1936, the Melbourne Philharmonic began negotiations with the ABC, and by 1937 the two parties had reached an agreement. Kathleen Nelson has summarised the agreement as

a ‘take over’ of the Society’s choir, [which] allowed the ABC to require the auditioning and replacement of choristers. The ABC also gained the right to appoint the choirmaster, conductors and soloists as well as the right to choose the works to be performed. It would furthermore provide the orchestra, thereby relieving the Society of a longstanding source of concern. Perhaps the major benefit to the Society was that the Commission would take responsibility for the financial risk involved in concert giving and cover most of its costs. The ABC would also retain any profits made, and was given broadcast rights to all the Society’s concerts.37

The agreement was a unique one; according to Nelson, outsiders may have viewed the terms of the agreement too much in the Philharmonic’s favour. Unlike agreements signed with other amateur choral societies, the ABC guaranteed the Melbourne Philharmonic four public concerts per year. Nelson also points out that the “Philharmonic was guaranteed against losses resulting from performances as well as having most costs covered including payment for the Secretary and his Assistant.”38 One additional advantage in the agreement between the Melbourne Philharmonic and the ABC was that the Philharmonic’s performing members each received two free tickets for the Society’s performances. In comparison, the members of the Hurlstone Choral Society in Sydney only received one ticket per member, the vocalists in the Queensland State and Municipal Choir received two tickets at a

concession rate, and the members of the Adelaide Philharmonic Society did not receive any free or concession tickets.³⁹

The next several years were a high point in the Melbourne Philharmonic Society’s history, both artistically and in terms of financial security, and the Society was granted the title of “Royal” in 1946. In his history of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society in 1954, W.A. Carne referred the Society’s then current approval of the ongoing association with the ABC.⁴⁰ The Society also had the opportunity to perform at the 1956 Olympic Games.

However, by the 1960s the performance standard of the Society had begun to slip. Although several proposals concerning the reorganisation of the Society were made during the decade, no changes to the structure of the organisation occurred until 1969. That year marked the termination of the Society’s original agreement with the ABC, and a new contract was instituted in 1970. According to Nelson,

[b]oth parties agreed on the need to rebuild the standard of performance. Under the new agreement, the ABC took full control of concerts involving the Society and employed the choir as an artist. The Society was to take back the management of the choir and operate on an independent basis.⁴¹

Currently, the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic consists of 130 volunteer vocalists who are “strictly auditioned.”⁴² Since its founding in 1853, the Society has annually performed the Messiah at Christmas and has produced the Australian premieres of many choral works. Although many current members of the Society are of the opinion that the organisation’s extended agreement with the ABC was


⁴⁰ Carne, 206.


⁴² RMP website.
restrictive and in some cases detrimental, the union between the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic and the ABC ensured the Philharmonic’s survival. 43

A second case study of the relationship between the ABC and a different amateur choral society will further illustrate how a semi-permanent association with the Commission paved the way to a more secure future. The Hurlstone Choral Society was established in the southeast Sydney suburb of Hurlstone Park in 1920. Almost immediately, despite the general decline of many amateur choral societies, the Society reached artistic levels that challenged the standing of the Royal Philharmonic Society as the premier amateur choral society in the greater Sydney area. 44 Like the Philharmonic, the Hurlstone Choral Society also produced Messiah annually at Christmas; often, the reviews of the Messiah performances by the Hurlstone Choral Society and the Philharmonic Society appeared jointly in the Sydney Morning Herald, Australian Musical News, and other Sydney publications. The members of the Hurlstone Choral Society and the Philharmonic also occasionally joined forces during the late 1930s to present various concerts, specifically at Christmas.

In Sydney, the Hurlstone Choral Society obtained the coveted agreement with the ABC in 1941. 45 According to David Garrett in an article published in ABC Radio’s magazine, 24 Hours, in 1995, the ABC chose the Hurlstone Choral Society because the organisation “had shone in the inter-choral competitions then so important

43 The Royal Melbourne Philharmonic celebrated its sesquicentennial in 2003 with a series of concerts and an exhibition of items from the Philharmonic’s past, as well as other events. The current researcher had the opportunity to attend a one-day symposium, entitled “Choral Music in Melbourne: A Symposium,” on 21 June 2003 at the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne. Several papers were presented on this topic. This researcher also had the opportunity to have informal conversations with current members of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic, during which the members expressed their views on the Philharmonic’s association with the ABC.

44 Peter Campbell, “Choral singing” in Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia.

45 The ABC’s records of their association with the Hurlstone Choral Society are located at the Chester Hill reading room of the National Archives of Australia: NAA: SP724/1, 7/11/18 PART 1; NAA: SP1299/1, R10/6/2 PART 1.
in musical life.”46 The agreement between the Hurlstone Choral Society and the
ABC, which would remain in place for many years, was, on the surface, similar to that
between the Commission and the Melbourne Philharmonic Society. The Hurlstone
Choral Society would provide a chorus of a predetermined number of voices for a
minimum of three guaranteed public or studio performances, usually including the
Christmas performance of *Messiah*. In return, the ABC would provide all of the
music and orchestral musicians, usually the members of the Sydney Symphony
Orchestra. The Society would receive a predetermined amount of money per
performance, and the ABC retained all broadcasting rights. Unlike in Melbourne, the
Hurlstone Choral Society was not covered against any losses from the concerts, and
the Society had to pay its conductor and officers from its own funds. The Hurlstone
Choral Society was only allowed to perform at non-ABC concerts with prior written
approval from the ABC officials, provided the extra concert did not interfere with a
previously scheduled ABC event. This contract was renewed annually with the
number of vocalists and rate of pay per concert adjusted as the ABC saw fit.47

As in Melbourne, both the Hurlstone Choral Society and the ABC benefited
from the association during the first few years of this agreement. The Society was
performing at a relatively high artistic level, and according to W.D. Rankine, the
Honorary Secretary of the Hurlstone Choral Society, members of the Society felt
“sincere appreciation of its happy association with the commission.”48 However, by
the late 1950s, the Hurlstone Choral Society’s sentiment toward their agreement with
the ABC had changed. As of 1959, the ABC only required the services of the

47 NAA: SP724/1, 7/11/18 PART 1; NAA: SP1299/1, R10/6/2 PART 1.
48 W.D. Rankine to B.W. Kirke, Esq, Manager of NSW ABC, 18 July 1944, NAA: SP724/1,
7/11/18 PART 1.
Hurlstone Choral Society for two of the three guaranteed contracted performances. This practice was significantly lowering the morale of the Society, according to Hurlstone representatives. Although ABC officials acknowledged their departure from the original agreement, the officials generally believed that if the Hurlstone Choral Society “had adopted the aggressive tactics of the Q.S. & M. [Queensland State and Municipal Choir] or Melbourne Royal Philharmonic Choir, the situation would have been rectified long ago.”\(^49\) At any rate, the condition of the Hurlstone Choral Society did not improve, and in 1963, Joseph Post, the ABC’s Assistant Director of Music, suggested that the Society be restructured. In an inter-office memo to ABC executives, Post suggested that the Hurlstone Choral Society be reorganised into a semi-professional chorus, resembling the then defunct Sydney Wireless Chorus.\(^50\) Post also offered a second solution.

A far better proposal, of course, would be the formation of a fully professional chorus of say 60, and a cancellation of our agreement with the Hurlstone….its cost could not be much more than that of the S.S.O. … a cost which we cheerfully bear.\(^51\)

A couple of weeks later, Post re-evaluated his assessment and suggested that the Hurlstone Choral Society be restructured to include up to approximately eighty voices. He determined that this “would appear to be a very inexpensive way of acquiring a fine choir.”\(^52\) Following the exchange of several additional inter-office memos, ABC officials decided to allow the Hurlstone Choral Society to make the

\(^49\) H. Cannon to the General Manager [Charles Moses], 6 February 1959, NAA: SP1299/1, R10/6/2 PART 1.

\(^50\) The ABC Wireless Choruses were renamed according to their respective home city following World War II, but in 1953 the Melbourne and Sydney Choirs were dissolved. Inglis, 161.

\(^51\) Joseph Post to the Assistant General Manager, 5 August 1963, NAA: SP1299/1, R10/6/2 PART 1.

\(^52\) Joseph Post to the Assistant General Manager, 22 August 1963, NAA: SP1299/1, R10/6/2 PART 1.
necessary changes to their personnel roster, subject to ABC approval. In what Covell referred to as a “drastic action,”53 the Society re-auditioned its members at the end of 1963; the resulting choir, still performing under the name Hurlstone Choral Society, included the approved eighty members.54

However, the Society was still not performing up to the high standards set by the ABC, and the Hurlstone Choral Society was again reorganised in 1968 as the Sydney Philharmonia Choir. By this time, the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney was not as widely known as it had once been. Therefore the title Philharmonia would not have been a source of confusion for the members of the Sydney music community, and the Philharmonia would not have been confused with the Philharmonic Society. Four years later, with the blessing of the ABC, the members of the Philharmonia Choir embarked on a concert season of their own, with the orchestral support of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and later the Australian Chamber Orchestra. Presently, the Sydney Philharmonia is made up of three choirs: the 35-voice Motet Choir, the 120-voice Symphonic Choir, and the 450-voice Sydney Massed Choir.55

From this case study, it is evident that although their agreement with the ABC was restrictive at times, the financial and artistic support of the Commission allowed the Hurlstone Choral Society, now the Philharmonia Choir, to survive in Sydney to the present day. With the help of the ABC, both the (Royal) Melbourne Philharmonic

53 Covell, 122.

54 ABC agreement with the Hurlstone Choral Society, 15 January 1964; K.E.D. Lennard to General Manager, 13 November 1964, NAA: SP1299/1, R10/6/2 PART 1.

Society and the Philharmonia Choir were able to overcome the same challenges that the Philharmonic Society faced.

So, why was the Philharmonic unable to secure such a contract with the ABC? The first, and perhaps most obvious, reason was that the artistic levels of the Philharmonic were not at the standard required by the officials at the ABC when the Commission was looking for a large choir. However, it could be argued that in Sydney, the Hurlstone Choral Society’s artistic levels were not much higher than that of the Philharmonic. When H.G. Horner, the ABC’s Manager in New South Wales, criticised amateur choral performances in Sydney in 1933, he did not exclude the performances of the Hurlstone Choral Society, although it is plausible that the Hurlstone Choral Society was one of the “exceptions” to which Horne referred. Garrett also states that the Hurlstone Choral Society was winning choral competitions around the state;\textsuperscript{56} there is no documentation of the Philharmonic entering such competitions. In the 1940s, when the Philharmonic was attempting to deal with a high turnover rate of conductors and the absence of many members due to the war, the Hurlstone Choral Society was reportedly performing at a successful level. A letter from the Hurlstone Choral Society’s honorary secretary to the New South Wales manager cites a performance of the Messiah in 1943 “from which hundreds of the public were turned away.”\textsuperscript{57} No matter what the specific reason, in the years that followed the ABC’s agreement with the Hurlstone Choral Society, the artistic standards of their performances increased while those of the Philharmonic declined.

A second contributing factor that led the ABC not to select the Philharmonic was the organisation’s inability to maintain consistency in their leadership. Although

\textsuperscript{56} Garrett, 37.

\textsuperscript{57} W.D. Rankine to B.W. Kirke, Esq, Manager of NSW ABC, 18 July 1944, NAA: SP 724/1, 7/11/18 PART 1.
no reference to the Philharmonic’s constant change in leadership was made by the Commission, it likely would have influenced the ABC’s decision. Although Howard Carr held the position of conductor for seven years, the Philharmonic’s unfortunate experience with Curt Prerauer reflected poorly on the organisation’s choice of leadership. Furthermore, the ABC’s personal aversion to Prerauer was evident in later dealings between the conductor and the Commission; according to ABC records, Prerauer had the reputation at the ABC as being arrogant and intolerant of music by many composers.58 Although Prerauer’s personal encounters with the ABC occurred after his departure from the Philharmonic, the fact that he had been associated with the Society may have had an indirect impact on the Philharmonic’s chance to win the bid to perform on a long-term basis with the ABC.

In spite of the Philharmonic’s inability to enter into a long-term agreement with the ABC, the Society did enter into various short-term associations. According to the minutes from various meetings of the Philharmonic’s executive committee, the ABC and the Philharmonic were in regular communication concerning the swapping of concert dates at the Town Hall and the borrowing of music from each other’s collections. As mentioned earlier, the ABC Wireless and Radio Choirs augmented the choir of the Philharmonic at several performances, and the ABC’s orchestra often supported the Philharmonic’s amateur orchestra. The Philharmonic also had a number of their concerts, or portions thereof, broadcast by the ABC throughout New South Wales and across Australia. However, these broadcasts were few and far between.

Nonetheless, in 1950, Roland Foster, president of the Philharmonic, wrote a letter to Charles Moses, the General Manager of the ABC, requesting that the ABC

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58 Keith Barry to ABC General Manager, 22 April 1940, NAA: SP173/1, Prerauer.
broadcast a performance by the Society on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Federation of Australia in 1951. Citing the Philharmonic’s “command” performance of the *Messiah* on 3 January 1901 as part of the Federation celebrations, Foster strongly urged that a performance by the Philharmonic in conjunction with the anniversary would be an effective and memorable way to tie the two events together. In this letter, Foster also stated that the Philharmonic would be willing to perform *Messiah*, *St. Matthew Passion*, or *Caractacus*.59

A couple of months later, Moses sent his reply to the Philharmonic. Officially, the ABC would not accept a performance of either *Messiah* or *St. Matthew Passion*, but a performance of *Caractacus* was a possibility. Moses promised to present the Society’s proposal to the Jubilee committee, explicitly stating that the Philharmonic would be included in the celebrations only because of their involvement in 1901 Commonwealth celebrations, not based on the Philharmonic’s artistic merits.60 An inter-office memo from W.G. James, the Federal Controller of Music for the ABC, a month later confirmed that the ABC would agree to broadcast the performance of *Caractacus* by the Philharmonic. In the memo, James stated,

> I think it would be good policy to broadcast a part of this work by the Royal Philharmonic Society….Although I have not heard the Society recently, I understand that there is a distinct improvement in their work under Dr. Toy.61

In this memo, James implies that the broadcasting officials at the ABC viewed the decision to broadcast the Philharmonic’s concert in conjunction with the Jubilee functions as a charity case. This “good policy” decision, emphasised by James, was

59 Roland Foster to Charles Moses, 9 December 1950, NAA: SP497/1, Request for broadcasts associated with Jubilee.

60 Charles Moses to Roland Foster, 16 February 1951, NAA: SP497/1, Request for broadcasts associated with Jubilee.

61 W.G. James to C/Programmes, 13 March 1951, NAA: SP497/1, Request for broadcasts associated with Jubilee.
based on the Philharmonic’s tradition in Sydney’s music community, not on their current standing among the city’s ensembles.

In the months preceding the various Jubilee broadcasts, the terms of the agreement were reached. The ABC’s offer to the Philharmonic involved the recording of an hour of the Society performing *Caractacus* live in concert on 7 July 1951. The recording, which would be the exclusive property of the ABC, would then be broadcast at a later date. For these rights, the ABC would pay the Philharmonic £30 10s. Shortly thereafter, Foster, on behalf of the Philharmonic, accepted all of the terms and conditions of the offer. Although not explicitly stated in the organisation’s records, the Philharmonic officials were a bit disappointed that the ABC did not offer them a live broadcast or even a re-broadcast of an entire performance. Nonetheless, the Philharmonic was pleased with the support it received from the ABC. Unfortunately, the concert recorded by the ABC was judged a failure among Sydney’s music critics.

This agreement between the ABC and the Philharmonic Society was the only one of significance reached between the two parties. As shown in the case studies of the Melbourne Philharmonic Society and the Hurlstone Choral Society, a long-term arrangement with the ABC was essential for survival during the years building up to World War II, and a continuing association with the Commission in the years that followed resulted in existence into the twenty-first century. Although both of these choral societies, together with the ABC’s chosen choirs of the Adelaide Philharmonic in South Australia and the Queensland State and Municipal Choir in Queensland, felt their respective agreements restrictive and unfair at times, it appears that it was this

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62 Roland Foster to Charles Moses, 4 June 1951, NAA: SP7241/1, 7/21/6 PART 2.

63 “Minutes Book,” 2 November 1951 (Annual General Meeting), 144.
association with the ABC that allowed for their survival. Although there were several factors which led to the Philharmonic’s eventual demise, the fact that the Society was not able to secure a permanent association with the ABC was perhaps the most damning factor in the downward spiral that led to the Society’s ultimate collapse.

Another reason for the Philharmonic’s dramatic decline that merits analysis was the continuing lack of support from the local, state, and federal governments.

A Lack of Government Support

From its inception in 1885, the Philharmonic had, almost continuously, petitioned the Sydney City Council and New South Wales state government for financial support. Not once had the Philharmonic’s requests for assistance been honoured to by these governmental bodies, despite invitations to the Philharmonic from both levels of government to represent the city and/or state at various events. As mentioned earlier, the Philharmonic had made its frustration and anger with the government known publicly, often suggesting that the Sydney and New South Wales authorities take a lesson from the governments in Europe that actively supported the performing arts. As the Philharmonic slipped deeper and deeper into financial and artistic distress, the need for support from the government became paramount. Many involved with the Philharmonic strongly believed that the solution to all of the organisation’s problems lay with financial support from the government.

Since the Philharmonic was a Sydney institution, most of the organisation’s applications for financial aid were made to the Sydney City Council. As examined in the chapters focusing on the leadership of Hazon and Bradley, the Philharmonic had been at odds with the Council over the issue of the rental fees at the Town Hall for decades. The organisation had also asked the city officials for monetary assistance
during the Philharmonic’s many financial crises of the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries. Members of the committee had close ties to the Sydney City
Council; three of the Philharmonic’s presidents had served as the Lord Mayor of
Sydney.64 Despite this personal relationship between the Philharmonic and the
Sydney City Council, there is virtually no record of discussions or decisions by the
Council concerning the Philharmonic. While there are several instances in the
Council’s minutes that simply state that funding for the Philharmonic was denied, it
appears that the city officials did not record any of the meetings between the
representatives of the Philharmonic and the members of the Council.65

Although the Philharmonic made note of meetings with the members of the
Council over the years, two significant meetings took place in the 1950s, when the
Philharmonic desperately needed the financial support of the City of Sydney to
continue to function. The immediate result of both meetings, as recorded in the
Society’s Minutes Book, was a promise of support and/or consideration on behalf of
the Lord Mayor. The first of the two meetings with Lord Mayor Alderman O’Dea in
early 1951 was moderately successful, at least from the Philharmonic’s point of view.
Those members who attended the meeting described the Lord Mayor as “sympathetic”
to the Society’s cause and financial situation.66 The Lord Mayor reportedly pledged
his support and promised to approach the City Council on behalf of the Society for the
consideration of lower rental rates for Town Hall. In spite of the Lord Mayor’s

64 Brewer, 88. These Lord Mayors of Sydney who also served as presidents of the
Philharmonic Society included Sydney Burdekin (the Philharmonic’s first president), Sir William
Manning, and William Johnson.

65 Brief references to the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney are found in the books of
minutes from the Council’s meetings, located in the City of Sydney Archives.

promise of support, the City Council notified the Society a month and a half later that the Society’s application for an annual grant had been rejected.67

The second face-to-face meeting during this decade with the Lord Mayor took place in mid-1955 when members of the committee once again visited him asking for financial assistance for the Philharmonic. They relayed to the Lord Mayor that “the Society was trying at present to raise the cultural standard of music…[and the Society] was prepared to present Sunday afternoon concerts in the Town Hall”68 for a lower hall rental rate. The Lord Mayor told the delegates that he would consider the request.69 Although the Lord Mayor’s response was not recorded in the Philharmonic’s minutes, it can be inferred that the City Council once again denied the organisation’s request.

Between 1955 and 1962 the Philharmonic made four additional applications, as recorded in the Society’s Minutes Book, to the Town Hall Clerk and the Lord Mayor for monetary support, concession rates for the hiring of the Town Hall, and/or the use of a suitable meeting and rehearsal space free of charge. In each request, the Philharmonic specified their contributions to the city’s musical and fine arts culture. In one application, the committee advised the Town Hall Clerk that the Philharmonic had paid over £14,000 in rental fees for the Town Hall for concerts and rehearsals during the past seventy-five years.70 Despite the promising tone often relayed by


68 “Minutes Book,” 19 February 1951, 133.


either the Town Hall Clerk or the Lord Mayor in their respective responses upon receipt of the applications, the Philharmonic’s requests were always denied.71

Indirectly, the Philharmonic was dealt another blow by the city authorities in March 1962. It was reported to the Society and recorded in the minutes of a committee meeting that the professional Sydney Symphony Orchestra received a grant of £10,000 per annum from Sydney officials, in addition to the financial support of the ABC. Additionally, the City Council also paid for the City of Sydney Eisteddfod, an annual musical festival. Once council member, Councillor Kyle, reportedly told the committee that he believed there was a possibility that the Sydney Council would give the Philharmonic a subsidy similar to that received by the Sydney Symphony.72 However, nothing came from this brief show of support. At the same meeting, it was also reported that various suburban music societies were subsidised by their local councils; one committee member added, “We are the only society who are not subsidised at all.”73

In this manner, the Philharmonic was repeatedly denied financial support from the City of Sydney, despite the contributions the organisation made to the city’s musical and fine arts culture. During these years of fiscal instability, the members of the Society also turned to the state government of New South Wales for support. Over the years, numerous state and federal officials had served as patrons of the Philharmonic. Members of the state government had also expressed their enjoyment of many of the Philharmonic’s performances. Furthermore, the state government had


invited the Philharmonic to perform at various events of state over the years, including the Federation of the Commonwealth and celebrations in honour of the monarchy. Therefore, the members of the Philharmonic felt justified in approaching the state authorities for help.

Although it is likely previous applications for assistance were submitted by the Philharmonic, the first such application recorded in the minutes of the committee’s meetings was in 1958, when it was suggested

someone should go through the records of the Society and present [a synopsis of the Society’s history] to some liberal member of Parliament with a view to putting the Society before the general public and seeing their support in view of the seriousness of the Society’s financial position.74

In turn, the Philharmonic hoped that a show of public support would demonstrate to the state government the popularity of the organisation. Although nothing came of this member’s suggestion, the Premier of New South Wales was again petitioned in 1962 with a request for financial aid. The Philharmonic also requested suitable accommodation be made available for rehearsals and business meetings, free of charge. The Under Secretary in the Premier’s Department replied to the application, stating that the notice had been received and would receive the Premier’s full attention as soon as possible. Although it must have been disappointing, it probably did not have come as a surprise to the Society when the Premier’s office did not approve the subsidy.75

In many ways, it was rather unrealistic of the city and state authorities to assume the Philharmonic would be willing to represent the civic interests on important occasions or at state events without funding in return. Additionally, the


Philharmonic made numerous contributions to various funds, such as war bonds, patriotic funds, and overseas benevolent funds. Despite these efforts and the argument that governments in Australia should strive to support the performing arts in the same manner as the European governments, the Philharmonic Society failed to receive any type of support from the civic authorities at any point during their existence.

Ironically, when the Philharmonic made its debut as a professional organisation in 1973, a letter from the Lord Mayor in the commemorative programme testified to the importance of the Philharmonic in Sydney’s performing arts community and declared the “rejuvenation of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney will be acclaimed and supported by all lovers of music.” Even though the city and state authorities may have been among those that “acclaimed and supported” this resurrected Society, the organisation did not receive financial support from the either level of government in their bid to become a professional organisation. Although it is impossible to determine whether support from the city or the state would have saved the Philharmonic, undoubtedly such support would have been greatly appreciated by the organisation.

Criticism in the Sydney Press

Another factor that affected the level of success or failure experienced by the Philharmonic was the criticisms printed in the Sydney press. Not only did the criticisms affect the morale of the members of the Philharmonic and influence the choice of music programmed, these comments also influenced the general public’s opinion of the organisation. In an article discussing the “Value of Musical Criticism,”

76 1973 history, [3].
the editors of *Musical Australia* argued that there were “many people who read the newspapers the day after they have attended a concert or operatic performance for the purpose of finding out whether or not the performance gave them proper or sufficient enjoyment.”\(^7\) However, many of the so-called “music critics” were not educated in the art of criticism and did not understand the “line…drawn between mere expression of opinion and criticism.”\(^8\) This is not to say that much of the criticism surrounding the later concerts of the Philharmonic was not warranted; most of the “bad press” from the later years was a result of the Philharmonic’s ever declining artistic levels. However, many of the music critics’ responses to earlier concerts were extreme. Nonetheless, the quality of the criticism did not matter; the effect of the words, either positive or negative, printed in the Sydney press in response to the activities of the Society was significant.

Peter Jeffery Dart provides a comprehensive study of the history of music criticism in Australia to 1931 in his PhD dissertation, specifically focusing on the contributions of the music periodicals from this time.\(^9\) Before the end of the 1880s, according to Dart, there had not been a great demand for music criticism in Australia. Up to that point, most critics wrote for local newspapers and were casual music enthusiasts, not necessarily educated musicians or trained music critics. With the development of the Australian middle class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the demand for educated music critics increased.\(^10\) As the Sydney Philharmonic Society was being established in 1885, the earliest music-specific

\(^7\) Value of Musical Criticism,” *Musical Australia* 1:3 (July 1920), 4.

\(^8\) “Value of Musical Criticism,” *Musical Australia* 1:3 (July 1920), 4.

\(^9\) Peter Jeffery Dart, “Criticims in a Developing Culture: Australian Music Periodicals to 1931” (Ph.D. diss., University of Queensland, 1997).

\(^10\) Dart, 2-7.
periodicals were introduced to the music community. Although several music magazines appeared during the existence of the Philharmonic, a few stand out in their coverage and criticism of the organisation. Case studies of three of these periodicals, *Australian Musical News*, *Conservatorium Magazine* and its successor *Musical Australia*, and *Triad*, will reflect the differing views of the Philharmonic Society held by music critics in Sydney.

Although published in Melbourne, the *Australian Musical News* was influential in the Sydney music community as well. The magazine, published under various titles from 1911-1963, was aimed at members of the developing Australian middle class and their growing love for music. According to Dart,

> the *Australian Musical News* proved itself a journal of national consequence which both paralleled and influenced the national impetus of musical policy into the 1930s…. [T]he *Australian Musical News* developed a content and style…[with an] awareness of the presences and demands of a growing market of music lovers.82

The critics who wrote for the *Australian Musical News* usually presented a fair criticism of the Philharmonic performance in question. In most reviews, the critic praised the ensemble and offered warranted criticism. The areas most often criticised included the orchestra and the male sections of the choir. These comments would not have come as a surprise to either the Philharmonic or the public as both were known

81 For detailed publication information of these periodicals, see the following in Dart’s dissertation: *Australian Musical News*, 327-333; *Conservatorium Magazine*, 336-338; *Musical Australia*, 346-349. Dart does not include the *Triad* in his study because the journal originated in New Zealand, and although it was published in Sydney from 1915, he determined that the contributions of this magazine to music were not significant enough for his study (see footnote 3 on page 148). For further historical information about the *Australian Musical News* see Dart, 147-193. Lina Marsi indexed the articles and reviews published in the *Australian Musical News* in *Index to the Australian Musical News*, 1911-1963 (Melbourne: Lima Press, 1990). This index was very helpful in locating references to the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney in that publication.

82 Dart, 148, 151.

83 The majority of the reviews in the *Australian Musical News* were written either anonymously or under the pseudonym “Allegro Giusto.”
to be the greatest weaknesses of the Society. The featured soloists were also frequently at the centre of the criticism.

In addition to constructive criticism, the editors for *Australian Musical News* also used their articles on the Philharmonic to drum up support for the organisation. The magazine’s Sydney correspondent acknowledged this effort in 1936: “From time to time, the difficult [financial] situation in which the Royal Philharmonic Society finds itself has been noted here.” During the Philharmonic’s several campaigns to gain support from the public, the *Australian Musical News* often joined the organisation’s bandwagon. In 1934, when the Philharmonic’s set out to reorganise and reaudit the choir in the hopes of entering into an agreement with the ABC, the *Australian Musical News* published an appeal for assistance from the public sector. By emphasising the Philharmonic’s illustrious past and place of importance in the community, the *Australian Musical News* hoped to generate considerable support. This magazine also offered suggestions of how the public could come to the Philharmonic’s aid. For example, it was often proposed that members of the public could greatly help the Philharmonic by subscribing to the Society’s concerts. The journal also implored some of Sydney’s “wealthy men…[to come] forward with subvention,” even going as far as to make a comparison to the support of the arts in America.

More than once I have suggested an “easy” solution…an appeal for a subsidy to be provided by our very wealthy men, mining magnates, wool kings,

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87 “Philharmonic and the Public,” *Australian Musical News* 26:9 (1 April 1936); 24. This suggestion for financial aid from the wealthy members of Sydney’s community was also proposed in “The Philharmonic,” *Australian Musical News* 25:11 (1 June 1935): 25.
merchant princes, captains of industry, financial barons, and others of the classes that are burdened with superfluous wealth. In America, such people can pretty easily be induced to back artistic enterprise in their own states and cities. But would this solution of the Philharmonic’s troubles prove so easy in Australia?\footnote{88 “The Hard Fight,” \textit{Australian Musical News} 26:8 (1 March 1936): 21-22.}

Unfortunately, those Australians and Sydneysiders “burdened with superfluous wealth” did not seem at all interested in aiding the Philharmonic, and in the end, these pleas for public support of the Philharmonic from the \textit{Australian Musical News} failed.

Without a doubt, the Philharmonic welcomed these words of support. The Society also likely appreciated the constructive criticism offered by the \textit{Australian Musical News}. Despite the unrelenting support from the magazine in the first half of the twentieth century, no mention of the journal was made in the Philharmonic’s meeting minutes or records.

As would be expected, this strong source of support began to weaken as the Philharmonic plunged deeper into artistic and financial despair. By the 1950s, the \textit{Australian Musical News} was no longer blaming the public for the Philharmonic’s problems. Rather, the critic pointed the finger of blame directly at the organisation and refrained from discussing the positive aspects, if any, about the performances.

The Philharmonic performance was scarcely of musical importance. There was a lot of out-of-tune playing in the orchestra, a failing which could have been minimised by a conductor bent upon giving dynamic beat and rhythm to his players. Far too little was demanded of the choir in matters of crisp and precise attack, soaring jubilation and massed exultation in expression and reflective shading.\footnote{89 “Debits Outweighed Credits,” \textit{Australian Musical News} 43:8 (February 1953): 19.}

Despite this eventual cessation of support of the Philharmonic, the encouragement offered by the \textit{Australian Musical News} over the years was undoubtedly valuable to the organisation. In an unbiased fashion, particularly early in the twentieth century,
the journal offered different solutions to the Society’s ongoing problems, including suggestions for the public and the organisation as a whole.

Another music periodical that provided support for the Philharmonic was the Conservatorium Magazine, which was superseded by Musical Australia in 1920. This publication was, according to the magazine’s title page, “The Official Organ of the New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music.” As mentioned earlier, there were many close ties between the State Conservatorium and the Philharmonic. Thus, the reviews and reports in these publications often provide an interesting internal view of the organisation, and many of the reviews in this publication were positive and supportive of the Philharmonic’s efforts. Occasionally, the articles also questioned the accuracy of reports in other publications. One such example is from a review of the Philharmonic’s performance of Bach’s St. Matthew Passion in 1936.

[The] orchestra, chorus and soloists all did their share excellently under the skillful guidance of Mr. Joseph Bradley….By the way, one of our local critics must have been suffering from bile or something of the sort, judging by his report, which differs materially from those of his brother scribes. If he were right, they were all wrong, which is hardly likely.90

As with the Australian Musical News, the reporters for Musical Australia used their publication to promote the Philharmonic, particularly when the organisation was in financial trouble. In 1920, for example, when the Philharmonic faced a £200 debt and a drastic drop in membership, Musical Australia threw its support behind the organisation and implored the public for financial assistance.91 Although biased in favour of the Philharmonic, the articles printed in the Conservatorium Magazine and

91 “Philharmonic Progress,” Musical Australia 1:2 (June 1920): 11.
later *Musical Australia* concerning the Philharmonic Society, are valuable sources of information. 92

At the other end of the music criticism spectrum in Australia was *Triad*. Dart determined that this publication’s “musical content was never greater than a general arts magazine,” and he described the reviews of music performances as “acerbic” and “a manifestation of...urbanity and general cultural polemic.”93 The editors of the *Triad* readily acknowledged their policy to include a “personal note” in their criticism,94 a policy that was often attacked by the magazine’s readers. Therefore, the reviews of the activities of the Philharmonic printed in the *Triad* should be read and considered in this context. The first issue of the Sydney edition of the magazine included a scathing review of Philharmonic’s premiere of Berlioz’s *Grande Messe des Morts* in 1915. Although the review criticised the conducting of Bradley and the performance of the musicians in the orchestra, the final blow was struck at the tenors.

But the sins of the orchestra pale before the vocal atrocities of the tenors....To say that the tenors sang out of tune would be a gross injustice to our normal idea of false intonation. The vocal quality of these tenors was on par with their inability to maintain the pitch – if it really was inability. At times it seemed to attain almost to perverted genius. 95

And so began the hostile relationship between the *Triad* and the Philharmonic. 96 Despite the knowledge that the *Triad* was not a music-specific journal, the magazine would have influenced members of Sydney’s music community. The magazine’s principal grievances with the Philharmonic were the

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92 No reference was made in the records of the Philharmonic to articles in either the *Conservatorium Magazine* or *Musical Australia*.

93 Dart, 148.


95 “Berlioz and Mr. Bradley,” *Triad* 1:1 (10 October 1915), 67.

96 No reference was made in the records of the Philharmonic to articles in the *Triad*.
committee’s choice of works programmed, the attitude of the organisation’s subscribers, and Bradley’s conducting style. All three were the subject of a review from 1917.

[Bradley’s] mistake is simply that of having no demon. Hazon had one – a rough, widely-energetic and very exciting fellow….But a demon and Mr. Bradley would never hit it; and if they did, we are not so sure that the [subscribers of the] Philharmonic would approve….But there are contributing causes to make Mr. Bradley’s task more painful. The incapacity of the orchestra – almost wholly amateur – to play more than the mere notes, makes a decent interpretation impossible. At times even the notes themselves make mock of this orchestra. In the chorus, the tenors, save for rare deviations into something like musical sense, are frankly impossible in a very hideous way.97

The periodicals presented in these case studies offer different views and opinions on the activities of the Philharmonic. The daily newspapers in Sydney paint yet another picture of the Philharmonic. Since the daily newspapers reached a wider audience than the music specific periodicals, the quality of the reviews in the newspapers was often less refined. Nonetheless, the reviews and reports in Sydney’s newspapers were important in the development of the Philharmonic.

During the existence of the (Royal) Philharmonic Society of Sydney, several newspapers came and went in Sydney. Without a doubt, the most influential daily newspaper was, and still is, the *Sydney Morning Herald*; the *Herald*, founded in 1831, is also the oldest newspaper in Australia.98 Despite the presence of other newspapers, including the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sun*, the *Evening News*, and the *Daily Guardian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* will be at the centre of this study of the relationship between the Philharmonic and the daily press. The reason for this focus on the *Sydney Morning Herald* is twofold. First, the relationship between that newspaper


98 For more information on the history of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, see *A Century of Journalism: The Sydney Morning Herald and its Record of Australian Life, 1831-1931* (Sydney: John Fairfax and Sons Limited, 1931).
and the Philharmonic had the greatest impact on the Society; later years saw this relatively cordial relationship reach volatile levels. Second, the majority of the articles published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* are indexed, thus making a survey of the newspaper in relation to the Philharmonic much easier. This is not to say that the other newspapers listed were not important to the success or failure of the Society. However, due to restrictions of space and time, the focus of this study will be limited to the relationship between the Philharmonic Society and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The Philharmonic’s relationship with the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the twentieth century could accurately be described as being in a state of flux, often unsupportive, and frequently explosive. Conversely, during the years of Hazon and Bradley, the *Sydney Morning Herald* was usually very supportive of the Philharmonic; the reviews of the concerts overflowed with praise and often occupied a column or more. In spite of these supportive comments, the relationship between the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the Philharmonic began to sour as the organisation began to slip artistically; the further the Society declined the harsher the criticism from the *Herald*. Occasionally, the *Sydney Morning Herald* printed editorial appeals for public support of the Philharmonic, but never to the extent of those published by the *Australian Musical News*. Rather, most of the pleas published by the *Herald* were either letters to the editor from the members of the Philharmonic’s committee or factual and unbiased reports about the Society’s situation.

Those writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* after the reign of Joseph Bradley as the Philharmonic’s conductor provided little constructive criticism in their reviews of the Society’s concerts and in later years wrote what appear to be half-hearted reviews of the Society’s concerts. As with the reviews in the *Triad*, the
Philharmonic’s orchestra and the selection of works programmed were at the centre of the criticism in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

One of the most volatile relationships between the Philharmonic and the music critics writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* involved Neville Cardus. Cardus was one of England’s most influential music critics and sports writers in the years prior to World War II. Described as “one of the world’s greatest critics,” “an inspiration to millions,” and “the greatest cricket writer and most enchanting music critic of his time,” many of his colleagues questioned his decision to come to Australia in 1939.\(^9^9\) Although he did not explicitly express his reasons for moving to Australia, it can be deduced that life in England at the beginning of World War II was very difficult and certainly no place for a music critic. Cardus originally went to Melbourne on an invitation to cover a concert tour of Sir Thomas Beecham for the *Melbourne Herald* in 1940. Six months later, he moved to Sydney to take up a position with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, electing to stay in Australia as a “refugee from the war” until 1947.\(^1^0^0\)

From the beginning, many Sydneysiders saw Cardus as “just one more sneering Pommy bastard come to hand down higher wisdom to the ignorant colonials.”\(^1^0^1\) Their suspicions of Cardus were understandable, especially given that Cardus thought of himself as Australia’s “senior music critic,”\(^1^0^2\) based on his previous experience in England. In one of his first reviews of a Philharmonic concert, his disgust with the Society’s low artistic standard was evident.

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\(^1^0^0\) Brookes, 156, 157; Inglis, 86.

\(^1^0^1\) Brookes, 158.

\(^1^0^2\) Robin Daniels, *Conversations with Cardus* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1976), 52.
Much musical ambition should be expected of an organisation bearing the resonant name of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney. I expected such a body to perform vocal works of some importance. I certainly never expected at the Conservatorium on Saturday, to hear 12,000 miles from England, and in the present epoch, a perpetuation of Stanford’s dreary and incompetently written setting of Tennyson’s doggerel ballad, ‘The Revenge.’ And, frankly, the singing in this work was amateurish – poor in attack and ensemble, and entirely jejune.\textsuperscript{103}

In mid-1941, Cardus published a series of reviews of the Philharmonic’s concerts; it is likely that he intended these reviews to be perceived as constructive. Despite Cardus’s good intentions, many in the Philharmonic considered these reviews to be personal attacks. The members of the Philharmonic were further incensed when Cardus wrote,

> For so long the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney persists in a timid musical policy they can scarcely expect to take up much of a critic’s time…It is, to me, extraordinary that a Royal Philharmonic Society anywhere in the British Empire should be satisfied with no more ambition and no more technical proficiency than that of any church choral society in any small town of England. In fact, I doubt very much whether the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney could hold their own either in performance or in extent of repertory, with the next local church choral society of Croydon, Wigan, Putney, Burnley, or Laisterdyke.\textsuperscript{104}

A few days later, the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} published the Philharmonic’s response to Cardus’s criticisms. Edward Wilson, a vice-president of the Philharmonic, argued that Cardus made a “gross exaggeration, totally unjustified by the facts” and defended the Society’s so-called “timid musical policy.”\textsuperscript{105} Wilson suggested that Cardus remember that he is in Australia, not England, where music resources, particularly during wartime, were scarce.\textsuperscript{106} Cardus’s biographer, Christopher Brookes, suggests

\textsuperscript{103} Neville Cardus, “Variable Music and Voices,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 28 October 1940.

\textsuperscript{104} Neville Cardus, “Philharmonic Society,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 28 July 1941.

\textsuperscript{105} Edward Wilson, “The Philharmonic Society,” (letter to the editor) \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 1 August 1941.

\textsuperscript{106} Edward Wilson, “The Philharmonic Society,” (letter to the editor) \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 1 August 1941.
that neither Cardus nor the Philharmonic emerged from this exchange of words in the press fully satisfied, but the confrontation did lead “to a clearer understanding of the issues at stake.”¹⁰⁷ No further reviews by Cardus of concerts by the Philharmonic appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald. Shortly thereafter, Cardus joined the ABC as a broadcaster and produced a Sunday evening classical music programme, “The Enjoyment of Music.”¹⁰⁸

When Neville Cardus left Australia in 1947, he had reportedly “gained the confidence and respect of Sydney’s musical community” by providing the average listener an opportunity to understand music.¹⁰⁹ It was a far cry from the days when Senator Lamp (Labor – Tasmania) asked the Australian Federal Parliament, “How much longer are the people of Australia to be pestered by Neville Cardus?”¹¹⁰ During his stay in Sydney, Cardus had learned not to patronise Australians and in the process, he most likely had a positive influence on the development of music performance and appreciation in Australia. Nonetheless, his coverage of the Philharmonic concerts, although intended to be constructive, demoralised and frustrated the Society, at least in the short term.

This lack of support from the music critics at the Sydney Morning Herald directly affected the number of people who attended the Philharmonic’s concerts; continuous negative reviews in the Sydney Morning Herald would have dramatically lowered the already low audience numbers. This practice of harsh criticism in the

¹⁰⁷ Brookes, 160.

¹⁰⁸ For more about Cardus’s association with the ABC, see Inglis 86, 161-162; Covell 129-130; Daniels 53-54; Brookes, 163-164, 175-177. Although there is not enough evidence to support the claim, it could be argued that Cardus’s dealings with and opinion of the Philharmonic influenced the ABC’s decision not to select the Philharmonic as their choir of choice.

¹⁰⁹ Brookes, 162.

¹¹⁰ Brookes, 159.
Herald toward the Philharmonic reached a peak in 1946. The review in the Sydney Morning Herald of the first concert following Barnett’s death was less than flattering toward the organisation. The Philharmonic would have expected a bit of leniency from the Herald music critic given that their conductor had suddenly passed away and Livingston Mote had stepped in as conductor at the eleventh hour. However, the critic was not at all impressed with the performance and stated as much in his review. He commented that the performance did not achieve much and that orchestra and soloists performed very poorly, with the resulting performance inadequate and unfulfilling in many areas. In what might have been considered an overreaction by those in Sydney’s music community, the committee voted to ban the Sydney Morning Herald from any future Philharmonic performances because of this review and other “harsh criticisms.” The Herald was excluded from the Philharmonic’s press list, and it was decided by the committee that the paper would not be granted any tickets even if requested. This ban did not have the results hoped for by the Society, as the Sydney Morning Herald music critic bought tickets for the concerts on his own. He continued to write reviews of the Philharmonic’s performances, much to the chagrin of the committee.

It is not clear from the minutes of the committee meetings when the press tickets were re-instated, but the tickets for the Sydney Morning Herald were again suspended in 1951 following the review of the Philharmonic’s performance of Caractacus in association with the Commonwealth Jubilee. In the review, the critic declared that the choir “sang a poor work poorly” and the orchestra apparently had no


112 “Minutes Book,” 1 May 1946, 75.
sense of style or balance. This prompted the committee to discontinue the Sydney Morning Herald’s complimentary press tickets yet again. Once again, the Herald reporters continued to attend the concerts and wrote several scathing reviews about the performances by the Philharmonic. During 1952, committee member Alfred Hill encouraged the committee to reconsider its exclusion of the Sydney Morning Herald critic, but to no avail. At the annual general meeting for the 1951/1952-concert season, the committee submitted a report that summarised the Society’s view on the year’s proceedings.

Feeling that Philharmonic concerts were irritating to Mr. Lindsay Browne and Mr. Martin Long, the Committee decided not to invite a Herald critic to the first concert of the year, but Mr. Brown bought himself a ticket, attended the concert and wrote quite a column in condemnation of the presentation.

And so the turbulent relationship between the music critics from the Sydney Morning Herald and the Philharmonic persisted. Although the length and frequency of the articles tapered as the years passed, The Sydney Morning Herald continued to publish debasing reviews of the Philharmonic’s concerts. Eventually the reviews ceased, perhaps because the critics felt the Society’s performances were not worth their time.

However, the rift between the Philharmonic and the Sydney Morning Herald was mended to some extent in an article written by Roger Covell directly following the Philharmonic’s first concert in their attempt at professional status in 1973. The review was more supportive of the efforts of the Philharmonic than anything printed

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113 L.B., “Philharmonic Sings Caractacus,” Sydney Morning Herald, 9 July 1951. Although the Sydney Morning Herald critics are only identified by their initials, it was known that the critics at the centre of this controversy were Lindsay Browne and Martin Long.


115 “Minutes Book,” Annual Report 1951/1952, 155. This was the only mention of the names of the music critics for Sydney Morning Herald in the Philharmonic Society’s records.

116 According to the index to the Sydney Morning Herald, no mention of the Philharmonic was made in the newspaper after 1960.
in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in more than thirty years. Although Covell believed the Society was well on its way as a professional organisation, the choir still had many improvements to make.

> At present [the choir] makes a decent, plain, ordinary sound...When the basses were heard by themselves the sounded decidedly homespun; and any listener’s faith in the thoroughness of the group’s preparation might have been weakened by the fact that one of the tenors standing prominently in the front row...hardly ever seemed to know what to sing or when….But [the sopranos] and the altos have a welcome and reassuring youthfulness in their tone as well as in their collective appearance. Delightful girls: they sing as though they mean every note, and that is the first step towards sounding as though they mean it.\(^{117}\)

Despite the apparent promise of the reorganised Philharmonic Society, the organisation was forced to disband only a few months later. The negative press from the *Sydney Morning Herald* did not directly cause the Society to collapse. Rather, the harsh criticism in the *Herald* was a result of the Philharmonic’s artistic decline that manifested itself into a cause of the organisation’s eventual downfall.

**Conclusion**

The eventual demise of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney in 1973 was not the result of a single event. Rather, it was a combination of many factors, each compounding the effects of the previous, which caused the Philharmonic to fall apart piece by piece. Furthermore, this collapse did not happen overnight. Despite the strong leadership of Roberto Hazon and Joseph Bradley, some of the seeds of destruction were planted in the early years of the Philharmonic. However, it was the strong leadership of these men that held the organisation together through many tough times. Although it is impossible to determine, it is arguable that had the Philharmonic been able to maintain consistency in its leadership after the resignation of Joseph

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Bradley, many of the obstacles that the Philharmonic faced could have been overcome. Unfortunately, without significant aid from an external source, specifically the local government or the ABC, the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney was not able to survive all of the difficulties the organisation was forced to deal with. In other words, in the absence of significant financial and artistic assistance, the demise of the Philharmonic Society was inevitable.