Introduction

Choral Concert Life in the Late Nineteenth-Century 'Metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere'

Kerry Murphy
University of Melbourne

This issue of the *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* is devoted to Australia and more specifically to music-making in colonial Melbourne. The colony of Victoria was acknowledged as the cultural heart of Australia during the second half of the nineteenth century. Melbourne hosted two International Exhibitions in the 1880s and welcomed innumerable travelling musicians to its shores, where significant amounts of money could be made. Because of Melbourne's standing and cultural significance at the time and the extensive body of material available for study, the articles in this journal focus on this 'metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere'. However, the activities discussed here can all be found, to varying degrees, in other parts of Australia as well. Liedertafels, for instance, were very prominent in Adelaide and its surrounding areas (and indeed still exist today), because of the significant German migration there. Philharmonic choirs were also widely established.

The period discussed here took place only about a century after the very beginnings of Australia's colonial period. On 26 January 1788 the British First Fleet landed in Port Jackson in New South Wales with 736 convicts; free land settlement grants began the same year. By 1800 the estimated total non-indigenous population of Australia was 1,024 and the next few decades saw rapid pastoral expansion with particular growth in wheat and wool. Capital cities were established slowly: Hobart in Tasmania (Van Diemans Land) in 1804, Brisbane in Queensland (Northern Australia) in 1824, Perth in Western Australia in 1829, Melbourne in Victoria (South East) in 1835, Adelaide in South Australia in 1836 and Darwin in the Northern Territory in 1871.[1] By 1846 the population of the two biggest colonies, New South Wales and Victoria, was 154,205 and 32,879 respectively. In 1850 partly elected legislative bodies were established in Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia. The discovery of gold in 1851 attracted a huge influx of immigrants and there was a boom period for both gold and wool over the period 1860–90. By 1870 Australia was the largest producer of gold in the world, providing 39 per cent of world production, and until the late 1880s Australian income per head was among the highest in the world. In 1870 the Australian-born population outnumbered the

---

[1]   As Palmerston: the name was changed to Darwin in 1911. These figures are taken from Robin Brown (comp.), *Collins Milestones in Australian History 1788 to the Present*, ed. Richard Appleton (Sydney, 1986).

immigrant population for the first time, with an estimated total non-indigenous population of 1,647,756.[2] Table 1 shows the area population figures for 1850–90, and Table 2 shows the capital city population figures for 1861–91.[3]

Table 1   Area population figures for 1851–91

Year	NSW	VIC	Old	SA	TAS	WA	NT	AUST
1851	178 668	77 345	8 575	63 700	70 130			437 665
1861	350 860	538 628	30 059	126 830	89 977	15 593		115 947
1871	502 998	730 198	120 104	185 626			201	
1881	749 825	861 566	213 525	276 414	115 705	29 708	3 451	2 250 194
1891	1 123 954	1 139 840	393 718	315 533	146 667	49 782	4 898	3 174 392

Table 2   Capital city population figures for 1861–91

Year	Sydney	Melbourne	Brisbane	Adelaide	Hobart	Perth
1861	56 394	123 061	6 051	18 303	19 449	3 507
1871	134 736	191 449	19 413	27 208	19 092	5 007
1881	220 984	262 389	37 053	38 479	21 118	5 044
1891	383 283	474 440	101 554	37 837	33 450	8 447

As can be seen, over this period the population of Victoria outstripped that of New South Wales, and Melbourne was considerably bigger than its nearest rival, Sydney. This was due to dramatic migration to Victoria for the goldfields and the subsequent economic expansion. As Graeme Davison states in his book *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, 'By the end of the 1850s the pastoralists had been supplanted by a growing middle class of merchants, civil servants and professional men and thereafter the urban economy [in Melbourne] began to gather its own momentum'.[4] Davison describes how by the 1880s Melbourne's economic influence reached well beyond Victoria. He quotes Twopeny's contemporary reflection that

> if there is a company to be got up to stock the wilds of Western Australia, or to form a railway on the land grant system in Queensland, to introduce the electric light, or to spread education among the black-fellows, the promoters either belong to Melbourne or go there for their capital. The headquarters of nearly all the large commercial institutions which extend their operations beyond the limits of any one colony are to be found there.[5]

---

[2] Factual information in this paragraph has been extracted from Brown, *Collins Milestones*.

[3] Selected statistics taken from 'Table: Population Distribution, Colonial and State Censuses 1861–1981', quoted in Wray Vamplew, ed., *Australians, Historical Statistics* (New South Wales, 1987): 26, 41.

[4] Graeme Davison in *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Melbourne, 1978): 6.

[5] R.E.N. Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia* (London, 1883) quoted in Davison, *Rise and Fall*: 7

However, the financial boom was unsustainable, and gave way to severe depression in the 1890s.

In nineteenth-century colonial Australia amateur and semi-amateur music-making, in particular the concerts put on by the major choral societies of the time (the Liedertafels and the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society choir), played a formative role in the development of musical taste. The articles in this journal issue will focus on these societies. Until the publications of the recent companions to Australian music (Oxford and Currency),[6] the small amount of published secondary literature available on musical life in Australia documented chiefly the professional bodies, the opera companies and the post-Federation symphony orchestras. However, the *Currency Companion to Music and Dance* in particular focuses on the idea of music as practice, activity or process. By concentrating on amateur music-*making*, the articles in this journal fit into this broader picture of Australian musical culture. The reader is also directed to the ground-breaking unpublished Masters and Doctoral theses by Thérèse Radic, one of our contributors, which were the inspiration for this volume.[7]

Although many of our articles examine the impact of British musical institutions, music journals and publishers on repertoire and taste formation, they also show how performing resources, institutional characteristics, and other European influences made the musical scene in Australia different from the British scene.[8]

The articles in this journal are the result of a major research project based at the Centre for Studies in Australian Music, Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, working on musical life in Melbourne from approximately the 1870s to Federation.[9] The project draws on the rich resources of the Database of Melbourne Concert Life based primarily on the extensive archival collections of the Melbourne Liedertafels and Philharmonic Society: programmes, scrapbooks of reviews, music, minute books, annual reports, and subscription lists.[10] Much

---

[6]   Warren Bebbington, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Music* (Melbourne, 1997); John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell, gen. eds, *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia* (Sydney, 2003).

[7]   Thérèse Radic, 'Aspects of Organised Amateur Music in Melbourne 1836–1890', 2 vols, MMus diss., University of Melbourne, 1969; Thérèse Radic, 'Some Historical Aspects of Musical Associations in Melbourne 1888–1915', 3 vols, PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 1977.

[8]   Other forms of amateur music-making that arrived in the colonies with British migrants, the brass bands and the church choir, also flourished, but they do not form part of this present study.

[9]   Kerry Murphy gratefully acknowledges generous financial assistance from the Australian Research Council in assisting this University of Melbourne research project. The research project has also involved a number of postgraduate students at the Faculty of Music and we acknowledge in particular the wonderful work undertaken by Alexandra Williams and Jessica Smith on the database, and Peggy Lais's research assistance. The preparation of this volume of essays could not have been completed without the outstanding contribution of Jennifer Hill in every area of production. Suzanne Cole's support has also been invaluable. Illustrations from the Liedertafel collection are reproduced by kind permission of the Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne.

[10]   This database, which has been designed by one of the research team, Suzanne Cole, consists of almost 5,000 records of performances of roughly 2,800 separate musical works, and brings together information on performances, concerts, composers and performers.

of this material is housed in the Grainger Museum, also based at the University of Melbourne. The database will be mounted on the web in the future but is currently available for access on application to the Centre for Studies in Australian Music.

This issue of the *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* should be seen as an integrated volume rather than a series of discrete articles. All the contributions are connected and some of them treat the same topics from differing perspectives. Given that little prior knowledge can be assumed about the areas covered in the articles, our first article provides some contextual and historical background. Written by Thérèse Radic, this also gives empirical information on the choral bodies as institutions. This is followed by other articles that examine issues arising out of study of the organizations. Although these articles stand alone, they also benefit from familiarity with the article by Radic. Readers may wish to start with Radic's article before proceeding to any others.

The two articles directly following Radic look at external influences, British and German, on Melbourne musical life. Through a survey of substantial choral works purchased and performed by the Melbourne Philharmonic Society over the years 1876 to 1901, Jan Stockigt's article reveals the development of a repertoire influenced by British opinion. She explores the correlation of items purchased and performed by the Melbourne Philharmonic Society (1876–1901) with announcements in The *Musical Times* of items to be performed at various British choral festivals. In examining the changes that took place within the Melbourner Deutsche Liedertafel as it became increasingly Australian, Kerry Murphy's article analyses changes to the organizational structure and repertoire (using a case study of the transformation of Carl Elsasser's chorus 'Auf mein Deutschland' into 'Hail Britannia').

The next two articles look at social and repertoire issues in the Liedertafel societies. Jennifer Hill studies the balance and tensions between the amateur and professional and the social and musical in the choirs and outlines some of the types of semi-social, social and ceremonial functions in which the societies involved themselves. Suzanne Cole also analyses the tensions between the social and concert-giving roles of the societies but does so through a close examination of the programme construction.

Finally, Jennifer Royle discusses how the omission of local works from the established repertories of Melbourne's amateur societies does not indicate that there was no compositional activity in the colonies. Close inspection of programmes and holdings of the societies reveals an astonishing amount of music written by members of each of the three dominant societies, which to a large extent supported compositional activity in Melbourne during the late colonial period.

So much of music history is focused on the activities of professional musicians and institutions. The articles in this volume show, however, that a vital culture of amateur and semi-amateur music-making can also have a profound effect on the development of musical life. We are fortunate that such a significant quantity of archival material has survived in Melbourne to enable us to reconstruct that life.