

Thérèse Radic. *G.W.L. Marshall-Hall: A Biography and Catalogue*
Melbourne: The Marshall-Hall Trust, 2002
ISBN 0 7340 2886 5. xviii+138pp., name index, ill.

George William Louis Marshall-Hall is without a doubt one of Australia music history's most striking personalities, the course of his professional life in Australia ultimately one of our great missed opportunities. Born in London in 1862, Marshall-Hall was an early, if originally somewhat peripheral, product of that great flowering of compositional self-confidence we have come to know as the 'English Musical Renaissance,' who came to Australia in 1891 to take up the first Ormond Professorship in Music at the University of Melbourne. It seems clear that those who made the appointment knew little, or perhaps had been misadvised, as to the personality of the young man they had appointed, as in retrospect they seem to have had expected an altogether more conventional representative of British musical life of the day. Francis Ormond's benefaction, furthermore, had been inspired by long-standing beliefs in the positive effects music could have on an individual's moral character, beliefs he had no doubt been encouraged to hold by observing the role of music in support of Scottish Presbyterian and Methodist evangelicalism. For him, a Professor of Music would help to improve the civil character of the colony, and in this respect the Ormond Chair fitted in neatly alongside Ormond's other great public benefactions.

But in London Marshall-Hall had already caught the attention of George Bernard Shaw 'as a representative of young genius, denouncing the stalls, trusting to the gallery, waving the democratic flag, and tearing around generally', as a evangelist not so much for conventional morality, but for music as the vehicle for raw emotion, for the life of the soul that lay beneath the trappings of bourgeois morality. Indeed Melbourne was soon also to discover that Marshall-Hall was by inclination strongly anti-clerical. He reacted violently to what he considered to be both the aesthetic and moral hypocrisy of established religion, complaining bitterly, for instance, of the 'horrible namby-pambyism' to be 'found in its most effeminate and sickly forms in our churches'.¹ The bastions of establishment religion in Melbourne in their turn set out to remove him from the Ormond Chair, a goal they achieved after a long drawn out struggle in 1900.

In the meantime, though, Marshall-Hall had founded a conservatorium, and then an orchestra, and between 1892 and 1912 (when the orchestra disbanded in the face of union difficulties) this orchestra gave some 111 concerts and helped gain for Marshall-Hall a truly first-rate reputation as a conductor. Indeed, he was considered by one visiting London critic to have 'stood as far above Wood and Beecham as Wood and Beecham stood above Stanford and Bridge' (p. 10). Marshall-Hall also remained an active composer throughout these years, to which we can add poet, and prolific music journalist. It was the two latter activities that were to provide the specific ammunition that was to be used in building a case against him. But in removing Marshall-Hall, Melbourne also distanced itself from its first true musical visionary, and the institutional muddle that resulted, not least from the fact that Marshall-Hall had skilfully founded the conservatorium in his own name and not the University's, created a dissipation of human resources that the new State could neither justify nor afford—

¹ W.L. Marshall-Hall, letters to University Council, 12 August 1898, University of Melbourne Music Library.

the consequences of which can arguably still be felt today. Realising what they had lost only too late, in 1914, a remorseful University rescinded its decision and again offered Marshall-Hall the Ormond Chair. It was not, however, to be. Marshall-Hall would serve as Professor for only six months more, dying in 1915 of complications arising out of appendicitis.

Given the considerable interest in Australia's musical past that now exists both in and outside the academy, the reappearance of Radic's seminal study, *G.W.L. Marshall-Hall: Portrait of a Lost Crusader* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia, 1982) in a new, revised edition by the Marshall-Hall Trust is broadly to be welcomed. Substantive differences include the addition of a number of illustrations and the inclusion of Radic's full descriptive catalogue of the Marshall-Hall collection in the Grainger Museum (rather than the 'checklist of materials' that appeared in the 1982 publication). Beyond this there is some slight reordering of the text, most notably of the conclusion of the biographical chapter, and the addition of two minor footnotes. The liveliness of the writing and thoroughness with which Radic had originally pieced together her study means that this text has retained much of its value and interest to scholars and general readership alike. It would not be churlish, however, to point out that twenty years is a long time in academia—and it has been a long time in Australian music history studies in particular. Thus it is disappointing that the opportunity was not taken to advance the original study by making, for instance, at least a passing reference to subsequent biographical work on Marshall-Hall among other published studies that have considered this period. For instance, the Melbourne historian Joe Rich has written extensively on the circumstances that led up to Marshall-Hall's dismissal, and indeed has taken issue with some of Radic's original historical suppositions. It would indeed have been fascinating to have seen the biographical and cultural context surrounding Marshall-Hall enlivened by some academic debate, not least in so far as this would help to attract further scholarly attention.

And what about the music? Radic's descriptive catalogue of the Grainger Museum's collection of autograph scores will undoubtedly be of value to musicologists and perhaps also to the more adventurous of performers, but the book as a whole does not attempt to integrate this substantial corpus of music and other material into a wider biographical or cultural context. Yet it is perhaps here that the most interesting work on Marshall-Hall may lie. For instance, for those scholars interested in considering the notion of what might constitute a uniquely Australian compositional response amidst an otherwise largely transplanted musical culture, the work of composers like Marshall-Hall flourishing around the time of federation is especially significant. It is precisely at this time that the country had on the one hand developed the social and economic infrastructure and population base to support a sophisticated level of musical enterprise, and on the other had yet to become inundated with the products of a fast-developing international music industry. Certainly, Marshall-Hall was no crude musical nationalist, but it is also true he saw his creative work as part of a nation-forming project, part of an effort to create what Radic calls a 'heroic New Britannia' (p. 4). Later, Radic makes a tantalising reference to Marshall-Hall's reading of the philosophy of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and his championing of Richard Wagner. Looking at his compositions, this influence is indeed obvious, but the peculiar manner of Marshall-Hall's reception of both ideas and music remains unexplored—a topic that becomes even more tantalising when one considers the contrast to the later Wagner reception in the works of men like Edgar Bainton

and Fritz Hart. Marshall-Hall's music has potentially a unique perspective to offer about what Australian nationhood could mean at this time, both in terms of the developing relationship with Britain, and the creation of a self-consciously Australian sense of place and purpose. The biographical section of Radic's book indeed ends with the claim that 'Marshall-Hall was a vital and necessary element in the making of our national awareness' (p. 26).

If this is so, then it is no disrespect to Radic's pioneering achievement in compiling her study in the first place, to say that the case is not yet proven, and that this revised edition serves to remind us of what needs to be done. Perhaps we may eventually have to conclude that Marshall-Hall was less of a founding champion of classical music and music education in Australia, than a foiled idealist who, if he were once before his time, may indeed now be well past it. When Australia seems to lack the commitment to sustain world-class tertiary institutions, and its major operatic and symphonic institutions seem perpetually in crisis, or at the very least museum pieces, one might also ask: Where are our Marshall-Halls today?

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Suzanne Robinson (ed.). *Michael Tippett: Music and Literature*

Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002

ISBN 0 7546 0132 3. xvii+260pp., index, ill., music exx.

There could hardly be a composer who deserves a volume in Ashgate's Music and Literature series more than Michael Tippett. As Suzanne Robinson notes in her impressive 'Introduction,' Tippett—one of the most widely read composers of the twentieth or indeed of any century—implanted allusions to literature and psychology into every one of his sung texts, from the early song-cycles through three oratorios and five operas to his penultimate work, *Byzantium*. Robinson rightly argues that the extent to which these allusions can be or should be overtly recognised by the audience is a central issue in Tippett studies. Is the audience required to be almost unbelievably literary, able to respond knowledgeably not only to Tippett's allusions but in some cases to the allusions made in their turn by such source texts as *The Waste Land*, or was Tippett simply reflecting the multicultural mosaic which emerged in European and American culture during the twentieth century, presenting a verbal collage and trusting, as a committed Jungian, that the 'collective unconscious' of humanity will enable his spectators to absorb subconsciously the many layers of meaning?

However, the actual book follows the issues raised in this introduction only intermittently. Its central concern should be the relationship between music and literature in Tippett's output, but only four papers contribute to this main theme. Edward Venn offers a good essay on Tippett's prose writings, and his three positions as Romantic, as idealist and as modernist. Robinson herself explores extremely well the rich literary and political background to *A Child of our Time*. Barbara Doherty makes an ambitious attempt to analyse the music as well as the texts and contexts of *The Heart's Assurance*, focussing on the places where Tippett in his setting either goes against or expands on the natural metres of the verse, and attempting to relate these choices to Tippett's own experiences. Finally, Rowena Harrison contributes a strong, very well-argued treatment of the use of the *Iliad* and other classical sources in *King Priam*.