

**THE ROYAL PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY OF SYDNEY:
THE RISE AND FALL OF A MUSICAL ORGANISATION**

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I certify that this thesis, and the research to which it refers, are the product of my own work, and that any ideas or quotations from the work of other people, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices of the discipline.

Clare Thornley

Date

To Paul

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PREFACE

During the course of my research, I was often asked about the topic of my thesis. When I replied, “The Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney,” the response I most often received was, “Who? I’ve never heard of that ensemble.” When I further elaborated that the Society was active in Sydney from 1885 to 1973 and was one of the most popular music ensembles in Sydney in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most people became intrigued. By the end of the conversation, the questioners agreed with me that this was a matter worth pursuing.

This is the first study of the Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney undertaken by a person not involved with the Society. Prior to this project, three historical reviews had been written by members of the Philharmonic Society. The first, by Robert B. Barton and G. Marr Thompson, was written as the Philharmonic Society celebrated its 100th concert in 1903. The pamphlet, entitled *Oratorio in Australia: A Short History of the Sydney Philharmonic Society*,¹ not only reflected on the eighteen years since the founding of the Philharmonic Society but also included details about the development of oratorio in Australia. After comparing the details from this publication with those from other sources, many of Barton and Thompson’s details were found to be erroneous. Nonetheless, this account was a valuable source of information and included many colourful anecdotes. In 1935, James K. Gill compiled a history of the then Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney on the occasion of the organisation’s fiftieth anniversary.² This version included many details from Barton and Thompson’s narrative and further offered a detailed chronology of the

¹ Robert B. Barton and G. Marr Thompson, *Oratorio in Australia: A Short History of the Sydney Philharmonic Society* (Sydney: privately printed, 1903).

² James K. Gill, *The Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney* (Sydney: privately printed, [1935]).

Philharmonic's concerts and associations from 1903 to 1935. The final review was published in 1973 as promotional material for the Philharmonic's first season as a professional organisation.³ The booklet lifted many details and stories from the previous two historical reviews and emphasised the more positive aspects of the Society's development from 1935. Although all three sources are biased toward the Philharmonic Society, many of the details provided have been confirmed by information and evidence recorded in other sources. Moreover, these sources merely provide a chronological account of the Philharmonic's history and offer very little interpretive analysis into the way these events affected the development, or lack thereof, of the Society.

In addition to these three primary sources, the official records and programme collections of the Philharmonic Society, located in Sydney and Canberra, were important resources. The National Library of Australia in Canberra holds the Minutes Book of committee meetings of the Society from 1943 to 1962 and an extensive assortment of concert programmes. The Mitchell Library collection at the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney contains selected annual reports from the Society's first twenty years, various concert programmes, and records from the 1970s.

The information and details in these documents were augmented by first hand accounts published in several Sydney and Australian periodicals and relevant details found in other secondary sources. Two of the most valuable secondary sources in this area of research are W. Arundel Orchard's *Music in Australia: More than 150 Years*

³ *The Royal Philharmonic Society of Sydney: 1854-1973* (Sydney: privately printed, [1973]); (hereafter cited as 1973 history). The pages in this historical review are not numbered; the numbers in the brackets have been determined by this researcher.

of Development and Roger Covell's *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society*.⁴ In addition to providing general historical details of the development of music in Australia, both authors mention the Philharmonic Society and offer brief descriptions of the Society's history. Roland Foster, long-time member of the Society, and Ernest Wunderlich, entrepreneur and self-proclaimed supporter of the arts, also made passing references to the Philharmonic in their respective autobiographies.⁵

Throughout my research, I have received information, ideas, and encouragement from many people. My supervisors, Dr. Kathleen Nelson and Dr. Diane Collins, provided a balance of musicological, cultural, and historic insights. Murray Scott, Claire McCoy, and the rest of the staff at the Sydney Conservatorium Library helped track down obscure sources and offered information that only music librarians in Sydney would know. The librarians at the National Library of Australia and the Mitchell and State Reference Libraries at the State Library of New South Wales and the staff at the National Archives of Australia were accommodating in locating the records of and additional references to the Philharmonic Society. Thank you to my families in America and Australia for support and encouragement from far and near. And a special thank you to my husband, Paul, for being my research assistant, editor, thesaurus, chauffeur, sounding board, and a constant source of support.

⁴ W. Arundel Orchard, *Music in Australia: More than 150 Years of Development* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1952); Roger Covell, *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society*, (Melbourne, Sun Books, 1967).

⁵ Roland Foster, *Come Listen to My Song* (Sydney: Collins, 1949); Ernest Wunderlich, *All My Yesterdays: A Mosaic of Music and Manufacturing* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Ltd, 1945).