

Research report

Historic Australian Opera Project

Kerry Murphy

The first opera in the Historic Australian Opera Project, G. W. L. Marshall-Hall's opera in one act, *Stella*, has just been published by the Centre for Studies in Australian Music of the School of Music, The University of Melbourne. Both full and vocal scores have been published.

The full score, edited by Dr Suzanne Robinson, includes extensive critical apparatus, conductor's notes by Marshall-Hall and a detailed historical introduction. The vocal score was Marshall-Hall's first working score rather than a reduction of the full orchestral score. It is not intended as a scholarly edition but as a performing edition.

English-born G. W. L. Marshall-Hall took up the University of Melbourne's first Ormond Chair of music in 1891. A poet, conductor and composer he rapidly became a figure of importance in Melbourne's cultural life. He was an iconoclastic free-thinker whose ideas proved too extreme for the moral values of his peers. In 1900 the University Council opposed the renewal of Marshall-Hall's contract of appointment. *Stella* is a parable of Melbourne life at the turn of the century and plots the suicide of a nurse who is hounded by the 'respectable' establishment when her past affair with the local mayor comes to light. Completed in 1910 and first performed on 4 May 1912 at Her Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne, *Stella* is believed to be the first realistic Australian opera. It is scored for tenor, *basso cantante*, baritone, soprano, mezzo soprano, chorus and full orchestra. In one act (nine scenes), the opera is approximately 65 minutes long. The scores are the first publication of the Centre for Studies in Australian Music and are computer typeset and spiral bound to open flat; parts are available for hire from the Centre.

Stella is the first opera of a projected series of four Historic Australian Operas. Other operas to

be published in the series include Alfred Hill's *Giovanni* (1913) Fritz Hart's *Riders to the Sea* (1915) and Peggy Glanville-Hicks's *The Glittering Gate* (1957) (to be confirmed). The Centre also intends to publish in 1994 a volume of songs with orchestral accompaniment by the Australian composer, Florence Ewart. Performances are projected for all the works in the series. The project is being funded by a major ARC Grant from 1992-1994.

The Project for 1992 has been to edit the opera *Giovanni* by Alfred Hill. Most primary source material on Hill is in Sydney, in the Mitchell library (chiefly correspondence, newscuttings and programmes), and in the ABC Federal Library, where all the manuscripts of Hill's music are kept. Both these collections have been consulted and copies of the full and vocal scores of *Giovanni* obtained.

Haydn Reeder has been working since May both editing and putting the full score onto computer using the software, Score. Editing work is meanwhile being undertaken on the two divergent copies of the vocal score. A student, Annalisa Eng, has been working on various versions of the libretto and the 1992 Research Method Class in the School of Music completed an editing assignment on extracts from the two vocal scores. We are thinking ahead to next year's projected opera by Fritz Hart, whose manuscripts are in the State Library in Melbourne. A current Masters student working on Fritz Hart, Peter Tregear, will be doing some work on the editing Hart's scores early next year. The Associate Investigator on the project for this year has been Jennifer Hill, from the Centre for Studies in Australian Music.

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