
REVIEWS

Thérèse Radic and Suzanne Robinson, eds
Marshall-Hall's Melbourne: Music, Art and Controversy 1891–1915
North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012
ISBN 9781921875502. xviii, 265pp., plates, ill., facsimis., music, ports.

Reviewed by David Tunley

Sixteen scholars have contributed to this engaging study of the English-born foundation Ormond Professor, Marshall-Hall, and the city he loved and contributed to so richly. The essays, each written by a specialist in the field, are like little tiles, which, when assembled, produce a quite dazzling mosaic bringing those times vividly before us. Including biography, art and cultural history, musicology, music education and textual analysis, each of the essays shines a light on a particular aspect of this broad topic that might otherwise elude a single author. A superbly written essay (presumably by one or both of the editors, Thérèse Radic and Suzanne Robinson) not only helps us find our way through such diversity, but also whets our appetite for what is to follow.

Living as we do in the present dominantly secular and liberal-minded Australia, it is easy to forget or be unaware of how mid-Victorian British attitudes had found a welcoming home in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how long it took for these to be dislodged. Marshall-Hall's dismissal from the University of Melbourne because of his satirical and anti-clerical verses (as well as his atheism and fondness for lounging about in his garden on Sunday mornings wearing only his pyjamas) found an easy mark amongst the prudish and well-placed Melburnians. Alas, the thick dust of respectability which he stirred up blew back in his face with an intensity that now seems to us unbelievable. But before we reproach 1900s Melbourne, we should remember that fifty-six years later another wonderful

English musician and conductor was forced to flee the city he loved for broaching the codes of censorship and morality prevailing in Sydney in more modern times!

George William Louis Marshall-Hall (1862–1915) composer, conductor, educationalist, amateur, rationalist and sceptic and a proselytising Wagnerian, swept into Melbourne with a reforming zeal that left its mark on that city for many years, most notably in the development of its symphony orchestras. At heart a bohemian, some of his closest friends were the forward-looking painters such as Norman and Lionel Lindsay, Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Fred McCubbin and Charles Condor, a number of whom painted striking portraits of him. In the opening essay, Ann Galbally gives us insight into art, music and theatre in Melbourne in the 1890s, her broad brushstrokes largely replaced by finer ones in those that follow, tracing out more specific topics. These are ‘Superman & Society: Perspectives on the Aims of Music Education at the University of Melbourne, 1891–1915’ (Keiran Crichton); ‘“Du holde Kunst”: The Musical Life of Vera Deakin’ (Carole Woods); ‘Marshall-Hall & Eduard Scharf: A Close Friendship’ (Kerry Murphy); ‘Elise Wiedermann & Carl Pinschhof: Patrons of Music and Art in Melbourne, 1883–1920’ (Pamela Niehoff); ‘Bohemia and Brotherhood in Late Nineteenth-century Melbourne: Marshall-Hall’s Involvement with the Cannibal and Ishmael Clubs’ (Stephen F. Mead); ‘“That Good Fellow Sugden on the Side of Tolerance”: Marshall-Hall and the Master of Queen’s’ (Wilfrid Prest); ‘Sir James Barrett, Musical Patron in Melbourne’ (Kenneth Morgan); ‘Hermann Heinicke, a Champion of Professional Orchestral Music in 1890s Adelaide: A Contemporary Counterpart to Marshall-Hall in Melbourne’ (Julia I. Szuster); ‘Marshall-Hall contra Wagner: Authors and Readers in Turn-of-the-Century Melbourne’ (Matthew Lorenzon); ‘Artists at Work: G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, Arthur Streeton and Henry Tate’ (Christine Mercer); ‘Marshall-Hall’s Symphony in E Flat and its Symphonic Context’ (Rhoderick McNeill); ‘Resisting the “Blighting Curse of Puritanism”: On the Sexual Politics of *Stella*’ (Suzanne Robinson); ‘G.W.L. Marshall-Hall and Percy Grainger: The “Good Sort” and the “Anarchist with Definite Principles”’ (Jennifer Hill); ‘Romeo, Juliet and George: The Genesis of the Last Marshall-Hall Opera’ (Thérèse Radic); and ‘Marshall-Hall as an Australian Composer’ (Peter Tregear).

To do justice to all the contributions in this ‘horn of plenty’ is obviously beyond the scope of this journal review. All the writers have a connection in some way with the University of Melbourne. It would seem that a number of contributions are a distillation of earlier or related work on the chosen topic, some of them from higher-degree dissertations from that institution. The present publication should help spread this research beyond the borders of academia, lending it new significance in the rich context of this splendid book. For example, the idea of looking at university music examination papers from 100 years ago might seem a somewhat arcane exercise. Yet in its present setting the kind of questions Marshall-Hall asked of his students, as shown by Crichton, becomes a matter of extraordinary interest. No longer just a curious concern, it helps round out the character of the Ormond Professor, about whose many-sided personality we want to know more. (Incidentally, one wonders what present-day music students might make of an examination calling for an understanding of the philosophical concepts of Herbert Spencer and Schopenhauer.) Clearly shining through this book is the respect and admiration for Marshall-Hall from those of good will in Melbourne’s social, intellectual and artistic life. The support of the wealthy Pinschhof family, for example, through all of Marshall-Hall’s trials and tribulations place them amongst the great patrons of that era. Luckily, echoes of similar patronage are still present in modern Melbourne.

It is a pity that there is a tendency for the same essential information about Marshall-Hall to be unnecessarily repeated throughout the book. A little more pruning would be welcome. However, this pales beside the undeniable quality of the research and its clear message, which hopefully will reach readers beyond Melbourne and inspire scholars from other cities to emulate its format. Its genesis was a symposium on Marshall-Hall's life and works held in the Grainger Museum in 2010. Yet its roots go back much earlier than that, for the University Melbourne has been at the forefront of Australian music studies for many years. Of that sustained research this book is one of its latest fruits. And a sweet one at that!