

RESEARCH REPORT

# The Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Concert and Theatre Program Collection

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This project concerns the conservation and arrangement of, and access to the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library's Concert and Theatre Program Collection ([www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/music/collections/programmesindex.html](http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/music/collections/programmesindex.html)). Prior to this project the collection lacked a logical arrangement, which hindered access to materials, and was stored in inadequate conditions. There was also no way of knowing what was in the collection as there was no record of the contents and no finding aid to assist researchers in identifying materials relevant to their research interests.

The aims of this project were, therefore, to maintain the physical integrity of the items, ensuring their long-term preservation, to arrange the collection so as to aid access to the materials, and to create a finding aid so that items could be easily located. These aims were successfully achieved, although not without encountering a number of obstacles, such as damaged concert and theatre programs, and the acquisition and discovery of new items. Despite these difficulties, the project has resulted in a well-preserved, highly organised and accessible collection that has the potential to enhance substantially not only the musicological research programs at the Faculty of Music at the University of Melbourne, but also the historical research projects of musicologists, historians and other scholars.

The Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library's Concert and Theatre Program Collection contains over seventy boxes of materials, some dating from as early 1860. Although the Music Library has owned the collection for some decades, its exact origins are unknown. Despite the growing interest of local scholars in the field of Australian music history, the Music Library, prior to this project, did not have the time or resources to preserve and/or provide access to the materials.

Not only were the extent and contents of the collection unknown, but the materials had never been arranged for access and had suffered under inadequate storage conditions. Sadly, they had been left to disintegrate in the Music Library's storage room while scholars in the field remained ignorant of their existence.

The collection contains programs from a number of musical institutions including the Conservatorium of Music (now the Faculty of Music at the University of Melbourne); various orchestras, including the International Exhibition Orchestra, Marshall-Hall's Orchestra of the 1890s (see Figure 1) and later the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra; choral and chamber-music societies; schools and churches; as well as numerous public concerts, theatrical productions, operatic performances and ballets given by resident and visiting companies, ranging from 1860 to the present. Its uniqueness lies in its Melbourne focus, with almost seventy percent of the programs relating to musical life in Melbourne. A further twenty percent relate to overseas concerts and the remaining programs (approximately ten percent) to various interstate concerts and theatrical entertainments.

**Figure 1.** Program for Melbourne Town Hall concert, 15 December 1894

TOWN HALL,  
MELBOURNE.

*Saturday, 15th Dec., 1894,*  
AT 3 O'CLOCK.

**GRAND...**  
**ORCHESTRAL**  
❖ **CONCERT**

**Orchestra of 63 Artists.**

**Hon. Conductor:**  
PROF. G. W. L. MARSHALL-HALL.

**Hon. Vocalists:**  
MADAME ELISE WIEDERMA, N.  
HERR RUDOLF HIMMER.

**Tickets, 3s. (Balcony and Reserved Chairs),  
2s. and 1s.**

BOX PLAN AT ALLAN'S.

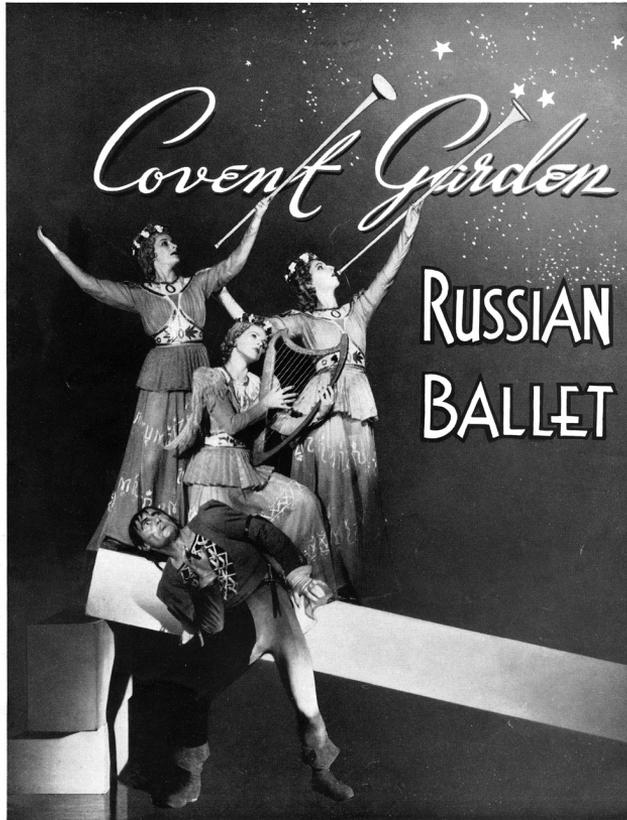
MR. ARBUCKLE & CO., PRINTERS, 490 BOURNE-ST., MELB.

**Committee:**  
HERR F. DIERICH.  
SIG. A. CESCHINA.  
MR. J. R. MAIR.  
MR. E. MOFFITT.  
MR. B. SMITH.  
MR. W. STONEHAM.

—  
MR. BERNHARD SMITH  
*Hon. Secretary.*  
MR. ERNEST MOFFITT  
*Orchestral Secretary.*

**Figure 2.** Program cover for the Covent Garden Russian Ballet (*Les Sylphides*), 1938

J. C. WILLIAMSON'S THEATRE MAGAZINE PROGRAMME . . . Price 6d.

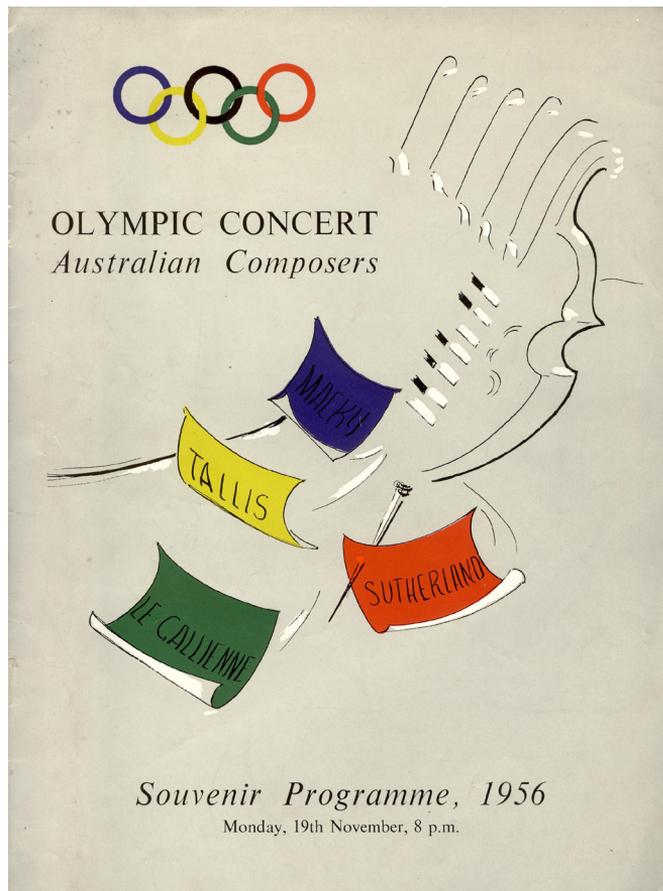


The scope and depth of the collection is remarkable. Melbourne's musical history as represented in this collection can be traced from the establishment of the Melbourne Philharmonic Society in 1853 and the Fitzroy Musical Union's public concerts in 1860 through to the development of Melbourne's first orchestras. It contains material related to various exhibitions and musical festivals (such as the Christmas Festival of 1882 and the International Exhibition Concerts in 1888–89); the foundation of the Ormond Chair of Music, and later the Musica Viva Society; visits by renowned musicians such as Fritz Kreisler, Ignaz Friedman, Artur Schnabel, the Viennese Boys' Choir and the Ballets Russes (see Figure 2); and the Olympic Games Music Festival of 1956 (see Figure 3). Other items in the collection include programs from stage productions (see Figure 4), a series of concert programs from communist Cuba and various items from Europe and the United States of America.

Early in 2006 Evelyn Portek, the Music Librarian of the Louise Hanson Dyer Library, successfully applied for a grant from the Vice-Chancellor's Office to 'help improve scholarly access to the University's Cultural Collections, ensure their long-term preservation and enable their wider public display.'<sup>1</sup> It was acknowledged that improved storage conditions

<sup>1</sup> 'Cultural Collections Grant Helps Conserve Victorian Heritage Concert Programs,' *UniNews* 15.14 (7–21 Aug. 2006), accessed 10 Oct. 2007, <[uninews.unimelb.edu.au/articleid\\_3572.html](http://uninews.unimelb.edu.au/articleid_3572.html)>.

**Figure 3.** Program cover for the 'Olympic Concert,' 1956



were needed to preserve the collection for future use and that something needed to be done about their lack of arrangement and accessibility. While the obvious priority was to preserve the materials, it was felt that preservation alone was meaningless if the materials could not be located or used.

At the conclusion of the project, therefore, it was hoped that:

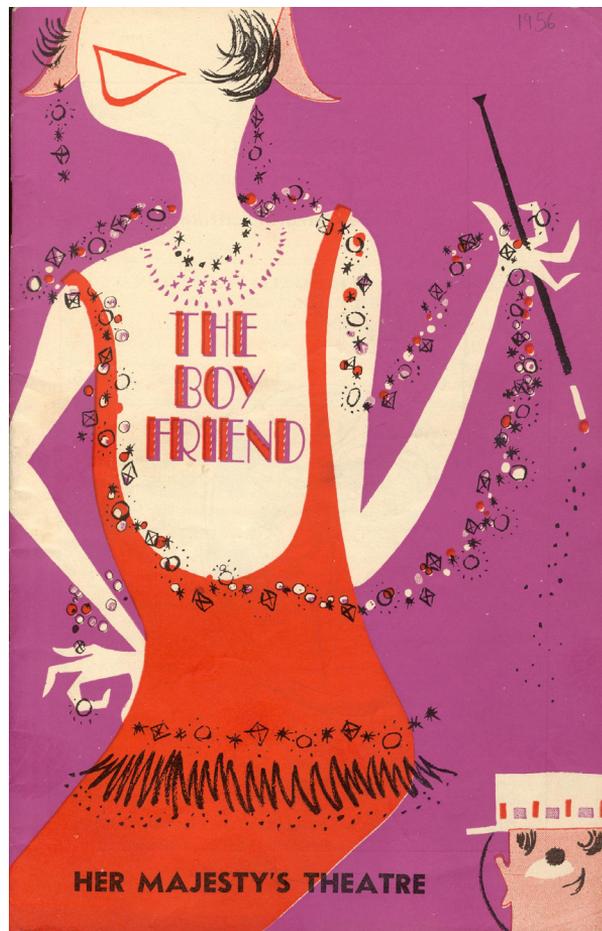
1. the collection would be preserved in an acid-free environment;
2. the collection would be well-organised;
3. access to the collection would be facilitated through a finding aid; and
4. awareness of the collection would be increased.

At the start of the project, meeting these objectives appeared to be relatively straightforward. Items were to be placed in acid-free envelopes and archival boxes, with more fragile materials also placed in Mylar (a protective plastic). However, it soon became clear that the process was more complex than simply removing the items from the old boxes and placing them in the new. Some of the programs were mouldy and needed further treatment, which had not been anticipated in the initial planning stage of the product, while the collection had not been effectively arranged to facilitate access.

Furthermore, although the programs were roughly sorted in chronological order, it was decided that date alone was not an adequate starting point for finding information, as most researchers concentrate on particular musical institutions, locations and/or individual composers or performers. This judgement was not only based on my own experiences as a postgraduate research student in the field of Australian music history, but was also formed through discussions with staff and other postgraduate students at the Faculty of Music, who felt that sorting the collection by institution and geographical location as well as date would enable them to locate information related to their various research projects. To complicate matters further, there were a number of boxes that comprised programs of various dates along with many unrelated items, including numerous German-language music periodicals, which had to be removed.

While maintaining the physical integrity of the items in the collection was relatively simple, the issue of providing access was far more complex and problematic. After considering various options, including the possibility of constructing a database of concert programs, it was decided that preparing a descriptive list of the contents of each box would be the best approach, and that this list should be made available online via the Louise-Hanson Dyer Music Library website.

**Figure 4.** Program cover for *The Boyfriend*, 1956



After the mouldy and unrelated items were taken out of the collection, the remaining items were sorted into the following categories: geographic location (for example, Melbourne, Interstate or International concerts), institution (for example Melbourne Symphony Orchestra), miscellaneous public concerts, and date. They were then placed in acid-free envelopes (and in some cases Mylar) and archival boxes. Each box and envelope was then given a number (Envelope 1a was the first envelope in Box 1), and the general contents (rather than the entire contents) were written on the front of each envelope. The same details were also recorded in a descriptive list. In July 2007, the music library applied for an additional grant so that the damaged programs could be treated for mould at the Centre for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (CCCM), a self-funding department at the University of Melbourne. Approximately thirty items were treated in September 2007 and they were then placed in the appropriate envelopes.

Progress was further frustrated by the acquisition of additional concert programs. Approximately six months into the project, more concert and theatre programs were discovered in the library's storeroom and a small number of programs were donated to the library. A further two boxes of materials relating to the late conductor and music professor Bernard Heinze were found to contain a substantial number of concert programs, letters and administrative materials. The 'discovery' of more programs continued late into the project with a further two bound volumes of concert and theatre programs added to the collection. One of these, containing approximately one hundred pages of concert and theatre programs, annual reports of some of Melbourne's leading musical societies, and newspaper clippings, required treatment for dust and mould.

It soon became clear that processes would have to be defined more clearly if we were going to reach a point of 'completion.' It was decided that any material unprocessed after the launch of the website in December 2007 would be dealt with as a separate project to be carried out periodically (for example, on a six-monthly basis) and that the descriptive list would be updated accordingly.

Overall, the desired outcomes of a preserved, accessible, and well-organized collection with an accompanying record of contents were successfully achieved. Not only are over seventy boxes of programs now safe from further deterioration, but their organization and the accompanying descriptive list ensure that they are accessible to users. The publication of the descriptive list on the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library's website makes information about the collection and its contents available to remote users. This has led to an influx of reference queries about the collection, coming not only from students and staff at the Faculty of Music at the University of Melbourne, who have informally 'heard' about the project, but also from academics and private scholars from other institutions in Australia and overseas, including the Doráti Society in the United Kingdom and the National Library in New Zealand.

The project will require ongoing maintenance as new concert and theatre programs are acquired. This will be carried out periodically and the descriptive list updated accordingly. Programs can now be accessed by researchers upon request from the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library staff and can be viewed in the Cultural Collections Reading room on the third floor of the Baillieu Library.