

SYMPOSIUM: CHORAL MUSIC IN MELBOURNE

The Melbourne Philharmonic Society under Contract to the Australian Broadcasting Commission: Preservation and Triumph *

Kathleen E. Nelson

On 17 August 1936 a letter from the Melbourne Philharmonic Society arrived at the head office of the Australian Broadcasting Commission in Sydney addressed to the General Manager.¹ Signed by the President, Chairman and Secretary of the Society, the letter marked a momentous decision in the Philharmonic's life, and began the formal negotiations towards a contractual agreement under which the ABC took over the Society's choir. With its government funding, the ABC was able to be a powerful collaborator and patron. At a very difficult time in the Society's history, the agreement assured its preservation and also its triumphs of the late 1930s and 1940s. Having come into place in 1937, the agreement with the ABC remained until 1970 when the basis of the collaboration was changed and the scene set for the Society to return to independence.

This article addresses mainly the early years of the Society's association with the ABC, with discussion of why the agreement came about, and proceeds to some of the problems or controversies which arose, as well as making observations about other choirs the ABC worked with. It offers a view of the Society's history largely from the perspective of the ABC files, drawing on materials which are now held by the National Archives of Australia principally in the Sydney office but also in the Melbourne office.² The ABC files contain memoranda between

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¹ National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA) SP724/1, Box 16, file 7/21/7 part 1: 14 August 1936, Melbourne Philharmonic Society President, Chairman and Secretary to General Manager, Australian Broadcasting Commission. The Philharmonic was previously known as the Melbourne Philharmonic Society, and from 1946 was able to include the word 'Royal' in its title. The Society's first one hundred years has been carefully documented by W.A. Carne in his book *A Century of Harmony: the Official History of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society* (Melbourne: The Society, 1954). The present study is much indebted to Carne's work.

² For advice on archival material, I am indebted to Geoffrey Harris, archivist at the ABC Document Archives, and also acknowledge the assistance of archivists at the National Archives of Australia, Sydney and Melbourne offices.

ABC staffers, as well as correspondence to and from Philharmonic Society officers (especially with the Secretaries of the period). Included are materials relating to the early negotiations prior to the signing of the agreement, problems which arose such as financial issues, performance matters including repertoire and soloists, and from the 1960s, the movement towards a replacement agreement.

At the time of the Philharmonic's approach to the ABC in 1936, the Commission had only been established about four years. Already it was a major force in Australian music as an employer of musicians and a concert organizer, with a small orchestral group and chorus in the state capital cities, as well as other groups such as dance and military bands. The ABC's leaders were determined to raise musical standards and to provide the best possible in music for its audience. In 1936 the musical leaders were the General Manager, Charles Moses, the Federal Controller of Music, William James, and the Commission's Musical Advisor (and also the Society's conductor), Bernard Heinze. In their endeavours they were keenly supported by the Chairman of the Commission, W.J. Cleary.³ The Commission succeeded in quickly assuming a significant role as a patron of music in Australia affecting and influencing many musical practices, customs, tastes and careers. This study offers some insights into its role and practice in relation to the amateur choral societies and especially to the Melbourne Philharmonic Society.

Why Associate: An Endangered Society?

The mid-1930s was a difficult period for Australian choral societies. There had been the financial worries of the Depression, and societies competed for the audiences and broadcasts needed to cover costs. Their problems were exacerbated by the activities of the ABC. The Melbourne Philharmonic Society's Annual Report of 1936 described the preceding year as 'probably the most difficult which choral societies have ever had to face.'⁴ At this point the Society must have feared for its continued existence.

A concern to the Society, expressed in the August 1936 letter of approach, was the formation of the ABC's 'own choir.'⁵ The Society feared that as a result it would now receive less assistance from the Commission, probably expecting that the services of the Philharmonic choir would be required less frequently. Although a very much smaller choir than the Society's, it must have been the ABC Wireless Chorus in Melbourne that had raised concern.⁶ The Society would

³ In 1983 the Australian Broadcasting Commission became the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The abbreviation ABC (or in earlier practice A.B.C.) has been used for both names. On the early history of the ABC, see K.S. Inglis, *This is the ABC* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1983), and Ian Thomas, *Broadcast and be Damned: The ABC's First Two Decades* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980); on ABC musical history see Phillip Sametz, *Play On!: 60 Years of Music-making with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra* (Sydney: ABC Enterprises, 1992). The activities of the ABC have often received comment in discussions of Australian musical history. Particularly relevant to the present topic is the important work of Roger Covell, *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1967); also Thérèse Radic, *Bernard Heinze* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986); and on a similar period Kathleen E. Nelson, 'Percy Grainger's Work for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1934-1935: Background and Reception,' *Australasian Music Research* 2-3 (1997-1998): 99-110, and 'Grainger and the Australian Broadcasting Commission after 1935: Memories, Hopes and Frustrations,' *Australasian Music Research* 5 (2000): 113-24.

⁴ Carne, *Century of Harmony* 202. See Carne on effects of the depression (pp. 193-203), and on the significance of the Society's financial problems (pp. 205-7).

⁵ NAA SP724/1, Box 16, file 7/21/7 part 1: 14 August 1936, Melbourne Philharmonic Society to General Manager.

⁶ The Wireless Chorus is likely to have had sixteen members (Covell, *Australia's Music*, 117).

have anticipated a decline in broadcast and performance possibilities, and therefore income. Although not mentioned in the letter, a further underlying concern may have been that the standard of singing in the Philharmonic choir at the time was not high. We know that in September 1935, the conductor, Bernard Heinze, apologized to Percy Grainger for the fact that the choir had not been up to the standard required for the performance of Delius' *Song of the High Hills*, which they had planned. Heinze 'felt depressed about the Philharmonic' and explained 'choral technique and ability seem to be at a standstill.'⁷ Of course, without a good level of community support and interest, choral societies were unlikely to attract the best singers or the good attendance levels needed for high standards of performance.

Much thought and anxiety would have preceded the writing of the Society's letter of appeal to the ABC. It must have been felt that a loss of independence was outweighed by the potential benefits. The Society sought a co-operative association which would allow its 'name and identity' to be preserved. It offered to do a minimum of four concerts annually, those concerts to include *Messiah* and *Elijah*, significantly suggesting amalgamation with the ABC chorus.⁸ Encouraging the executive group to put forward its proposals would surely have been the excellent connections with the Commission which the Society possessed. Notably, Heinze was both the Society's chief conductor and the Musical Advisor for the Commission, and William James had been the Society's chorus master for the period 1929 to 1935, during which time he had been employed by the Australian Broadcasting Company and then in the Victorian Office of the fledgling Commission. James's departure from the Society in 1935 preceded his move to the Sydney head office as Federal Controller of Music.⁹

The Establishment and Early Years of the Agreement: Exciting Times

The ABC's General Manager, Charles Moses, took the Society's approach seriously and circulated the letter to the ABC's Commissioners and the Controllers of Music and Programmes. The responses were favourable and negotiations commenced. Heinze recommended an arrangement similar to that with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. By June of 1937, the two parties had largely reached agreement, the ABC accepting most of the proposals put forward by the Society. The arrangement was regarded by both parties as a 'take over' of the Society's choir, and allowed the ABC to require the auditioning and replacement of choristers. The ABC also gained the right to appoint the choirmaster, conductors and soloists as well as the right to choose the works to be performed. It would furthermore provide the orchestra, thereby relieving the Society of a longstanding source of concern. Perhaps the major benefit to the Society was that the Commission would take responsibility for the financial risk involved in concert giving and cover most of its costs. The ABC would also retain any profits made, and was given broadcast rights to all the Society's concerts. Negotiations on the final contract

⁷ Grainger appears to have donated the music of the Delius work for chorus and orchestra. Grainger Museum: Bernard Heinze to Percy Grainger, 16 July 1934 and 5 September 1935. The quotations are from the second letter and are also quoted in Radic, *Heinze* 67.

⁸ NAA SP724/1, Box 16, 7/21/7 part 1: 14 August 1936, Melbourne Philharmonic Society to General Manager.

⁹ On James as chorus master and assistant conductor, see Carne, *Century of Harmony* 192, 200, 289, 291. On his career with the ABC see comments in Inglis, *This is the ABC*; Sametz, *Play On*; and Nelson, 'Grainger and the Australian Broadcasting Commission.'

continued for some time, its eventual date being 28 April 1938.¹⁰ The Society had acquired a unique agreement and also a unique opportunity for publicity, as from mid-1938, the ABC was required by law to broadcast at least part of each of its concerts for which there was an entry charge.¹¹ The agreement, in the words of the Society's historian W.A. Carne, 'gave the Society a new lease of life.'¹²

Even before the final signing of the contract, the association was well underway with the agreement becoming operational in July 1937. The ABC had already provided its orchestra for the Christmas 1936 *Messiah* performance and again for *Elijah* at Easter 1937. A report to Heinze of a congratulatory and enthusiastic telegram, sent from the Perth ABC office on receipt of the *Elijah* broadcast, attests to the wide exposure available to the Society's choir under the new conditions.¹³ Auditions were conducted during late winter 1937 in front of a panel representing both the Commission and the Society. Current members had to audition, as well as new applicants; members of the choir specially formed for the visit of the English conductor Dr Malcolm Sargent to Melbourne in 1936 were invited to apply. A choir of some two hundred resulted, although a group of two hundred and fifty had been sought. The first performance with the re-constituted choir took place in October 1937, the occasion being an ABC Celebrity Concert given by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra conducted by Heinze. The choir took part in Vaughan Williams' *Flourish for a Coronation*, a recent work composed in honour of the coronation of King George VI which had taken place earlier that year. The visiting celebrity for the concert was the great pianist Arthur Rubinstein, who played the Second Piano Concerto by Rachmaninoff.¹⁴

Musically the next few years with the ABC formed a high point in the Society's history, and it must have been an exciting and gratifying time for its members, bringing much variety while maintaining the constancy of the annual Christmas *Messiah*. Easter 1938 saw a change from the choir's traditional *Elijah*, when, conducted by the ABC-appointed chorus master Gerald English and supplemented by the ABC's Wireless Chorus, it gave a programme including Dvorak's *Stabat mater* and excerpts from Wagner's *Parsifal*. From 1919 to 1937 the Society had presented *Elijah* annually at Easter with the exception only of 1928 and 1930, and since giving its first Australian performance in 1857, it had been the Society's second most frequently performed work following only *Messiah*.¹⁵ That the tradition should be broken in 1938 is particularly surprising given the mention of an annual *Elijah* in the 1936 letter of approach to the ABC. This, like the Christmas *Messiah*, was a tradition the Society seemed to have wanted to maintain. Perhaps the ABC's William James proposed the 1938 programme:¹⁶

¹⁰ For documentation covering the progress to the agreement, see particularly NAA SP724/1, Box 16, 7/21/7 Part 1, and SP368/1, Box 13, 7/47/14. Copies of the agreement may be found in SP724/1, Box 16, 7/21/7 part 1, and B2111/1, Mus40 Part 1.

¹¹ Inglis, *This is the ABC* 51; Sametz, *Play On* 62.

¹² Carne, *Century of Harmony* 206. Carne also refers to the unique quality of the agreement.

¹³ State Library of Victoria (hereafter SLV) MS 9824, Bernard Heinze Papers, Box 71: 30 March 1937, E.K. Sholl [ABC Victoria office] to Bernard Heinze.

¹⁴ For the programme for this concert see SLV Heinze Papers, Box 46. Also on this concert see Carne, *Century of Harmony* 208.

¹⁵ Carne, *Century of Harmony* 36–37, 163–204, 277. This section draws on Carne's useful listing of all concerts, which includes the programme, names of soloists and conductor, and extracts from reviews.

¹⁶ NAA B21111/1, Mus40 Part 5: 17 February 1938, Charles Moses to Federal Controller of Music [William James].

it was a return of the Easter programme given in 1930, during the period of James's tenure as the Society's chorus master. In general, the correspondence studied leaves unclear the question of who proposed and finally decided works to be performed, but there seems little doubt that both the Society and the Commission were involved, with Heinze taking an important role especially for concerts which he conducted. An important event in September 1938 was the Philharmonic's participation in the first Australian performance of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. Then on his second ABC tour, the conductor was Malcolm Sargent, who had given the work's first performance in England in 1931. Another visitor, Sir Granville Bantock, conducted the choir in its next performance two months later, Bach's Mass in B minor. In 1939 *Elijah* reappeared at Easter conducted by Heinze. *The Dream of Gerontius* had been proposed, probably by the Society, but as it was planned to be broadcast only two weeks earlier from Sydney, some other work was needed as the Easter concert would of course be broadcast.¹⁷ Soon after, the visiting George Szell took the podium for Verdi's *Requiem*, to be followed by Sargent returning for the choir's second performance of *Belshazzar's Feast*. Later in the same year came participation in Coleridge Taylor's *Hiawatha*. In fifteen costumed performances, the Philharmonic was part of the seven hundred-member chorus directed by Heinze.¹⁸ The year 1940 brought *Elijah* again at Easter, Sir Thomas Beecham conducting the Brahms *Requiem* and, in November, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* under Heinze. Not performed by the Society since 1924, the latter work then became a regular in the choir's repertoire. The war was to stop the stream of overseas conductors brought in by the ABC for some years, but concerts continued enthusiastically and successfully.

New members had been attracted during the exciting early years of the agreement, so that in the first half of 1940 the Society had a waiting list for the choir and reported almost 250 choristers for performances. Enthusiasm was such that there was what were believed to be record attendances at rehearsals three months prior to a performance,¹⁹ and for the relatively unknown *Gerontius* later in the same year, there were 217 choristers.²⁰ Further indication of the satisfaction and enthusiasm felt by the Society was its offer to do an extra 'Choral Praise programme' for broadcast, in order to show its appreciation of the collaborative association with the ABC. The choir was expected to number between 230 and 240 singers for the programme.²¹ In June 1940 an ABC memorandum expressed the ABC's warm satisfaction with the Philharmonic's work and the overall success of the arrangements,²² and in the same month Heinze told ABC decision makers 'that there had never been such interest in Choral music in Melbourne as there is at present.'²³

¹⁷ NAA B21111/1, Mus40 Part 5: 9 November 39, Ewart Chapple [Acting Federal Controller of Music] to [ABC] Manager for Victoria.

¹⁸ Carne, *Century of Harmony* 212. See also Radic, *Heinze* 107–8.

¹⁹ NAA B21111/1, Mus40 Part 1: 30 April 1940, T.W. Bearup to the General Manager [Moses]. When this report was made, the next concert was to be that with Beecham.

²⁰ NAA B21111/1, Mus40 Part 1: 26 November 1940, C.C. Wicks to Federal Controller of Music.

²¹ NAA B2111/1, Mus40 Part 1: 3 July 1940, Paull Fiddian (secretary, MPS) to Manager for Victoria; 16 July 1940, C.C. Wicks to Federal Controller of Music.

²² NAA, B2111/1, Mus 40 Part 1: 11 June 1940, James Grant and Moses to the Secretary [A. L. Holman].

²³ NAA SP 341/2, Box 3: Minutes of the Meeting of the Music Advisory Committee: 21–22 June 1940; also in SLV, Heinze Papers, Box 7.

Reviewers wrote favourably of the Philharmonic during this period. The complimentary words of the experienced English critic Neville Cardus writing about the sound of the choir in the 1940 *Elijah* are remarkable.²⁴ Another notable comment came from Thorold Waters on the performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony given as the conclusion of the Heinze-conducted Beethoven Festival of 1944. Waters wrote 'probably no more exalted performance has been heard in Melbourne than that of the Philharmonic Society.'²⁵

Controversy during the Early Years

This period of excitement and triumph for the Society was not without controversy. Back in winter 1937 when the agreement was only newly in place, there had been a series of letters published in the *Age* complaining about the Commission's 'monopolising' and domination of musical performance and broadcasting. The Society's association with the ABC was specified amongst the complaints in the initial letter written under the pseudonym 'Enquirer.'²⁶ He or she wrote 'Since the commission has adopted the philharmonic society, all other choral societies have been excluded, or almost so, from [its] broadcasting in Melbourne.' The 'Enquirer' further contended that the publicly-funded ABC should be assisting a much broader range of choral societies, pointing out that the societies relied on broadcasts and public concerts for income. It was wrong to give the Philharmonic 'a virtual monopoly of choral broadcasting over the national service.'²⁷ The ABC responded that other choirs in Melbourne would be given the chance to broadcast, given their preparation of 'suitable works' and 'the required standard.'²⁸

Some examples of the ABC's subsequent interaction with other choirs in or near Melbourne appear in the files. In 1940 the Heidelberg City Choir requested the appearance at one of its concerts of an ABC celebrity soloist. The ABC was supportive and a suitable artist identified, but in the end the arrangement fell through as a result of the illness of the soloist.²⁹ This was the baritone Harold Williams who was soon to sing in *The Dream of Gerontius* with the Philharmonic. Competition for visiting soloists to sing with the choral societies was an issue which could arise. As an example, on Christmas Day 1940 the soprano soloist Thea Phillips was to sing her first *Messiah* with the Philharmonic and the Commission. But she was also invited to sing *Messiah* in another performance not associated with the ABC and just three days before the Philharmonic's concert. The ABC asked her not to undertake this other performance.³⁰ No doubt the Commission had thought that if she appeared first elsewhere, it would spoil the novelty of her appearance at its Philharmonic concert. Phillips agreed to the ABC's request, as might be expected given its power as a patron and that the concert would be broadcast nationally.

²⁴ Quoted in Carne, *Century of Harmony* 212–13, and Radic, *Heinze* 109.

²⁵ SLV Heinze Papers, Box 46: newspaper clipping 21 February 1944.

²⁶ The complainant was probably thinking of the Easter 1937 *Elijah* and the Christmas 1936 *Messiah*, as well as the terms of the new agreement.

²⁷ 'Monopolising Music. Activities of Broadcasting Commission,' by 'Enquirer,' *Age* 3 July 1937. NAA SP1558/2, box 52/6, Monopolising Music—Melbourne *Age* Campaign.

²⁸ NAA SP1558/2, box 52/6, Monopolising Music—Melbourne *Age* Campaign.

²⁹ NAA SP368/1, Box 13, 7/28/19, Heidelberg City Choir.

³⁰ NAA B2111/1 Mus40 Part 1: 22 November 1940 and 26 November 1940, C.C. Wicks [Acting Manager Victoria] to the Federal Controller of Music. The other performance was to be conducted by Herbert Davis and may have been that of the Malvern Choral Society.

The ABC continued to be under pressure to work with local choral societies other than the Philharmonic. Complaint was made in front of a Parliamentary Committee in regard to the ABC's alleged neglect of the Malvern Choral Society, whose conductor was prominent Melbourne musician Herbert Davis. That complaint was followed in 1942 by the ABC's agreement to Malvern's request to broadcast its *Elijah*, even altering an ABC concert date so as to allow it. The ABC gave Malvern a fee of £50 for the broadcast. It is worth noting that the internal ABC memorandum on this subject mentions three requests for broadcasts of both *Elijah* and *Messiah*. Malvern continued to be granted broadcasts from time to time during the 1940s.³¹

There were also complaints received from other states about the Melbourne Philharmonic's preferred status for national broadcasting. That it was given preference must have been to some extent inevitable as the ABC was required to broadcast from the live concerts it organised and it was closely connected with the Society. In 1939 the Queensland State and Municipal Choir had wanted its *Messiah* to be broadcast nationally, objecting to the regular presence of the Melbourne Philharmonic's *Messiah* on the national relay. This led the federal ABC office to suggest that for the next year, the Society consider doing Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* for broadcast instead.³² Nevertheless, the Philharmonic performed *Messiah* at Christmas 1940. Another competitor was the Sydney-based Hurlstone Choral Society. Hurlstone had hoped for its Christmas *Messiah* to be broadcast in 1942, and put in another bid for the right in August 1943, pointing out the choir's importance to the ABC in Sydney.³³

Hurlstone had an arrangement with the ABC from 1941. Although it was not formalized in the same way as that with the Philharmonic, it appears that the ABC may have considered another similar agreement. In fact, the ABC worked with chosen choirs in other capital cities as well, especially Brisbane and Adelaide, and the differences between the arrangements with the various choirs are referred to repeatedly and critically in ABC files from 1940.³⁴ The terms of the Melbourne agreement were on occasion viewed as too much in the Philharmonic Society's favour. The arrangement with the Hurlstone Choral Society, founded in 1920 and eventually to become the Sydney Philharmonia, provides a good comparison. In 1941 the Commission promised Hurlstone a minimum of three public or studio concerts (and therefore broadcasts) during the year as opposed to Melbourne's agreement for four public concerts (not studio concerts), and the ABC was to pay Hurlstone a fee of £50 for each of the three concerts.³⁵ There lies a major difference with the Melbourne agreement. The Philharmonic was guaranteed against losses resulting from performances as well as having most costs covered including payment for the Secretary and his Assistant. Hurlstone would have to cover its costs from the fee, and any loss was its own responsibility. While the Commission did supply music and a rehearsal room, it did not supply or pay the chorus master or provide fees for Hurlstone's officers.

³¹ NAA SP368/1, 7/38/9, Malvern Choral Society: especially: 6 August 1942, Keith Barry to Acting General Manager [T.W. Bearup].

³² NAA B2111/1 Mus40 Part 5: 9 November 1939, Ewart Chapple to Manager for Victoria.

³³ NAA SP724/1, 7/11/18 Part 1, Hurlstone Choral Society: 15 August 1943, W.D. Rankine to the General Manager.

³⁴ See for example correspondence of August to October 1940 in NAA SP724/1, Box 17, 7/47/15.

³⁵ NAA SP724/1, 7/11/18 Part 1: 9 December 1941, James to Acting General Manager.

Another feature of the Philharmonic's agreement was the allowance for two complimentary tickets for each member of the choir for their concerts. This was a cause of regular irritation in the ABC head office and seen as inequitable. It was pointed out in 1944 that while the Melbourne Philharmonic choristers received two tickets, Hurlstone choristers had just one, the Queenslanders received concession rate tickets, and Adelaide Philharmonic Choir members received none at all.³⁶ The question kept arising and was not resolved until the eventual end of the 1937 agreement.

Concluding Remarks

Those early years of the agreement with the ABC were a high point in the Society's history. What a time it must have been. There was the absence of serious financial concerns, an orchestra that could be relied upon, the excitement of new works, visiting celebrities to work with, and a large and enthusiastic choir membership. Thanks to the unique relationship with the ABC, perhaps assisted by strong community interest in music and concerts during the anxious war years of the early '40s,³⁷ the Philharmonic enjoyed a surge of strength. However, change was coming; the Society at this point was moving against a general trend. In 1940, when the ABC Music Advisory Committee considered putting on a choral festival, it appears that they felt the Melbourne standard of choral singing could not be reached elsewhere in the country. A loss of choir members to the war effort was also noted and the festival did not go ahead.³⁸ In fact, with or without the war, the glorious days of the large choral societies had already passed, their great popularity had chiefly been a phenomenon of the previous century. The ABC's emphasis on the development of orchestral music must have contributed to the weakening of Australian choral societies over time, but the Commission itself was responding to broader trends already in existence well before its own formation in 1932.³⁹

The Society was not immune to the situation. Its Annual Report of 1950 commented on lessening interest in choral participation and a peak of interest during the war years.⁴⁰ Then, in defence of flagging attendance at the Philharmonic's concerts, Heinze pointed out in 1951 that choral music had declined in popularity, not only in Australia, and that orchestral concertgoers did not want to hear a choir. Such community attitudes made it difficult to form a good choir. As the ABC's Acting Director of Music wrote: 'So it becomes a vicious circle and the only type of choral concert that retains its drawing power is that in which musical values are subordinate to the religious, sentimental or traditional associations of the work performed.'⁴¹

³⁶ SP724/1, 7/11/18 Part 1: 28 April 1944, Moses to Paull Fiddian; further relating to this issue in the same file and NAA SP751/1 Box 9.

³⁷ On music in wartime see Covell, *Australia's Music* 124; Radic, *Heinze* 114–15; and Sametz, *Play On* 65, 87.

³⁸ The Music Advisory Committee minutes, 21–22 June 1940. Heinze was chair of the committee; other members present were Dr Edgar Bainton, Professor E. Harold Davies, and the ABC's William James and Keith Barry.

³⁹ The moves to passive listening rather than active participation in music (such as membership of choral societies), and the increased interest in instrumental music, which occurred in Australia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are well discussed in Peter Jeffery Dart, *Criticism in a Developing Culture: Australian Music Periodicals to 1931*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1997. The dominance of orchestral music in the ABC's agenda has been noted by various writers; see Covell's important discussion in chapter 6 of *Australia's Music* on the role of the ABC in Australian music-making; also Semmler, *The ABC – Aunt Sally and Sacred Cow* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1981), 142.

⁴⁰ Carne, *A Century of Harmony* 229.

⁴¹ NAA SP751/1, 2/33/2, Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society General File: 29 June 1951, H. Cannon [Acting Director of Music] to Director of Programmes.

Fortunately, the lows were not constant, and the Society continued its work with the ABC enjoying the high points of the period such as its 1953 centenary festival and performance at the 1956 Olympic Games.⁴²

By the early 1960s concern was expressed at the ABC about choral standards in both Melbourne and Sydney, and, writing in the mid 1960s, Roger Covell commented on the sad state of the choral societies, with only the Adelaide societies remaining strong.⁴³ The decline of Sydney's Hurlstone Choral Society occasioned a radical plan for renewal, proposed by the then ABC Music Director, Joseph Post. This plan saw its choir reconstituted under the Commission's leadership as a 'semi-professional' body. Despite proposals to extend a similar plan to the Melbourne Philharmonic, no such change took place there.⁴⁴

The Philharmonic's original agreement with the ABC finally came to an end in mid-1969 with a new one put in place in 1970. This change followed protracted and concerned discussions, the ABC seeking the control over concerts which it felt had been lost and a more satisfactory financial arrangement.⁴⁵ Both parties agreed on the need to rebuild the standard of performance. Under the new agreement, the ABC took full control of concerts involving the Society and employed the choir as an artist. The Society was to take back the management of the choir and operate on an independent basis. And so, with a new agreement, began another chapter in the history of one of Australia's most longstanding and significant musical organisations.

⁴² A recording of the choir dating from 1955 is held by the National Screen and Sound Archive. This is of the Philharmonic with the Victorian Symphony Orchestra in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, conducted by Walter Susskind.

⁴³ Covell, *Australia's Music* 19, 122. Lauris Elms writes of the declining Philharmonic choir of 1960 in *The Singing Elms: The Autobiography of Lauris Elms* (Terrey Hills, NSW: Bowerbird Press, 2001), 84.

⁴⁴ NAA SP1299/1, R10/6/2 Part 1, Hurlstone Choral Society. This file also contains reference to the Melbourne Philharmonic. Also NAA SP1322/1, 7/21/11 Part 2, Box 61: 8 April 1964, J. Shewcroft memorandum.

⁴⁵ NAA SP1322/1, 7/21/11 Part 2, Box 61.