

Post-Colonial Tristesse: Aspects of Wagner Down Under

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Australians of European origin might be forgiven for thinking that music history is, as the well-known saying goes, ‘something that happens to other people’—specifically, people in Europe. The majority culture in Australia is, after all, commonly described as a ‘transplanted’ one.¹ Moreover, the principal source of that culture is England, a country that the German social commentator Oscar A.H. Schmitz (in)famously described in 1914 as being inhabited by ‘das einzige Kulturvolk ohne eigene Musik’ (the only cultured people without its own music).²

As Jennifer Hill’s masterful exhibition ‘Becoming Wagnerites: Richard Wagner and Australia’ reminds us, however, the Australian colonies were far from silent.³ By the late nineteenth century they sustained a high level of sophisticated musical activity, observable in both the emergence of major musical institutions around the country such as conservatoires and symphony orchestras, and in the broader historical record to be found in archives, museums, newspapers and collections of musical ephemera. From these, we can have little doubt about the enthusiasm with which the growing urban population around Australia enjoyed an active

¹ For a recent discussion of Australia’s ‘transplanted’ musical culture, see Sinje Steinmann, ‘“We’re transplanted Europeans”: The Music Culture of British Settlers in Australia as an Expression of Ties with the Motherland,’ in Beat A. Föllmi, Nils Grosh and Mathieu Schneider, *Music and the Construction of National Identities in the 19th Century* (Baden-Baden: Éditions Valentin Koerner, 2010), 305–14.

² Oscar A.H. Schmitz, *Das Land ohne Musik: englische Gesellschaftsprobleme* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1914), 30. The title phrase ‘Das Land ohne Musik’ subsequently became a well-known quotation, and was once commonly attributed to Brahms.

³ Exhibition, *Becoming Wagnerites: Richard Wagner (1813–1883) and Australia*, 7 Oct. to 19 Dec. 2012, curated by Jennifer Hill. Exhibition catalogue published by University Library, University of Melbourne, 2013.

musical culture, whether in salons, theatres or concert halls, or in their own drawing rooms.

Schmitz, however, had not been suggesting that England was literally silent, or that there were not a few significant English composers, rather that it was a country in which serious music did not play a central role in the formation or maintenance of its collective sense of self. Of course, such an assessment tells us more today about the prejudices of the author against English composers, and English society more generally, than it does about the actual state of English music at the time. But without the apparent existence of a sizeable, distinctive and celebrated compositional heritage of its own, Australia was even more at risk of being considered to lack its own music history alongside a musical culture.

Certainly, by the end of the nineteenth century a corpus of music composed locally was indeed emerging in Australia; it was just that it did not *sound* particularly 'Australian'. It appeared simply to replicate the common-practice musical culture of continental Europe.⁴ We could be forgiven for thinking today that its purpose, therefore, was to be little more than the sonic equivalent of the practice of hanging pictures of old Europe on suburban Australian living room walls. Or is it in fact possible to trace in this music something we might yet incorporate into a peculiarly Australian musical history? What, for instance, can we make of the readiness with which composers around the turn of the twentieth century adopted aspects of the musical style and broader aesthetics of the operas of Richard Wagner? Can we reconcile the existence of this music with our sense of what it was, or, indeed, still is, to be Australian today? It is these questions I want to consider as we now help celebrate the significance of Wagner's music more broadly for Western culture on the occasion of the bicentenary of his birth.

We might begin by suggesting that the initial enthusiastic reception of Wagner in Australia by the settler population of the late nineteenth century could owe something to their sense of heroic adventure that accompanied their conquest of indigenous peoples and the transformation of a British penal colony into a soon-to-be federated nation. This may well have been one of the underlying reasons for why a season of *Lohengrin* given in August 1877 in Melbourne by the William Lyster Opera Company was drawn to the attention of the composer himself. A brief correspondence with Emil Sander, an expatriate German living in Melbourne, gives us more than a hint of what these performances might have meant for the local audiences.⁵ Sander wrote:

Dear Sir,

You will undoubtedly be surprised to receive a letter in an unknown hand from Melbourne Australia. I take this liberty because I believe it would please you to hear that in the course of the past month, one of your operas—*Lohengrin*—was performed for the first time in Australia. With it a new epoch begins in the musical world of this land, which is still *terra incognita* for so many in Europe ... Melbourne, one of the most beautiful cities in the world, although scarcely over thirty years old, has 250,000

⁴ See Peter Tregear, 'Marshall-Hall as Australian Composer,' in *The Marshall-Hall Era: Music, Art and Controversy in Federation Melbourne*, ed. Suzanne Robinson and Thérèse Radic (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Press, 2013), 199–207.

⁵ *Lohengrin* may have been some thirty years old, and long been surpassed by *Tristan, Meistersinger*, and the entire *Ring*, but the more significant chronological fact to note, perhaps, is that Melbourne's performance of *Lohengrin* occurred only two years after its premiere in London, and this was only the second complete opera by Wagner to have been performed in London. *Der fliegende Holländer* was first performed there in 1870.

inhabitants, three very beautiful [large] theatres and several small ones, and a large, beautiful opera house. It is a wonderful city, and it is therefore surely no wonder that the 'Music of the Future' has met with so magnificent a reception here.⁶

With deference to the plot trajectory of the *Ring*, we also might note with a little irony that it was only the discovery of gold (albeit it in central Victoria, and not in the Rhine) that had given Melbourne, capital of the colony of Victoria, the economic means to mount performances of the Music of the Future. One of the most profitable mining areas, indeed, was to be the Victorian town of Walhalla. What is more significant, however, is that in Sander's eyes, at least, Melbourne had become a place where the idea of the future could not help but dominate the imagination, and therefore a place where Wagner's operas would naturally find an especially receptive audience.

As the *Ring* suggests, however, the future that Wagner envisioned was not necessarily aligned with what Melbourne, or indeed Australia, was actually becoming. Wagner's art was self-consciously 'revolutionary' in that it offered 'a way of thinking and feeling that might resolve the contradictions of the times in a new social vision.'⁷ But is this what Australian audiences wanted to hear? In a telling passage, an unnamed critic in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1870 discussed the relative virtues of Wagner and Verdi and noted that while Wagner had 'far more originality and undoubtedly greater power of instrumentation,' and appealed 'to the mysterious and poetically unearthly side of human nature,' his was ultimately an aesthetic one could admire but not inhabit.⁸ The critic concluded:

It is not for us to condemn or to exalt either by the comparison; the words which the Laureate puts into the mouth of Guinevere, who, speaking to Launcelot of that 'passionless perfection,' Arthur, goes on to say:

'Who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the colour.'⁹

Simply put, just as Schmidt had suggested was the case for England, here high art did not have the critical or rhetorical privilege it was given in continental Western Europe. Australians did not, as a rule, go to the opera or listen to a symphony as a means of understanding themselves, let alone their possible future. They were suspicious, indeed, of what might be termed 'old world' affectation.¹⁰ One particular result, as Veronica Kelly notes of Australian theatre, was that by the turn of the twentieth century Australian culture 'was still a largely class-unified and commercial endeavour, where any common-sensical but cultivated observer could assess

⁶ Translation from Jennifer Marshall, 'Richard Wagner's Letter to Australia,' *Miscellanea Musicologica* 14 (July 1985): 152.

⁷ Anne Dzamba Sessa, 'At Wagner's Shrine: British and American Wagnerians,' in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 246.

⁸ Note also Robert Schumann's observation in 1839 that while 'Italy has his Naples, France its Revolution, England its Navy, etc., so the Germans have their Beethoven symphonies.' See the collection of his writings entitled *On Music and Musicians*, ed. Konrad Wolff, trans. Paul Rosenfeld (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 61.

⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Sep. 1879, 5. The 'Laureate' is Alfred Lord Tennyson, the quotation is from Chapter VIII 'Lancelot and Elaine' of his *Idylls of the King*.

¹⁰ The classic text on this subject is Russell Ward's *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958). For a more recent anthology of writing on the subject, see John Hirst, ed., *The Australians: Insiders and Outsiders on the National Character since 1770* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2007).

sacred drama and pantomimes in the same column, and even, upon occasion, as the same genre.¹¹ This is hardly a climate in which we might expect people to warm easily to the form and content of a Wagnerian opera.

Furthermore, an Australian Wagnerite might have faced a further point of critical resistance in the very foreignness (for a European at least) of the physical environment that she or he now found. Here, however, the gradual 'incorporation of rural Australia'¹² in the nineteenth century, and consequent alienation of urban society from the physical environment around it, meant that the Australian bush could nevertheless emerge as much (if not more) a mythical as a genuine physical presence.¹³ Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century there also arose idealised 'poets' of the land, authors like Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson, and painters like Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin and Tom Roberts. Image and word were easily incorporated into this cultural project, and one composer who sought to do the same for music, and in doing so also quickly became a friend and associate of many of these artists, was the London-trained composer and conductor George William Louis Marshall-Hall (1862–1915). He had himself been drawn to the idea of Australia as a land of new musical possibilities, if not a 'heroic New Britannia' more generally.¹⁴ An avid reader, too, of Friedrich Nietzsche, Marshall-Hall no doubt hoped that something of Nietzsche's dream of a 'super-European' music responding creatively to the 'uncontrollable flood and glamour of sunshine spreading over a race of independent and self-reliant beings' could come to pass.¹⁵ Indeed, more than a little of Nietzsche's elevated, flamboyant, literary style is detectable in the public utterances of Marshall-Hall as he came quickly to prominence in Melbourne after arriving to take up the Ormond Chair of Music at the University of Melbourne in 1891.¹⁶

Evidence for Marshall-Hall's self-identification with a Wagnerian-styled nation-forming creative enterprise is easy to find, such as an 1895 letter from Marshall-Hall to Arthur Streeton that has the opening line of the so-called 'Spring Song'—'Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond'—from Wagner's *Die Walküre* scrawled across it.¹⁷ In that same year, a performance by Marshall-Hall's orchestra of excerpts from *Tristan und Isolde* was, it appears, interpreted by the composer-conductor as not so much a Schopenhauerian, world-weary longing after death, but rather a youthful, virile longing after a *little* death.

[I]t is the love, not of a sentimental youth, but of a fully developed man of power and

¹¹ Veronica Kelly, 'J.C. Williamson Produces Parsifal, or the Redemption of Kundry: Wagnerism, Religion, and Sexuality,' *Theatre History Studies* 15 (1995): 170.

¹² Richard Waterhouse, 'Australian Legends: Representations of the Bush, 1813–1913,' *Australian Historical Studies* 31.115 (2000): 214.

¹³ See Tregear, 'European Sounds, Australian Echoes: The Music of Marshall-Hall, Hill, and Hart,' *The Soundscapes of Australia: Music, Place And Spirituality*, ed. Fiona Richards (London: Ashgate, 2007), 185–98.

¹⁴ Thérèse Radic, *G.W.L. Marshall-Hall: A Biography and Catalogue* (Melbourne: The Marshall-Hall Trust, 2002), 4.

¹⁵ '[E]iner übereuropäischen Musik, die noch vor den braunen Sonnen-Untergängen der Wüste Recht behält, deren Seele mit der Palme verwandt ist und unter grossen schönen einsamen Raubthieren heimisch zu sein und zu schweifen versteht.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Aphorismus 255; quoted in Ferruccio Busoni, *A New Aesthetic of Music*, trans. Th. Baker (New York: Schirmer, 1911) 34–5.

¹⁶ For an excellent contextualised study of Marshall-Hall as a literary figure, see Matthew Lorenzon, *The literary works of G.W.L. Marshall-Hall: 1888–1915* (MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 2010).

¹⁷ G.W.L. Marshall-Hall to Arthur Streeton, 1 Mar. 1895, M-H 9/7-1:1, Marshall-Hall Collection, Grainger Museum, Melbourne.

energy in which the long pent-up flood of passion has by a woman's glance been set free and now rushes tempestuously, irresistibly, through his being, so that he gives himself over utterly to its all-obliterating influence.¹⁸

The influence of Wagner is as clear in Marshall-Hall's own music. Works like his *Symphony in E-flat* (1903), which was composed in part during camping trips with Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts and other artists of the so-called 'Heidelberg School', demonstrate how Wagnerian musical rhetoric and style could be appropriated and adapted to serve an Australian context. Indeed, in it he believed he had 'unconsciously gathered together as a harmonious whole the many heterogenous [*sic*] impressions of Australian life and scenery which my stay in this country had engendered.'¹⁹

However, this ebullient and energetic sense of what an Australian music might sound like was not to last. It was not just that Marshall-Hall himself became the centre of a long-running public controversy that had seen him having to relinquish his University of Melbourne professorship in 1901; something of a late-Wagnerian mood of introspection, a post-colonial *tristesse* no less, seems to have taken hold of the artistic milieu in post-Federation Melbourne. Wagner's musical and intellectual legacy started being mined for a very different aesthetic end.

This contrast maps rather well onto the distinction between what might be called a 'heroic' Wagnerism, a public and often political response to the music born of the spirit of a Lohengrin or Tannhäuser or Siegfried, and what Elliott Zuckerman has elsewhere described as 'Tristanism', a response that was more introspective and personal.²⁰ The first type of response took inspiration from the social implications of Wagner's works, and, by and large, composers who did so considered themselves practical, secular, and rational by nature. The latter type of composer, by contrast, stressed the spiritual, esoteric, or inner meanings of his work as part of a broader *fin-de-siècle* discourse of loss and tended to move away from explicit connections to, or discussions of, social reform to an interest in theosophy or occultism and spiritualism.²¹ Among their ranks were also to be found artists of a traditionally pious bent, alongside the occultists, and 'connoisseurs of emotion.'²² We might also note here, too, that discourse around this distinction is often overtly gendered—the former being commonly described in 'masculine' terms, the latter 'feminine'.

It is a contrast that also maps well onto the difference in aesthetic attitude and

¹⁸ Concert Programme, Grand Wagner Concert, Melbourne Town Hall, 14 September 1895. Authorship of this, and other programme notes, from this concert series, is not claimed on the programmes themselves, but they exhibit Marshall-Hall's 'signature' flamboyant style to such an extent that attributing them to him is a reasonably safe supposition. It would, in any event, be hard to imagine that Marshall-Hall did not take a close interest in, and approve, their content.

¹⁹ Quoted in J.M. Thompson, *A Distant Music: The Life and Times of Alfred Hill 1870–1960* (Auckland: OUP, 1980), 125.

²⁰ Elliott Zuckerman, *The First Hundred Years of Wagner's 'Tristan'* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 30.

²¹ David C. Large and William Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 16.

²² Sessa, 'At Wagner's Shrine,' 255–6. This Janus-faced aspect of Wagner's operatic legacy was a particular topic of debate in Germany in the years after World War Two, with significant argument erupting around the time of Wagner's 150th birthday in the DDR as to whether his later, 'reactionary' works should still be performed at all. See Elaine Kelly, 'Imagining Richard Wagner: The Janus Head of a Divided Nation,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9 (2008): 799–829.

compositional style between Marshall-Hall and his successor Fritz Bennicke Hart (1872–1949).²³ Hart had originally come to Australia to conduct performances of the latest hit musical comedies for J.C. Williamsons. Following Marshall-Hall's death in 1915, Hart accepted an ongoing appointment as head of the conservatorium that Marshall-Hall had established in East Melbourne at the Victorian Artists' Society. Hart also became associated, socially and professionally, with the local artist community, particularly those linked to the influential artist, teacher, and personality Max Meldrum (1875–1955).²⁴ And, like Marshall-Hall, Hart also quickly demonstrated an interest in, and a commitment to, the possibility of a style of music suited to his adopted homeland.

Hart's 'Tristanism' was expressed most overtly in his literary interest in Celticism (or the so-called 'Celtic Twilight'), which became—among other things—a filter through which he would explore his own musical imagining of Australia.²⁵ That, in turn, was motivated not just by Hart's background and preexisting aesthetic interests, but above all by the advent of the First World War, a calamity which, as Martin Boyd suggested, undermined an older generation's belief in progress: 'It's not that we have lost hope. It's that before the war we hoped that things would happen, whereas now we hope they won't.'²⁶ In the words of British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, the unprecedented expression of violent modernity that the war unleashed forced Australians 'to face the present, and live in the present, and either adjust themselves to it, or flee from it into an unreality of their memories or their imagination.'²⁷

For an immigrant Australian, also struggling with the grim impact of modern warfare, Celticism proffered an allegory of the artist removed to the periphery of modernism, but also to the periphery of the modern world (or, more specifically, the British Empire). As the Celtic nations stood in relation to England, so did Europeans in Australia, and Australia in relation to the wider British Empire.²⁸ The sense of loss that pervades Celtic literature, alongside the immigrant experience itself, thus served to give expression to this compounded sense of loss. Hart once told Bernard Heinze, indeed, that 'far from hindering the exercise and fullest expression of his creative gifts,' the relative remoteness of life in Australia 'was actually a stimulus to him in the work that was so dear to him.'²⁹

Hart and many of his contemporaries were also looking for ways of responding to the 'bush'

²³ See Tregear, 'European Sounds, Australian Echoes,' 185–98.

²⁴ Many of Hart's British contemporaries were also inclined towards mysticism and paganism; for instance: Delius, Grainger, Butterworth, Bantock, Ireland, Finzi, Warlock, Bax, Vaughan-Williams and, of course, Gustav Holst.

²⁵ For further reading on Hart and Celticism more generally see A.H. Forbes, 'Celticism in British Opera,' *The Music Review* 47 (1986/7): 176–83; 'Fritz Hart's *Riders to the Sea* (1915),' *Studies in Music* 24 (1990): 47–63; 'Out of Old Mythologies: Operatic Interpretations of Irish Myths and Legends,' *The Australian Celtic Journal* 4 (1994): 4–14; and 'Fritz Hart: Melbourne's Celtic Composer in Residence,' in *Origins and Revivals: Proceedings of the First Australian Conference of Celtic Studies*, ed. Geraint Evans, Bernard Martin and Jonathan Wooding (Sydney: University of Sydney Centre for Celtic Studies, 2000), 371–8. See also Tregear, *Fritz Bennicke Hart: An Introduction to his Life and Works* (MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1993).

²⁶ Martin Boyd, *The Mountforts* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1963), 213.

²⁷ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Wartime Journals*, ed. Richard Davenport-Hines (London: Tauris, 2012), 257.

²⁸ One is reminded of Mahler's claim to be 'thrice homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world.' Quoted in Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), 7.

²⁹ Bernard Heinze, tribute to Fritz Hart on his death, *Con Amore* 16 (1949): 4.

and its indigenous inhabitants, one aspect of their adopted land which most baffled them. They thought that Celtic myths and legends might provide a suitably adaptable emotional iconography, one that could incorporate the old European view of Australia 'as a wilderness inhabited by wild men of the woods.'³⁰ As Victor Kennedy and Nettie Palmer exclaimed, when reviewing a poem entitled 'The Bush' by Bernard O'Dowd:

[A]t some distant date the 'magic prisms of a myriad years' will have changed the commonplace figures we tire of now into heroic shapes. The swag will have become a wallet of Sigurd, the drover's tale of love taken on the passion of Tristan's or Lancelot's; brumbies turned into centaurs, and the lyre-bird on his dancing mound into a mystagogue from some Bacchantic vale ... [O]ur humdrum present will have become translated into a romantic past.³¹

And of course they had, above all, the example of Wagner himself, whose Celtic interests had been so powerfully realised in his later operas *Tristan and Isolde* (1865) and *Parsifal* (1882). It is the musical style and rhetoric of *Parsifal* that most especially informed Hart's post-1914 works like *Riders to the Sea* (1914) and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1915–16) (see Table 1).

Table 1. List of 'Celtic' operas composed by Fritz Hart

Op.	Title	Date	Librettist
18	The Land of Heart's Desire	1914	Yeats
19	Riders to the Sea	1915	J.M. Synge
21	Deirdre of the Sorrows	1916	J.M. Synge
41	The Travelling Man	1920	Lady Gregory
45	The King	1921	Stephen Phillips
58	The Woman who Laughed at Faery	1924	Hart
66	Deirdre in Exile	1926	Hart
99	St George and the Dragon	1930	Trad. Cornish
106	Isolt of the White Hands	1933	E.A. Robinson
164	The Vengeance of Faery	1947	Hart

More broadly, was this shift simply a case of post-Federation blues, a loss of confidence in the 'heroic' potential of the new nation, or was it also, in part, a reflection of their attempt to find a more refined, even complicated, aesthetic understanding of the European settler experience of Australia? For Hart, and for a number of significant contemporaries and compatriots like Australian-born fellow composers Hooper Brewster-Jones (1887–1949) and Roy Agnew (1891–1944), such a Wagnerian-intoned Celticism seems simultaneously to have provided a means to express the Australian artist's alienation from an adopted landscape, as well as a promise of some longed-for reconciliation with it. For them, Australia was no longer the harbinger of a mood of sunlit optimism. Indeed, the sun itself is more often seen

³⁰ Bernard Smith, 'On Perceiving the Australian Suburb,' *The Antipodean Manifesto: Essays in Art and History* (Melbourne: OUP, 1976), 88.

³¹ Victor Kennedy and Nettie Palmer, *Bernard O'Dowd* (Melbourne: MUP, 1954), 151.

as a harbinger of death.³² Roy Agnew's 1928 setting of war veteran poet Harley Matthews's *Breaking of the Drought* is, just like the eponymously named Australian silent film of 1920, dark in character; the author's foreword to the poem notes that Australia is a 'land that laughs with a full knowledge of pain,' and that no matter 'how lifeless and inert she may appear—giving no sign whatever—for them there is always that sure hope—Beauty.'³³ A review of an early performance praised the Wagnerian aspects of the score where the composer,

in setting out to convey the spirit of these lines, employs all the resources of the modern orchestra, and has aimed at developing a reflection of Australian atmosphere in his instrumental picture, which is much more than a mere accompaniment to the vocal part of the score.³⁴

Criticism of the Celtic turn in Australia, however, grew through the 1920s, in part because of its apparent disinterest in the political and sectarian struggles in Ireland itself. For instance, in a commentary for *The Catholic Press* on 'Irish Music In Australia', Fergus MacRoy argued that,

[o]ne of the chief reasons for the popularity of this so-called Celtic school is its success in broadcasting the husks of Irish culture while the kernel is left behind. Time will tell whether its literature will not bear the same relation to real Irish literature that jazz does to real music.³⁵

But there is another reason, and it is perhaps symbolised in a violent event that affected almost all in the circle of artists, writers and musicians around Hart and Meldrum. In the summer of 1929–30, just as the impact of another modern calamity, the Great Depression, started to be felt around the world (with its associated social and political consequences), they had been introduced to one Mary Dean, though she was best known as 'Mollie'. She was an art teacher, but she also possessed, by all accounts, a precious intellectual and sexual energy that quickly made her very popular in their midst. Hart was one who was to become particularly close to her.

Early on the morning of Friday 21 November 1930, however, Mollie Dean was brutally murdered. In the words of one close associate, it became 'a *cause célèbre* and had a shattering effect on all the Meldrumites.'³⁶ Suddenly, and very publically, this Wagner-loving Celtic-tinged 'world of art, of sensitivity and imagination' came crashing against a 'netherworld of violence and gray lives, of small-minded policemen and aggressive reporters, of the *Truth* newspaper.'³⁷ What had art, in particular their type of art, to say when placed against all this? Nettie Palmer perhaps summed it up best when she noted that 'somehow I can't help feeling

³² The short film *Breaking of the Drought* (1920) based on the earlier play by Arthur Shirley (1902) was considered so likely to create a bad impression of Australia to the outside world that the NSW Minister of Customs considered banning it on the grounds it could be 'harmful to the Commonwealth.' See Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900–1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production* (Melbourne: OUP, 1998), 97.

³³ Harley Matthews, foreword to *The Breaking of the Drought* (Sydney: The Viking Press, 1940).

³⁴ 'Music and Drama,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Aug. 1928, 12.

³⁵ Fergus MacRoy, 'Irish Music In Australia,' *The Catholic Press*, 2 Aug. 1928.

³⁶ Betty Roland, *The Eye of the Beholder* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1984), 68. The shock of Dean's death resonates in Melbourne to this very day. See, for instance, Jane Sullivan, 'A Revealing Walk with Saints and Sinners,' *The Age*, 6 Mar. 2005. The crime is also fictionalised in George Johnston's novel *My Brother Jack* (1964) as the 'Jessica Wray murder.'

³⁷ Garry Kinnane, *Colin Colahan: A Portrait* (Melbourne: MUP, 1996), 84.

that the meaningless tragedy is part of the cloud that has been lowering over the city this past year—the sense of wheels running down.³⁸ As one commentator later wrote, the questioning that these artists faced from the police in the aftermath of her murder ‘forcefully reminded them of their closeness to horror and to another world altogether than the easy one they had always enjoyed.’³⁹

However we might wish to explain this shift, certainly by the mid-1930s many of those looking for ways of expressing their relation to the Australian environment now experimented with appropriating indigenous myth, or searched for some other means of expression not so powerfully connected with the old world and / or more overtly connected to the high modernist experiments emanating out of Europe and America. This appropriation of indigenous myth was evidenced by what later became known as the Jindyworobak movement, in works like John Anthill’s ballet *Corroboree* (1944).⁴⁰ Others did not believe in making these connections at all. ‘Music is still the fine adventure: no harm done in this mechanised age,’ confidently declared Thorold Waters in the *Australian Musical News* in 1936.⁴¹ Others still simply retreated further: one artist from the Meldrum circle, Justus Jørgensen, for instance, developed an ‘arts and craft’ artists colony in the outskirts of Melbourne he named ‘Montsalvat’.

There is a certain irony, however—or, to return to the beginning of this essay, it says something about the ongoing Australian aversion to taking its music history seriously—in the fact that while works by Marshall-Hall and Hart may be all but forgotten, other non-musical artifacts that are linked to their artistic creeds and milieu, such as the designs by Napier Waller (a close colleague of Hart’s in Melbourne) for the windows of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, do retain prominence in Australia today. Indeed, Waller’s designs have set the tone for a building that some might consider the spiritual heart of the nation.⁴² We might now want to make the case for music, as critic Deborah Jordan has done in relation to Australian literature, that ‘with the emergence of ecocriticism, with a richer dialectical materially orientated theory of literature and neo-colonialism, and with the field of Australian literature in such fragile state, we should be able to begin to recognise how significant [such aesthetic experiments] were in inscribing the very legitimacy’ of Australian art.⁴³

Certainly, we should be neither surprised nor dismayed to learn about the fascination a significant group of composers of this time had for the music of Wagner, and that for them this fascination was also compatible with their sense of what it was to be Australian. To the extent we can better acknowledge this, we can also better understand how post-European settlement Australia has had a history that is indeed profoundly musical.

³⁸ Nettie Palmer, entry for 22 Nov. 1930, *Fourteen Years* (Melbourne: Meanjin Press, 1948), 62–3. Quoted in Kinnane, *Colin Colahan*, 88.

³⁹ Kinnane, *Colin Colahan*, 90.

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of the Jindyworobak movement and Australian music, see Roger Covell, *Australia’s Music: Themes of a New Society* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1967), 64–87.

⁴¹ *Australian Musical News* 26 (1 July 1936): 1–2.

⁴² For a comprehensive study of the significance of war memorials in Australia, see K.S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, 3rd ed. (Melbourne: MUP, 2008).

⁴³ Deborah Jordan, ‘In Defence of Vance and Nettie’, *Overland* [online], 10 Oct. 2013, <https://overland.org.au/2013/10/in-defence-of-vance-and-nettie/>.