

MARSHALL-HALL'S SYMPHONY IN E FLAT & ITS SYMPHONIC CONTEXT

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George W.L. Marshall-Hall completed his second symphony, in E flat, in Melbourne during 1903. It is a large-scale work in three movements that speaks a coherent musical language consistent with major trends within German and English music of the 1880s and 1890s. Although the symphony shares the same year of composition as *Sinfonia Domestica* of Richard Strauss, Symphony no. 6 of Mahler and *Pelleas und Melisande* of Schoenberg, it is unlikely that Marshall-Hall would have known of these pieces and their idiom in faraway Melbourne. Nevertheless, the symphony seems more in tune with its age than other contemporary Australian symphonies by Alfred Hill or Joshua Ives. It shares a similar musical language to the symphonies that were written prior to 1903 by his older English contemporaries Stanford and Parry and is not outclassed by them.

The symphony manuscript bears the date of 29 October 1903.¹ There were at least three Australian performances, the premiere in Melbourne on 28 May 1904, a second performance on 10 July 1908—both conducted by the composer²—and a Sydney performance in 1917 conducted by Henri Verbrugghen.³ The symphony was given its English premiere in the London Promenade season of 1907 and was admired by Sir Henry Wood, the conductor.⁴ It was repeated there at some time between 1907 and 1911.⁵ Arthur Nikisch contemplated a performance in 1905 but it is unlikely that a German performance eventuated. According to Thérèse Radic, Nikisch's offer to take up the

symphony was dependent upon Marshall-Hall altering the second movement, which he refused to do.⁶ The full score of the work was published by Paris and Co., Berlin, and in piano four-hands by Breitkopf und Härtel in 1905.⁷ Thus published and performed, Marshall-Hall's symphony received more attention initially than either Parry's fourth⁸ or Stanford's sixth symphonies,⁹ both of which were unjustly neglected. However, like much of the pre-war orchestral music of his generation and most Australian orchestral music, Marshall-Hall's symphony was largely forgotten from the end of World War I until 1986, when it was recorded by the Queensland Theatre Orchestra under the direction of Warren Bebbington.¹⁰

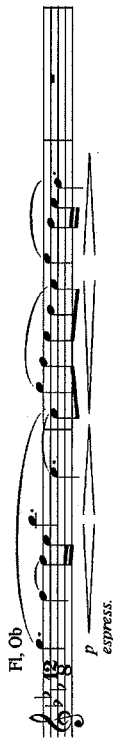
The Symphony in E flat is scored for double woodwind (with roles for piccolo and cor anglais) and bass clarinet, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and percussion and strings. It consists of three sizeable movements. There is a fast movement cast in orthodox sonata form. The slow movement—centred in D flat major—is in abridged sonata form with coda. A sonata-rondo forms the basis of the finale. The opening idea of the first movement (Example 12.1), with its strong appoggiaturas and flowing motion, and presented in C minor, could be mistaken as a short introductory paragraph.

Example 12.1: First movement, bars 1–3, Violin I

The image shows two staves of musical notation for the first movement, bars 1-3, of the Violin I part. The top staff is marked 'Vivace' and 'f'. The bottom staff is marked 'poco dim'. The music is in C minor and 2/4 time. The first staff begins with a quarter rest followed by a quarter note G4, then a quarter note F4 with a flat, and a quarter note E4 with a flat. The second staff begins with a quarter note D4 with a flat, then a quarter note C4 with a flat, and a quarter note B3 with a flat. The notation includes various rhythmic values and dynamic markings.

However, it frequently appears later as a counterpoint to other more recognisable and prominent themes. For instance, it appears against the principal main theme of the first subject group when the tonality settles into E flat major. The main theme (Example 12.2) is a memorable and poignant idea that features a prominent falling seventh, prompting echoes of Schumann, Wagner, Parry and Elgar, echoes that are strengthened by the sequential development of the motive.

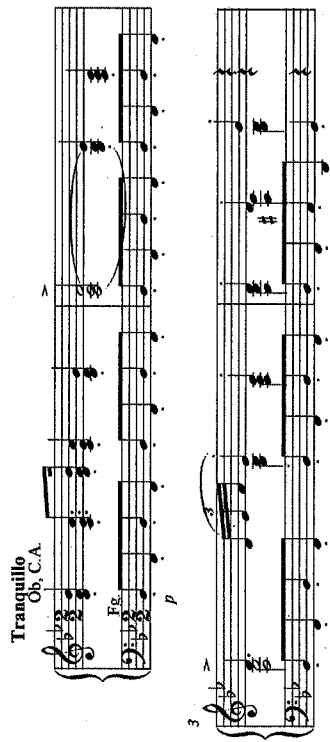
Example 12.2: First movement, bars 10-11



The compound metre and general liveliness of the music is not dissimilar to two later symphonies in E flat major by Stanford (no. 6 of 1905) and Elgar (no. 2 of 1911) and, although metrically different, to the soaring opening of Schumann's third symphony, also in E flat. Two subsidiary motives, the second of which descends sequentially and dissipates the energy, complete the first subject group complex.

The second subject group, in the orthodox key of B flat major, consists of four ideas. The first of these themes (Example 12.3) gently struts with oboes and bassoons, answered by trumpets and trombones (an idea not dissimilar to the principal subject of the second movement of Tchaikovsky's 'Little Russian' symphony).

Example 12.3: First movement, bars 33-36



Its tail connects to a loud and swashbuckling second theme (Example 12.4) for brass and full orchestra, beginning in B flat minor.

Example 12.4: First movement, bars 44-48



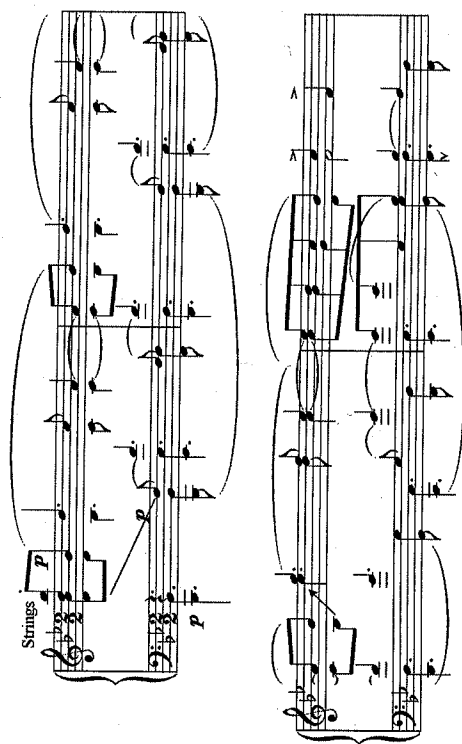
The third theme is a bold fanfare idea for trumpet with off-beat slashing chords for full orchestra.

Example 12.5: First movement, bars 52-55



Then, more quietly, in the fourth idea Brahms is invoked by rising and falling ideas in the strings.¹¹

Example 12.6: First movement, bars 62-65



At this point, Marshall-Hall returns to E flat major with a *tranquillo* paragraph that features nostalgic reminiscences of the main subject idea and quiet chords for trombones derived from the Example 12.5 fanfare figure. These transformations suggest that the development section

is already under way, but the composer surprises us with a substantial transition to bring about a repeat of the exposition—an unusual place for such a device. The repeat is not taken in the only recording available of the symphony and is not missed, despite the composer's transition. A repeated exposition was somewhat old-fashioned for 1903—although both Mahler and Rachmaninoff call for one in the first movements of their sixth and second symphony respectively.

Now the first idea from the opening of the symphony is treated with solo presentations from upper woodwinds and cello. From a quiet beginning this paragraph based on Example 12.1 is whipped up into a ferocious climax, reminding us that the opening motive is important and not mere prelude. This is some of the most impressive writing of the symphony and shows that Marshall-Hall was capable of a level of power far in advance of his Australian contemporaries Alfred Hill or Joshua Ives. The music quietens to another *tranquillo* paragraph where the strutting theme (Example 12.3) from before is transformed into a gentle reverie, occasionally accompanied by Example 12.1 as a counterpoint. Rich divisi string figures support this section which eventually is whipped up into action with figures based on Example 12.1. The music slips into the recapitulation via an enharmonic modulation onto a tonic $6/4$ resolution. This device of tonic $6/4$ right at the moment of recapitulation is not uncommon, examples including the first movements of Schumann's third symphony, Brahms's third Symphony, Liszt's *Faust Symphony* and, later, Elgar's second symphony.

Thereafter, all the principal musical events of the exposition are repeated in similar order in the tonic key. The coda features the heroics of the second subject second theme and some sequential development of a brass motive to bring the movement to a stirring close. This movement is a substantial achievement both in strength of invention and continuity.

The second movement has two main thematic groups. The first is an expansive and richly scored reverie in D flat major, featuring the colours of violas and clarinets in the opening presentation.

Example 12.7: Second movement, bars 1–6

Largamente
Violas
dolce

First violins take over with the following idea with its yearning appoggiaturas.

Example 12.8: Second movement, bars 6–10

VI.1 div.
dolce *cresc.* *dim.* *cresc.*

The second thematic group is more animated and martial in character in B flat minor/D flat major.

Example 12.9: Second movement, bars 41–44

Poco andante
Ob. & Cl.
Vc. & Cb. (8ve lower)
Fl. & Fm. (8ve lower)
Cl. & Tbn. (8ve lower)

Both thematic groups are repeated in the home key in last third of the movement (second group abbreviated somewhat), suggesting a sonata

form without development, before settling into a short coda that focuses on the first idea. Although the influences of Schubert and Brahms are strongly evident in the second thematic group, the rich tapestry of divisi string writing and the harmonic language of tertian and enharmonic shifts and basses of falling semitones in the first thematic group recall Wagner and Liszt. In particular, the final bars of the movement in D flat major evoke similar moods to the closing bars of *Götterdämmerung* or *Tristan*. Once again, Marshall-Hall succeeds in putting together an evocative and memorable movement.

The final movement is cast in sonata-rondo form. Section A is heard three times in its original key. It consists of a brooding theme supported by rich lower string figures.

Example 12.10: *Third movement, bars 1–6*

As with the first movement, C minor struggles with E flat major for ascendancy. Even though the shadow of Brahms falls strongly across this work, here the influence is especially evident with the parallel sixths and rich lower textures. This leads to martial triplet figures and fanfares. The more playful first episode group is marked by passages of cycle-of-fifth sequences that look back to Schumann and Bruckner, as well as forward to Elgar (particularly one of the themes in the finale of the Violin Concerto) and Mahler. This section closes with a brief reference to the second episode idea on horns. The next iteration of A and B is an extensive section of development that leads into the full presentation of

C, the principal slower and contrasting section of the movement. This consists of a slow moving and narrow-range melody for cellos.

Example 12.11: *Third movement, bars 175–82*

In the recapitulation, all three thematic groups reappear, group A in C minor, groups B and C in the tonic E flat major key. Finally, theme A crowns the movement with a triumphant transformation in E flat major.

The finale is the least successful of the three movements in this symphony. Although the writing is often colourful, spirited and convincing, Marshall-Hall fails to recapture the memorable lyricism of the previous movements. The principal weaknesses are linked to the secondary themes, which are not distinctive, and the complete recapitulations of sections B and C in the tonic key overstay their welcome. Alongside the Brahms influence, there are occasional flashes of scoring that recall the finale of Schubert's 'Great' C major symphony, and tertian modulations that evoke both Schubert and Wagner.

This description of the symphony shows that Marshall-Hall followed standard late nineteenth-century symphonic structures and procedures in constructing his music. However, the composer chose not to highlight these in his commentary on the symphony. He supplied two different, picturesque and flamboyant programme notes as to the 'meaning' of the music. In the 1904 premiere programme he claimed that the symphony 'belongs rather to the naive spontaneous, than to the introspective, analytical school. It represents in purely lyrical form the manifold impressions of various life upon an ardent, active temperament'.¹² Although he goes on to describe the work as 'this English symphony', by 1908 Marshall-Hall's programme for the work had taken on an explicit Australian identity. The published full score includes the printed inscription 'to my friends under

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the Southern Cross'. The 1908 note links the work to bucolic exploits with his artist friends.

This symphony was originally conceived of a summer holiday whilst camping out in Sydney Middle Harbour with a couple of congenial comrades. I found that in it I had unconsciously gathered together as a harmonious whole the many heterogeneous [sic] impressions of Australian life and scenery which my stay in this country had engendered. Hence its buoyant cheerful tone. For what have we Australians, in this fresh unattempted land which absorbs all our energies, to do with the self-questionings, the too often morbid introspectiveness, that the gloomy climate and cramped-life conditions of our English ancestral home more and more tend to induce? Here we grow: up under a genial Southern sun, amid an environment which makes it a delight merely to be alive. In every direction new paths open before us. Our every faculty, every energy, finds countless fields for healthy exertion. For us the world is only beginning.¹³

There are no obvious musical links to Australia, however, in the sound world of this symphony, despite the composer's claims. The musical language is essentially late nineteenth-century German. Marshall-Hall's colourful programme notes were quite consistent with his normal practice in programme notes of describing the symphonies of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Brahms in terms of their emotional impact and their connection with extra-musical ideas. During the 1911 series he put together detailed analytical programmes, and for concerts three and four included an essay in two parts entitled 'The Form of a Symphony'. This essay gives a fascinating insight into Marshall-Hall's theories about symphonic music.

He defines a symphony as 'the most complete attempt of man to give lyrical expression to his emotional life'.¹⁴ 'The symphony may be looked on as the apotheosis of the Dance,¹⁵ and its ideal form marks the perfect balance between the poetical and sensuous elements of music, between the artist's delight in beautiful sounds, and the man's instincts towards the complete expression of his emotional life'. 'The term abstract cannot properly be applied to music—not even to symphonic form, which is commonly supposed to be the most abstract of musical forms'.¹⁶ The

hyperbole of these statements is balanced, however, by his consideration of the inner logic of musical form—'this particular instance of musical cell-growth ... that results in a magnificently extended movement, every part of which is organic in structure'.

Where does Marshall-Hall's symphony fit into its context of symphonic works? In 1903 Brahms's Symphony no. 4 was only eighteen years old, the Tchaikovsky Symphony no. 6 was barely ten and the Sibelius Symphony no. 2 was two. In 1902 Elgar was declared 'the first English progressive' by Richard Strauss following the first German performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*.¹⁷ Against this background, Marshall-Hall's symphony is in tune stylistically with its age. Considering English symphonies, Marshall-Hall's work compares favourably with the Parry, Stanford, Cowen, Cliffe and Edward German symphonies composed during the 1880s and 1890s, although Parry's revised fourth symphony, his fifth and Stanford's sixth symphony that post-date 1903 are stronger pieces. Elgar's first symphony did not appear until 1908, and although score and parts of it were ordered in 1911,¹⁸ it was not performed in Australia during Marshall-Hall's lifetime.

As with Marshall-Hall's earlier Symphony in C minor of 1892, the E flat symphony is cast in three movements. This was unusual for this period, especially in British symphonies. Precedents amongst later nineteenth-century symphonies include Liszt's *Faust* Symphony, Dvořák's Symphony no. 3 in E flat, Bruch's Symphony no. 2 in F minor, César Franck's Symphony in D minor (perhaps the most influential of this group during the period of Marshall-Hall), D'Indy's *Symphony on a French Mountain Theme*, Chausson's Symphony in B flat and Dukas's Symphony in C. None of the English symphonies of Stanford, Parry, Cowen, Cliffe, Elgar or German predating (or post-dating) the Marshall-Hall Symphony in E flat share the three-movement shape. In his essay 'The Form of a Symphony', Marshall-Hall spoke of the conventional four movements which:

correspond in a broad way to the four main divisions under which man's emotional life can be classified; and which, therefore, form the basis of expression not only of the primitive forms of Dance, but of all Art, and at all times.

