

## MERSEYSIDE ORCHESTRAS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF LOCAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC.

By *Bertram B. Benas, J.P., B.A., LL.B.*

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**B**Y Merseyside for our present purpose is meant Merseyside in the more limited sense to which we have been accustomed in municipal usage as representing the City of Liverpool and the five Boroughs immediately contiguous to the City and their respective suburbs, but not on the one hand the Boroughs of Warrington and Widnes, both on Merseyside, and their neighbouring urban areas, while on the other hand, for the purposes of the range of reach of considerable numbers forming a Liverpool audience, the rural and urban areas of Deeside on the northern portion of Wirral should be included. In general, professional instrumental music-rendering on Merseyside thus defined is almost entirely centred in Liverpool, with which as a centre with extending radial relation this introduction is in general exclusively devoted.

One of the most popular errors which requires to be exploded is the notion, not uncommonly held locally, that the Liverpool Philharmonic Society Limited (and earlier, in the legal constitutional sense, an unincorporated unlimited association) is a pioneer of organised music on Merseyside.<sup>1</sup> Sir George Grove in his *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* under the heading "Liverpool Musical Festivals"<sup>2</sup> (first edition 1890, Vol. 2; the only article in the first edition of the *Dictionary* devoted to Liverpool) states that "Liverpool has a Philharmonic Society, which was founded 10 January, 1840, and opened its hall 27 August, 1849. There are twelve concerts every year, six before and six after Christmas." No mention is made by Sir George Grove of either a Philharmonic Orchestra or of orchestral features of the Philharmonic concerts.

<sup>1</sup> For the predecessors and early contemporaries of the Philharmonic Society see Argent's *Half a Century of Music in Liverpool* (1889).

<sup>2</sup> The first of the Festivals was held in 1784.

Argent's *Half a Century of Music in Liverpool* was written in view of the Society's then prospective jubilee and a prefatory note to the reprint in book form dated January 1889 may be here usefully reproduced.

"In presenting this reprint in a more ready form than that attendant upon its original appearance week by week in the *Liverpool Mercury*, attention has been given to the amendment of some trifling details, and the whole will, it is hoped, be accepted as a fairly accurate history. Regarding the earlier dates, old programmes, memoranda, and the recollections of the few living fathers of musical Liverpool have been consulted, while for that which deals with the most recent quarter of a century the writer is alone responsible."

William Ignatius Argent was for many years a well-known teacher of music, musical critic, organist to several churches, accompanist at concerts, one of the founders of the old Liverpool College of Music (for a time situate in Hardman Street in the old Meyerbeer Hall, later in Upper Parliament Street and subsequently in Canning Street until its close) and a composer whose principal work is a Mass in B flat (St. Benedict) published by the eminent publishing house of Novello.

When we compare the treatment accorded to Liverpool in the first edition of Grove with that of Manchester the contrast is very great. It will be noted that Liverpool is not given an article to itself, but is considered under the heading "Liverpool Musical Festivals," and this at a date some sixteen years after the last of the Festivals was held in 1874 (and that Festival was the first since 1836) and half a century after the foundation of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society.

Manchester is given an article all to itself—also from Sir George Grove's pen. For our present purpose the material passage in the article on Manchester is that dealing with "Mr. Charles Hallé's Grand Concerts" which, Grove proceeds, "are conducted by Mr. Hallé, and the chorus, which is 250 strong and remarkably efficient, is under the control of Mr. Edward Hecht. The reputation of the band is great and they are frequently engaged at Liverpool, Leeds, Bradford, Edinburgh, and other towns in the North." It will be noted that Grove makes especial reference to the Hallé Orchestra. No reference is made to the existence of a Philharmonic Orchestra in Liverpool. Picton in 1873

(*Memorials of Liverpool*, Vol. 2, Chap. 10) described the Philharmonic concerts thus:—"Although the performances are not operatic, the *morceaux* selected from the operas being presented in a fragmentary manner, without scenery or dramatic effect, the institution discharges for Liverpool society the same functions as Her Majesty's Theatre does for . . . the Metropolis. It is here that the small-talk, persiflage, and gossip of what is called 'good society' pervade the air and circulate their agreeable flavour. . . . The music however is not all operatic; oratorios, masses, cantatas and choral music of all kinds vary the bill of fare, which is generally selected with taste and performed with skill."

The emphasis on the social side will be noted, and Argent tells us (p. 11) that the Philharmonic Society gave its first concerts "in a saloon situated at the back of the residence of a dancing master named Lascelles, who lived in one of three houses in St. Anne's Street. The room was entered from Great Richmond Street. . . . The promoters were not very ambitious at first and were content with a chorus of 50 voices, more or less, and a small band. . . ." The passage from Argent goes to show that no entity should lose heart from the modesty of small beginnings. In 1844 he tells us that the symphony found a place for the first time in one of the programmes, actually a forerunner of current conditions, two symphonies being included—one of Haydn in E flat and the C minor of Beethoven. It appears that the programme for the first time in Liverpool attempted analytical notes, which from 1868 became a regular feature contributed by various writers. Argent states (p. 15) that it was in 1845 that for the first time the Society gave a list of the band, adding somewhat cryptically, "the latter affording scope for considerable reflection." Whether the absence of the names hitherto or their presence at this stage, or at all, or that some of them were amateurs (pp. 15-16) was the subject for reflection is difficult to appreciate. In the same year a little variety was introduced by way of a comic singer (*ibid.*) In that year the rules of the Society were published, one of which is of great significance in the history of music for the people of Merseyside, for it enacted that "No gentleman within seven miles of Liverpool, not being a member, or a member in the family of a member, shall be admitted to any

concert." As Argent adds in a footnote (p. 17), "Thus was embodied many rules of the present constitution of the Philharmonic Society as to proprietorship and admission." Well within living memory and that of those of middle age, right into the present century, the following statement appeared in a prominent place in the programmes of the Philharmonic Society Concerts :—

"The attention of Proprietors and those who *rent* Boxes or Stalls, is requested to the following Regulation, which will be strictly enforced.

No gentleman above twenty-one years of age residing or carrying on business in Liverpool, or within ten miles thereof, and not being an officer of the Army or Navy or Minister of Religion, is admissible to the Boxes or Stalls at the Philharmonic Society's Concerts, unless he be a Proprietor, a member of the Family residing at the house of a Proprietor, or has his name upon the list of Gentlemen having the *entree* exhibited in the corridors.

Resident Gentlemen, who are not Proprietors, can acquire the right of Purchasing Tickets, or of making use of Proprietors' Tickets during the Season, by payment of an Entrance Fee of 10s. 6d.

N.B.—Gentlemen above twenty-one years of age, although members of the Family residing in the house of those who *simply rent* Boxes or Stalls, are only admissible after payment of the Entrance Fee.

By order of

The Committee."

Inset was a four-page notice which stated that "The following Non-Proprietors having paid the Entrance Fee of 10s. 6d. are eligible for admission to the Society's Concerts during the Season . . ." Then followed the list of names.

It is rather surprising to find upon a perusal of those lists a number of prominent persons who were to be found among the *non-Proprietors*.

The Concerts were regarded as Subscription Concerts and access to the Boxes and Stalls while possible to the general public was clearly not encouraged, and hedged in by formalities. The Gallery was not thus restricted, some of it consisting of standing room only.<sup>1</sup>

Argent gives the list of the "band," as he and many others termed it, in or shortly prior to 1875 (p. 59) and makes an observation of capital importance, namely that on the date in

<sup>1</sup>A series of Shilling Concerts with choral programmes was reported as among the Society's activities in 1854 (See *Musical Times*, June, 1854).

question "the band remained largely of local origin and a glance at its personality now that Liverpool has no resident orchestra at all may be instructive," remembering that Argent wrote in 1889. On p. 60, he observes:—"When Hallé inaugurated his work as conductor of the Philharmonic Society the changes made in the orchestra were of the most sweeping character and the majority of the Liverpool men were displaced, including the resident leader."

The orchestras at the Philharmonic before the Hallé reconstitution previously referred to were only permanent orchestras in the sense that they played once a fortnight during the Philharmonic season under the successive permanent conductors. The bulk of the locally resident players would seem to have been members of the local theatre orchestras of those days, which were much larger in number than those obtaining in theatres in more recent times. The orchestras at the Philharmonic were not therefore comparable to the permanent orchestras of the kind such as August Manns conducted for so many years at the Crystal Palace with their weekly Saturday concerts, and in portions day by day under the general direction of the same conductor. Sir George Grove, as Secretary of the Crystal Palace for so many years, was closely concerned with the building up by Manns of the Crystal Palace Orchestra and of those Saturday concerts which for so many decades formed the backbone of orchestral musical culture in England. Little wonder then that in 1890 when Grove contrasted Liverpool and Manchester, he saw in the Hallé Orchestra an entity in some way approximating to the Crystal Palace permanent orchestra, but nothing of the same kind in Liverpool, for this reason, that while Hallé conducted the Orchestra at Liverpool it was virtually an orchestra with a personnel of the Hallé Manchester foundation *plus* some local extras. In Grove's eyes it was Manchester diluted—but without an individuality of its own. Hence it can be realized how it came about that for Grove the Lancashire orchestra *par excellence* was the Hallé.

As the first edition of Grove appeared in 1890, it might be thought that, perhaps, similar treatment would not obtain in later editions, although it should be borne in mind that 1890 marked a period when the Liverpool Philharmonic Society had

already completed the jubilee of its existence. But the third edition of Grove, edited by Dr. H. C. Colles (the musical critic of the *Times*, and one of the compilers of the *Oxford History of Music*) which is substantially reproduced by the fourth edition with supplement, has an article by Mr. F. Bonavia (a present musical critic of the *Daily Telegraph*) dealing with Liverpool, and yet makes no mention of a Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. This is all the more significant, as it mentions that "the Liverpool Philharmonic Society possesses a chorus of 250 under a permanent chorus master (Dr. A. W. Pollitt)".

In 1934 the *Oxford History of Music*, Volume VII, was published, the work of Dr. Colles. It is devoted to "Symphony and Drama, 1850-1900." The work of permanent conductors and permanent orchestras figures considerably in the volume. There is full mention of the work of Sir August Manns and the Crystal Palace Orchestra, Sir Charles Hallé and the Hallé Orchestra at Manchester, Sir Dan Godfrey and the Municipal Orchestra at Bournemouth, and Sir Henry Wood and the Queen's Hall Orchestra in London. Of a Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra there is not a word. Either these writers thought that orchestra not especially worthy of note or it was a case of non-existence. It must, however, be understood that non-existence has to be considered in relation to certain presumed standards, for it is indisputable that orchestral music has been played at the Liverpool Philharmonic Concerts by a band of instrumentalists virtually throughout all its series of seasons. But by an identifiable orchestra within the meaning of the learned writers in Grove two conditions seem to have been regarded as essential—conditions generally accepted by the musical world. One is that an orchestra should consist of a body of players, playing with reasonably frequent periodicity, and the other is that it should be for some time under the direction of a permanent conductor. Anything in the nature of a local orchestra complying with the two conditions previously referred to has not until relatively recently existed on Merseyside, save for intermittent periods. Nor have there been, save for similar periods, orchestral concerts, of the standard envisaged, generally available for the public as a whole. So far as one condition is concerned, namely a permanent conductor, the Liverpool Philharmonic Concerts after

Hallé's decease continued the policy of Hallé's time. Hallé died in 1895, and in 1896 Frederick Cowen was appointed permanent conductor, and the appointment was comparable to that of Hallé, as Cowen was also appointed conductor of the Hallé orchestra.

The orchestra at Liverpool was, however, on similar lines to those immediately hitherto obtaining, a Hallé foundation with a local admixture, and Cowen, like Hallé, only conducted this band of instrumentalists once a fortnight for the series of twelve concerts. Cowen's Liverpool appointment lasted over 1912, and since that date for the whole period until after the destruction of the old Philharmonic Hall by fire nothing in the nature of a permanent conductorship was again introduced.<sup>1</sup>

Two dominating points emerge from these surveys of orchestral work, namely, that no mention is made of a Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, nor that an orchestra of its own was an especial feature of Liverpool musical life. If we turn to the outstanding eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (the Cambridge edition) and refer to the article on "Liverpool," it is the fact that there is mention of the Philharmonic, but simply in relation to the Hall, which is stated to be one of the finest music rooms in Europe. Under the sub-heading "Literature, Art and Science" there is no mention of a Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. The author of the article is our learned president, Mr. W. Fergusson Irvine. We may be quite sure that if there was such an entity outstanding as a factor in the cultural life of the citizens generally the author would not have missed it. Turning to the article on "Manchester" by the then learned Deputy Chief Librarian of the City of Manchester, Mr. W. E. Axon, there is a notable contrast. After referring to the taste for music for which Manchester is distinguished, the author observes, "The orchestral concerts (notably under Charles Hallé) are famous."

If our President's absence of statement should not suffice, and it should be thought that the writers of the other articles were not sufficiently conversant with or interested in favour of Liverpool, such a view could not be entertained of our daily newspaper, the *Liverpool Daily Post*. On 29 May, 1899, it devoted

<sup>1</sup> For a list of the names of the Philharmonic Society's "permanent" conductors down to Hallé's period see Argent, *op. cit.*

not merely a paragraph or a special article to the subject of music, but a "leader." Nor could any Liverpool journal be regarded as particularly biased in favour of Manchester. In the course of the article these observations are made :—

"Up to the present in most provincial towns, there has been little opportunity afforded of learning to know and love the best music. . . . Here and there a musical enthusiast in some town manages to create about himself an atmosphere of enlightened art, and by inspiring his fellow-creatures with some little of his own zeal, succeeds in doing more for music than if he had spent his life in the composition of the most successful symphonies or sonatas. Take as an example the miracles wrought by Charles Hallé, when instead of qualifying for a 'star' conductor he settled in Manchester, and devoted his whole life and energy to the musical education of the town. The test of the musical intelligence of any people is not how much they are prepared to spend per annum on importing artistes to perform so many items per evening, at so much per item; the test lies in the devotion with which they mutually apply themselves to musical culture. Let every town have its own orchestra, its own vocalists, its own societies for the study and practice of music. . . ."

Now there is much of positive value and significance for the Liverpool of to-day in that trenchant leading article of the *Daily Post* of over forty years ago—but its most significant feature is the total absence of anything referable to a Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra or to a musical life among the citizens of Liverpool at all. Unhappily as the fact was, there was nothing in the orchestral sphere, for the bulk of the citizens, of the character envisaged by the leader writer, although, as we shall see later, in the previous season beginnings were made of a movement which achieved much and promised more in what is now the neighbouring Borough of Wallasey.

But if New Brighton saw the genesis of a local orchestra under a permanent conductor, Granville Bantock, for the purpose of giving a series of orchestral concerts of the highest types of music available to the public generally, there was a proem before the genesis. In this survey only passing mention will be made of amateur or largely amateur orchestral societies on Merseyside, many of which did excellent work in fostering a practical appreciation of music as a primary objective, and, as a valuable by-product, in providing opportunities which for many years were scantily available to the general public of hearing orchestral music

of the best category, played if not up to professional standards at any rate with a degree of enjoyable acceptance. In the Victorian era the most prominent was the "Societa Armonica," for so long associated with the enthusiastic direction of the Cafferata family, and at the present day it has several successors doing excellent work in this sphere, but if the work of these societies in detail will not be generally dealt with in this survey there will however be one exception, which in reality is hardly an exception at all, and that is the Liverpool Orchestral Society, so closely associated with the name of its founder Alfred E. Rodewald, than whom Merseyside can boast no more distinguished amateur musician. Ernest Newman, the eminent musical critic, (who from time to time was a contributor of the analytical notes to the Society's programmes), in his appreciation in the programme of the concert held in memory of Rodewald (5 December, 1903) wrote that in 1884 Rodewald

"took the first step along that path on which he was destined to do so much for music in Liverpool. In that year he founded an amateur orchestral organisation to assist at the Saturday Evening Concerts of Father Nugent: its title was 'The People's Orchestral Society.' Six years later it was reconstituted as 'The Liverpool Orchestral Society.' At first it was largely amateur in its constitution, but as time went on, and ambitions grew, and the need was felt for a band that could cope with the most difficult music of modern days, the professional players gradually came to outnumber the amateurs. This fine body of performers Mr. Rodewald infected with his own enthusiasm. . . . He was an amateur only in the dignified and honourable sense that he gave his services freely and cheerfully to his beloved art. He was emphatically no amateur in any other sense. Most professional musicians might well envy the range, the lucidity, the accuracy of his knowledge of the modern orchestra. As a practical conductor, too, he steadily improved year by year. . . . He was, in short, a thoroughly accomplished musician, and if he was appreciated when he was alive, it is safe to say that the musical public of Liverpool will in the future realise still more clearly how vast were his services to music here. For it would be a mistake to suppose that those services began and ended with his conducting of these concerts. . . . He was always willing to assist the Sunday Society to place high class music before the people, and when Mr. Granville Bantock left New Brighton, Mr. Rodewald took up the good work there and did his best to keep the sacred flame of art alight in the community."

Mr. Newman notes that, although Rodewald's family was not

in origin English, Rodewald himself was altogether English in his education and his habits, and in his predilections. He was educated at Charterhouse. Of the Sunday Society and of Bantock's work at New Brighton more will be said later, but it might here be added that Rodewald was as ready to take a back seat in an orchestra as he was to wield a conductor's baton. The present writer saw him several times playing the contra-bass in the "Societa Armonica" Orchestra, where he was listed in the orchestra as Principal of the contra-basses. The programmes of the Orchestral Society stated that its object was the cultivation of high class orchestral music. Four Ladies' and four Gentlemen's (smoking) Concerts were given during the season. Honorary (that is non-playing) members were admitted at an annual subscription of one guinea, which included one ticket for each smoking concert, and an apportionment of stall and gallery seats for each Ladies' Concert. Double tickets were a guinea and a half. The Smoking Concerts were for the most part held in what is now known as the Carlton Hall in Eberle Street, and later in the Myrtle Street Gymnasium—the Ladies' Concerts were held in the Philharmonic Hall.

There can be no gainsaying the fact that these concerts were regarded as more serious musical events than the fortnightly Philharmonics. At its fullest the orchestra numbered approximately 100 and was seldom much less. The programmes often contained works heard for the first time in Liverpool. For instance, as late as 1897 "Siegfried's Rheinfahrt" from the "Gotterdammerung" of Wagner received its first Liverpool performance at one of the Ladies' Concerts, and just after Rodewald died in 1903, Richard Strauss's "Ein Heldenleben" (which Rodewald was rehearsing just before his decease) similarly had its first local performance, and for this Liverpool Orchestral Society production Ernest Newman wrote a special pamphlet of analytical notes, dedicated to the Society.

Nor was it distinguished solely by first *local* performances. In a note to the programme of the first of the Sunday Afternoon Orchestral Concerts given at the Philharmonic Hall by the Liverpool Philharmonic Society on 29 October, 1939, the anonymous writer observes with reference to the first piece on the programme, Elgar's march "Pomp and Circumstance No. 1,"

that "this work was given its first performance by the Liverpool Orchestral Society in 1901." But the fact is that the Orchestral Society was much more closely identified with the work than that. The Full Score bears the following inscription:—

"Dedicated to my friend Alfred E. Rodewald and the members of the Liverpool Orchestral Society."

The march may not be qualitatively one of the major works of its composer, although one theme in it, associated with the words "Land of Hope and Glory," has girdled the world, but it is a work of one of the world's major composers and no other work of a major composer, so far as the present writer is aware, has been dedicated to a Liverpool musical organisation. The programmes were of a high standard and the performances generally well up to the standard of the day. They were well rehearsed. Rodewald conducted the vast majority of the concerts, while occasionally a guest conductor appeared, mostly a composer coming to conduct his own works, as for instance, Elgar on 29 November, 1902.<sup>1</sup> The audiences which the Society drew were not those of the public at large, but came from a wider range than those of the Philharmonic Society, and very little of the social element entered into the composition, except that groups of musical people found an added pleasure in the social contacts and opportunities which the interval afforded of conversing upon matters of musical interest. The chatter, those who were present on these occasions will recall, was definitely around music, not in those days a regular phenomenon of talk during intervals at local concerts. Just as Rodewald helped Bantock in his work at New Brighton, to which reference will be made later, so Bantock succeeded to the Liverpool Orchestral Society conductorship after Rodewald had passed away. Elgar was a close personal friend of Rodewald, and Elgar's music frequently figured in the Society's programmes, and in 1904, for instance, the composer paid a tribute to the memory of his friend by coming to conduct a Ladies' Concert in which were included his "Froissart" Overture, the "Enigma Variations," and for the first time in Liverpool (another Orchestral Society première) his concert overture "In the South" (Alassio). But

<sup>1</sup> The *Musical Times*, January 1, 1903, at p. 45.

the Society did not long survive Rodewald's passing, notwithstanding that it went through the process of incorporation, like the Philharmonic Society if not in exactly the same form. His name receives commemoration in a society bearing his name devoted, however, to Chamber music, a sphere of music quite different from that with which Rodewald will be permanently associated in musical history.

Ernest Newman mentioned in his appreciation of Rodewald both the Sunday Society and Granville Bantock. The Liverpool Sunday Society was established at the beginning of the 'nineties of the last century with the object of providing for the citizens of Liverpool some cultural facilities on Sunday of a non-ecclesiastical character, but in keeping with the day of rest. Argent was one of the principal moving spirits, and a founder. He not only delivered lectures upon music but organised an orchestra of some 70 performers and for several years gave popular Sunday afternoon concerts at St. George's Hall under its auspices. These concerts were light in character—not unlike those at a later series given on Saturday nights for a time by a body styled the "United Light Orchestra" under the conductorship of Mr. L. Baxter at the Picton Hall—but they were of necessity scantily rehearsed and might be regarded more as musical appetisers than substantial meals. However Argent, like Rodewald with his People's Orchestral Society's contribution to Father Nugent's series, established the fact of the need of orchestral concerts available to the general public and of the adequate response with which such concerts would be met. But the Sunday Society did not envisage music alone within its ambit, and the Society passed out and with it the Sunday afternoon Concerts. It has been said that Sunday by becoming an open air day largely through the increase of cycling and excursions to the country, even before the advent of motoring and motor traction generally, ceased to make for the activities of the Sunday Society the same wide appeal. However that may be, after an interval of blank the orchestral scene shifted to New Brighton. When the Tower was built at New Brighton vistas of great possibilities were opened out and not merely from its summit. The Directors envisaged something in the nature of the old Crystal Palace amenities and as an instance a large

restaurant catered for by a well-known firm of caterers included in its features a nightly dinner, of West End character and proportions, at a reasonable price. Dr. Colles in his article upon Sir Granville Bantock, as he now is, in the current edition of Grove, states that Bantock

“ was appointed in 1897 Musical Director of the Tower, New Brighton, a post in which he did great work for English music during the four years of his tenure. Like Manns at the beginning of the Crystal Palace Concerts, Bantock had, for the first year, only a military band, but when he succeeded in establishing a concert orchestra he organised concerts of British music many of which were conducted by the composers themselves. In 1898 Bantock founded the New Brighton Choral Society. . . . He left in the Autumn of 1900 to become Principal of the Birmingham and Midland Institute of Music.”

A programme survey shows that among guest conductors he secured the services of M. Camille Chevillard (of the Lamoureux Concerts, Paris) for a French concert, M. Edouard Colonne (of the Colonne Concerts, Paris) for a Berlioz Concert, M. Sylvan Depuis (of Liège) for a Belgian Concert, Rodewald for a Dvorak Concert, and the following composers conducted concerts devoted to their own works, Frederic Cowen, Villiers Stanford, Hubert Parry, Edward Elgar, Frederick Corder, William Wallace, Edward German, Emile Mathieu (of Ghent, Belgium) and Alexander Mackenzie. Bantock himself took a miscellaneous British Concert and, of others, a Liszt Concert. A series of 18 Sunday Afternoon Concerts cost half a guinea. The Gallery was free to all who paid 6d. for admission to the grounds, and 6d. extra secured a reserved seat. If this was not music for the people *in excelsis* one would like to know what is! Bantock got together a fine orchestra and secured good rehearsals, particularly with his wind instruments and percussion, by reason of the presence of many, if not all, of them during the rest of the week. But Merseyside, true to its exporting tradition, could not retain Bantock, and although Rodewald carried on the tradition at New Brighton for a time, the Tower did not appear to be able to retain its Crystal Palace ambitions in this and other directions, and the concerts disappeared.

New Brighton, however, recalls one of the highest flights of music on Merseyside. The leader of the orchestra was the late Vasco

V. Akeroyd, who was also leader of the Liverpool Orchestral Society, and, after another period of blank, in 1905 Akeroyd helped to establish a series of orchestral concerts at the Sun Hall, Kensington, under his conductorship, the body of players being styled the Liverpool Symphony Orchestra. The concerts with their well-formed and well-informed programmes were of excellent standard, but it was felt that the hall was not sufficiently central to draw the fullest audiences possible, and after some time they were transferred to the Philharmonic Hall with the players embodied under the title "The Akeroyd Symphony Orchestra." The personnel varied from between 65 to, occasionally, 100 players. The series of concerts extended, if one includes both the Sun Hall and Philharmonic Hall series, over some fourteen seasons.<sup>1</sup>

Chronologically the first Great War 1914-18 marks a period of obvious transition, but during that period a beam of light shone by the appearance of a young musician of an eminent Liverpool family, a family whose associations with and contributions to this Society remain an honoured record—I refer to Adrian Cedric Boulton. Educated at Westminster and Christ Church, Oxford, he took his Master of Arts degree, as well as the Musical Doctorate, and embarked upon music as his vocation. Dr. Colles in his article upon Sir Adrian Boulton, as he now is, states that "he gave some orchestral concerts in Liverpool and elsewhere, but may be said to have made his name by conducting certain of the Royal Philharmonic Society Concerts in London in the season 1918-19." The Liverpool concerts referred to were a series Sir Adrian gave both at the Sun Hall and at the David Lewis Theatre with an orchestra which he had got together of Mozartian symphonic proportions with the occasional addition of trombones—there were some 15 strings—and whose programmes were characterised by a distinctive taste. A dozen concerts were arranged in the Sun Hall series in 1914-15 and half a dozen in 1915-16, with some additions. These concerts met with warm appreciation from the pen of the late Mr. Henry Whitehouse (Weisse) who wrote the criticisms for them in the *Liverpool Daily Post*. Mr. Whitehouse was at the time the Headmaster of the Liverpool Institute and a great force for

<sup>1</sup> See as to this, correspondence in the *Liverpool Daily Post* from Mr. Alfred Summers and the present writer, 21 and 23 April, 1942.

music both in and beyond the school—chamber concerts there being a feature of his work. Merseyside's unretentive powers again became exemplified, for Sir Adrian, after a short but promising spell at Liverpool, went to London to become conductor of the British Symphony Orchestra, which, among other spheres of successful work, organised Sunday Concerts at the People's Palace, London, in the tradition of Bantock at New Brighton, securing guest conductors to conduct their own works, among them Vaughan Williams. In 1924 Sir Adrian became conductor of the Birmingham City Orchestra where he achieved outstanding success which was followed by what may be regarded as the premier musical position in the country, the musical directorship of the B.B.C. and the conductorship of the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra. In the *Liverpool Daily Post* of 17 January, 1938, Mr. A. K. Holland, its musical critic, wittily wrote :—

“ Liverpool is perhaps beginning to get the conductors it doesn't deserve. Not for the first time the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra had last night the presence of a conductor who being a prophet not without honour etc. etc. has been with us all too rarely of late. Sir Adrian Boult came to us in a new capacity and he had a reception which may possibly have caused him to feel that, unworthy as we are, we are not altogether beyond redemption and are even a little proud of him.”

Probably the phrase “ in a new capacity ” referred to the fact that Sir Adrian came to us as Musical Director of the B.B.C. to conduct at a concert before a really popular assembly on Merseyside what had by then (for he had conducted the same orchestra in the same hall in 1935) proved itself to be in this generation the first enduring local orchestra of symphony orchestra standard. The critic continues :—“ For one thing it may be submitted that the orchestra which he conducted last night, and which is not, or not yet, the official orchestra, represents a higher standard than anything Liverpool may have boasted of in the past.” Significant words these, when it is borne in mind that the critic had then some seventeen years of experience of Liverpool concerts with the tradition of all but a century behind them. The same critic in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, 26 November, 1934, wrote :—“ This is, in point of fact, the municipal orchestra we have been waiting for.”

Mr. T. J. Buckley, as musical critic of the *Liverpool Echo*, wrote in the issue of 19 November, 1934, "Mr. Cohen has got together an orchestra mostly of young players whose work is a continual joy." The rise and progress of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra may be briefly narrated. Its beginning evolved out of what was styled "The Merseyside Orchestra," founded by Mr. Louis Cohen<sup>1</sup> in 1930, a body of players which gave seven popular Sunday Concerts in New Brighton under the auspices of the Wallasey Corporation, continuing such series in the spring and autumn until 1935. Wallasey again became the vital centre of Merseyside music and the conductor received particularly cordial encouragement from the critical notes of the Wallasey correspondent of the *Liverpool Daily Post*.

In the autumn of 1932, the orchestra was expanded into what was styled "The Merseyside Commonwealth Orchestra," re-inaugurating in Liverpool after very many years' intermission "Sunday Music for the People" at St. George's Hall. It was these Concerts which opened out again the possibilities of Sunday music, care being taken that the times of performance did not coincide or clash with Church services—an important and often overlooked matter, which, so far as these concerts are concerned, was scrupulously attended to.

The interest of the Corporation of Liverpool was enlisted on behalf of the movement, in particular the members of the Finance Committee, the Committee in charge of the Hall. At once the large Hall was let at a reduced charge, regard being had to the cause of music for the people and the altruistic attitude of the conductor and orchestra, a commonwealth sharing by the latter of net takings being the sole material return. After a successful autumn series, a new series was commenced in February, 1933, the orchestra being expanded into "The Merseyside Symphony Orchestra," a number of guarantors guaranteeing against loss. The Corporation showed its continued interest by a further reduction in the charge for the Hall and in the autumn of 1934 signified its appreciation of the work by granting the Hall free of any charge. Among the guests who on occasions appeared as conductors of the orchestra

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Louis Cohen, Liverpool born, received his education, general and musical, in Lancashire, and has lived here all his life, save when on active service with his regiment during the Great War of 1914-18.

may be mentioned the late Sir Hamilton Harty, the late Sir Dan Godfrey, conductor of the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra, Mr. Albert Coates and Sir Adrian Boult. The visits of these distinguished musicians—in some cases repeated visits—were rightly regarded as marks of esteem. Moreover the orchestra secured engagements for concerts outside its own series. For instance, the Hon. Ruth Lever conducted a special Symphony concert organised under her own direction, and the Liverpool Welsh Choral Union, the premier choral body in the district, enlisted its services repeatedly instead of the *ad hoc* set of players it had previously engaged, the critics being unanimous as to the superiority as a whole of the performances of works for chorus and orchestra under these improved circumstances as compared with those rendered in association with a band casually got together as in the past. The musical critic of the *Daily Post* in its issue of 25 October, 1934, observed:—

“The Sunday night orchestral concerts which have been given in the St. George's Hall during the past seasons have received a new lease of life by the grant of the use of the hall by the Corporation. It is one more sign that the city has at length begun to wake up to its responsibilities towards music. For this we have to thank the perseverance of Mr. Louis Cohen who has been indomitable in furthering the aims of orchestral music in Liverpool. . . . Mr. Cohen's personal responsibilities have now been relieved by the foundation of an influential Committee which will serve to give the concerts stability.”

Of this Committee Mr. Richard T. Golding was appointed the first Chairman and was succeeded by Mr. D. L. Webster, who later became Chairman of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society Limited. The programmes, like those of the Queen's Hall (London) Promenade Concerts, but more rapidly than the London series, attained “Symphony Concert” character and even at the outset they were free from the concessions that London half-a-century ago felt it necessary to make to the then popular taste. The programmes contained a set of descriptive notes by a writer under the nom-de-plume of “Timbrel” who for several years contributed regularly a musical article over that signature to the *Liverpool Courier*. A by-product of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra is the Merseyside Chamber Orchestra, under the conductorship of Mr. Louis Cohen, with the opening

of the Walker Art Gallery for concerts by that orchestra, incidentally causing the expansion of the "Libraries Museum and Arts Committee" of the Corporation into the "Libraries Museum Arts and Music Committee." The series of concerts was held in several places besides the Walker Art Gallery. Its programmes may be regarded as of the most delectable description. In a notice of one of these concerts, the words of the musical critic of the *Daily Post* may be usefully quoted (17 March, 1938):—

"It is not too much to suggest that these experimental concerts are quite the most important and creative effort that has been made in Liverpool music recently. And Mr. Cohen paid a rightful tribute to his patrons and guarantors, the chief of whom is Mrs. Permewan, who have made these interesting concerts possible." The Merseyside Chamber Orchestra Concerts, founded in 1933, still flourish artistically, and have carried the artistic fame of Merseyside into the countryside of Lancashire, Cheshire and North Wales, an interesting feature being recitals in Chester Cathedral and various churches. Further extensions of the larger force of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra have been their playing for children's educational concerts and as an orchestra for the Welsh Choral Union and other choral bodies, as instanced above, giving to concerts of such organisations an orchestral equipment of a standard hitherto lacking.

The present war resulted in a parting of the ways in respect of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra, a parting with considerable repercussions upon the future of music in Liverpool and Merseyside generally, as well as further afield. With war imminent, it occurred to Mr. Louis Cohen, then conducting a season of orchestral concerts at Harrogate with an orchestra whose personnel was in the main constituted out of Merseyside players, that, with travel difficulties consequent upon war conditions and a restricted amount of opportunities for engagements, it would be expedient to guarantee the Merseyside personnel at least two concerts per week, and thus tend to retain them in the profession when war conditions, in the case of those not eligible for the armed forces, might attract them to other means of livelihood. Mr. Cohen felt that the retention of the players available served both a national as well as a musical purpose,

the provision of music for the people at all possible times during the War being admittedly a valuable factor in upholding national morale. Just before the outbreak of the War the Merseyside Committee had arranged for the usual series of Sunday Evening Concerts at St. George's Hall, and there was talk of embarking upon a weekday, possibly Saturday evening, series by the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra to be held at the Philharmonic Hall. War conditions, however, caused the authorities to suspend the use of St. George's Hall for other than emergency purposes, and it will, of course, be remembered that for a period after the outbreak of War no evening public assemblies were allowed.

A new difficulty descended upon the Philharmonic Society in that some twenty-five players out of the total of those who played at its concerts were no longer permitted by the B.B.C., who had engaged them as part of its Northern Orchestra at Manchester, to accept the Liverpool Philharmonic contracts, the B.B.C. raising then no objection to any of them playing for the Hallé Orchestra, centred as it was in Manchester, but placing a journey to Liverpool as out of bounds. The position was catastrophic for the Philharmonic Society, and only the existence and availability of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra helped to save the situation. The Merseyside Symphony Orchestra normally consisted of some 42 players, and although the Philharmonic Society decided to augment them to 60, not only were the Merseyside Orchestra players in the preponderant majority, but qualitatively as well as quantitatively they formed the main constituent element, since the augmentation by the Philharmonic Society was substantially in one direction only, namely the strings, the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra supplying all the various categories of the orchestra without which a symphony orchestra could not be constituted. Thus it can be seen that had the services of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra not been accessible, it is difficult to realise how the Philharmonic Society under current war conditions could have continued to give any orchestral concerts whatever. Mr. Cohen's formulated plan was taken up on behalf of the Philharmonic Society, and it was decided to hold two concerts a week, the one being the usual Philharmonic Society seasonal concert, and the

other being a popular-priced concert to be held on a Sunday afternoon on the lines of the St. George's Hall Sunday Evening Concerts, which, as previously noted, were no longer for the time being possible owing to the suspension of the use of the Hall in consequence of it being required for other purposes. The Merseyside Committee when requested, in order to assist the project, placed at the disposal of the Philharmonic Society on loan its lists of patrons and all the information as to its own administrative machinery. Furthermore the Philharmonic Society caused to be issued a letter signed by Mr. Cohen inviting all the patrons of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra Sunday Evening Concerts to support the new Philharmonic venture. The first Philharmonic series of Popular Sunday Afternoon Concerts were thus styled: "Sunday Afternoon Orchestral Concerts by the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (Augmented from Merseyside Symphony Orchestra—60 players). Conductor: Louis Cohen."

For the ordinary weekday seasonal series at first the Society engaged guest conductors in continuance of the policy it had pursued for many years.<sup>1</sup> The Sunday Concerts continued to be under Mr. Cohen's regular conductorship.<sup>2</sup> At the instance of the Merseyside War Time Entertainments Committee, under the Chairmanship of Major F. S. Milligan and the Hon.-Secretaryship of the Hon. Ruth Lever, and with the co-operation of the Lord Mayor's Fund, a series of Sunday Afternoon Concerts in available parts of St. George's Hall were given by the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra under its permanent conductor, Mr. Cohen, Miss Lever acting as guest conductor on two of the occasions, the concerts being designed especially for those in H.M. and Allied Forces, who were admitted free of all charge, a small charge being made for any friend accompanying them, and a number of surplus seats being open to the public at prices which helped to meet the expenses so that the Forces could come free. These were primarily Forces Concerts with some space at the disposal of

<sup>1</sup> Subsequently the conducting of the ordinary week-day seasonal series was mainly left to Dr. Malcolm Sargent, who had previously conducted at concerts of the Society. Furthermore his conductorship at an earlier date of the Llandudno Pier Company's Orchestra, in which post he succeeded the late Arthur Payne, already had made him a not unfamiliar figure to many of the older Liverpool and district concert-goers who were then habitués of the North Wales seaside resort.

<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, however, the conductorship of Sunday concerts was divided among several conductors, including both Mr. Cohen and Dr. Sargent.

the public for the purpose mentioned, not concerts primarily for the public, with some space at the disposal of the Forces. They were held at times when the Philharmonic Concerts were not taking place, and thus the old personnel of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra remained accessible. The creation of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra resulted in the establishment of the first orchestra in this locality which evinced the signs and tokens of possible permanence. With small beginnings in Wallasey, encouraged by the discerning praise of the Wallasey representative of the *Liverpool Daily Post*, the orchestra gave the Liverpool public as a whole in this generation its longest successive spell of easily available orchestral concerts and the practical support of the Liverpool Corporation provided the indispensable facilities of accommodation.<sup>1</sup>

The Philharmonic Society, until it took over the personnel of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra and augmented it, never possessed a professional orchestra of its own—an orchestra in the accepted sense of a regularly constituted entity appearing at least weekly during a full season with its consequential rehearsals and conducted as a rule by a permanent conductor. It is only right to make it clear that the Society never in the past claimed to have an orchestra of its own denomination. Its programmes, until the transfer from the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra, simply referred to its players as "orchestra." Of course, orchestra it was—in contradistinction to any other musical description. But "Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra" it never boasted to be until it gave its two concerts a week with the personnel of the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra augmented. On the other hand, the programmes and advertisements in the press at present make the most of the heading "Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra" and now hardly ever, if ever, refer to the Liverpool Philharmonic Society itself.

Local musical history does not confirm the view that we shall retain local musicians in our midst in the future any more than we did in the past. Cheshire allowed Granville Bantock, of London birth, to leave for the Midlands, and as regards Sir Adrian Boult, what Liverpool did not resolve at the time London

<sup>1</sup> See as to this, correspondence in the *Liverpool Daily Post* from Mr. Alfred Summers and the present writer, 21 and 23 April, 1942.

decided on the morrow, Birmingham thereafter, and subsequently the world-wide ambit of the B.B.C. took unto itself. Frederic Cowen, who was born in Jamaica (incidentally in surname a namesake in variant spelling of our present Liverpool conductor Louis Cohen), Merseyside did not retain for more than half of the time that his teacher Julius Benedict held the post—but neither were really local denizens like Hallé became in Manchester, or for the short time he was in Merseyside, Granville Bantock. Adrian Boult was, of course, *of us* as well as *with us*, Cheshire born, of Liverpool family. Of periodical indwellers mention should be made of Carl Rosa, whose long opera seasons in Liverpool were features of artistic life unknown to the present generation. In the days before the encyclical "Motu Proprio" of Pope Pius X resulted in the reconversion of the music of the Catholic Church into Gregorian and polyphonic channels of purely vocal music, the elaborate liturgical music of the eighteenth and nineteenth century composers was often heard at the neighbouring St. Peter's, Seel Street, with Carl Rosa Opera Company principals as soloists, orchestral accompaniment, members of the Goossens family conducting and Raymond Steinforth, a local member of the legal profession, being director of the music of the church. We could not retain the Goossens family (whose members conducted orchestral and choral concerts in the city, in addition to their work for church and operatic music), and the youngest Eugene Goossens (there was a succession of them bearing the names), its most distinguished representative, who might have been ours, found a welcome permanent home in the United States of America. We do not seem to contain those for whom Merseyside is their domicile of origin, and are unable to attract for any appreciable time those who make it a domicile of choice. Hallé's position was undoubtedly rooted through his Mancunian citizenship. In the opinion of many, Liverpool's music will enjoy efflorescence when it has its perennial flowering from plants with roots in the local soil. Long before orchestral concerts came to St. George's Hall the organ recitals gave to thousands their first acquaintance with the glories of orchestral music, and in recent years this work of Mr. Herbert Ellingford, who has dwelt in our midst to our great benefit, has been outstanding in its educational as well as in its enjoyable character. Great traditions of music

centre round our civic St. George's Hall, and to see that the days of artistic delight spent within it should be remembered and that the traditions of its share in the establishment of Merseyside's own orchestras shall not perish for want of recording, this introductory account may serve to assist. Merseyside's music has a future of great possibilities but the shaping of the future will in no inconsiderable degree depend upon its relation to the achievements of the past.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

The "history of the various attempts to establish an orchestra in Liverpool . . . is a long history and it has been rather befogged by a certain amount of special pleading." These words are quoted from an article by Mr. A. K. Holland, the musical critic of the *Liverpool Daily Post*, in its issue of 4 January, 1943, words completely coinciding with my own diagnosis of the position when I set out to write the foregoing contribution. Accordingly I have striven to allow factual material to speak for itself, references to sources being contained in the text, except in the case of some of the matters relating to the Merseyside Symphony Orchestra and its subsidiaries, as to which I have been able to supply first-hand testimony through my membership of its Committees from the outset, testimony which I have been enabled to check with the kind co-operation of my colleagues in these spheres. If I may paraphrase the preface of a legal text book, it is believed that every statement not by way of obvious comment or deduction is the gist of the narrative of recorded facts or a verifiable set of facts. Music has been generally well and fully served by the local Press whose columns form indispensable, if necessarily incomplete, sources of information.