The Royal Philharmonic Society

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THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF MUSIC

inside front cover
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By founding the Philharmonic Society, British musicians opened the doors to the world's best music and performers, and created a channel of communication which has hummed ever since. The result of such encounters raised standards and provoked innovation in a country where music was for too long neglected by both monarchy and government. It has taken inspiration, ambition and tenacity to keep the Society's flame alight for 200 years.

Here is its story.

Inaugural concert programme of the Philharmonic Society

UNDER THE IMMEDIATE PATRONAGE OF

His Royal Highness the Prince Regent.

PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY.

First Concert, MONDAY, March 8th, 1813.

PART I.

Overture to Anacreon - - - - - *Cherubini.*
Quartetto, two Violins, Viola and Violoncello, Messrs. F. CRAMER, MORALT, SHERRINGTON, and LINDLEY - - - - - - *Mozart.*
Quartetto & Chorus, Nell' orror, Mrs. MORALT, Messrs. HAWES, P. A. CORRI, and KELLNER *Sacchini.*
Serenade, Wind Instruments, Messrs. MAHON, OLIVER, HOLMES, TULLY, and the PETRIDES *Mozart.*
Symphony - - - - - - - *Beethoven.*

PART II.

Symphony - - - - - - - *Haydn.*
Chorus, Placido e' il mar, Mrs. MORALT, Miss HUGHES, Messrs. P. A. CORRI, C. SMITH, &c. *Mozart.*
Quintetto, two Violins, Viola, and two Violoncellos, Messrs. SALOMON, CUDMORE, SHERRINGTON, LINDLEY, and C. ASHLEY - - *Boccherini.*
Chaconne, Jomelle, and March - - - *Haydn.*

Leader, Mr. SALOMON.—Piano-Forte, Mr. CLEMENTI.

The Second will take place on Monday next, the 15th March.

Reynell, Printer, 21, Piccadilly, London.

John Nash's New Argyll Rooms 1819–1830

1 1813–1830 MUSICIANS UNITE

For the aristocracy the only option was the 'Antient Concert', whose concerts were 'dry-as-dust affairs'.

The year was 1813. Despite the legacy of Handel, Boyce and JC Bach, and of Salomon and Haydn's triumphant concerts in the mid-1790s, the capital city of the British Empire supported no symphony orchestra. There had been previous attempts: as well as Salomon's concerts, the Professional Concert was founded by musicians in the 1790s and brought Pleyel to London. But this had folded in 1793. Ad hoc concerts took place but there was no regular series with a solid reputation. For the aristocracy the only option was the 'Antient Concert', whose concerts were 'dry-as-dust affairs' in which bishops and dukes creakily directed vintage scores, preferably by Handel. Access was restricted and music had to be at least 20 years old to qualify.

Yet London did not lack musical talent: lowly as their status might be, fine and experienced musicians were plentiful and, on 24 January 1813, a group of them met to discuss the idea of re-forming an orchestral collective. This group included pianist and violinist William Dance, the pianist-composer Johann Cramer, his brother the violinist Franz, composer Philip Anthony Corri and the well-connected William Ayrton, critic and impresario. Within a fortnight they had formulated a manifesto and recruited as additional founder members high-profile figures such as Clementi, Vincent Novello, Giovanni Viotti and Salomon himself. The idea was that there should be fifty *bona fide* members who were professional musicians, while associates could be interested amateurs or professional musicians, and subscribers were sought to support the concerts.

The aims of the Society reveal much about the state of concert-giving at the time: its mission was to perform 'the best and most approved instrumental music'. Contemporary concerts at the time consisted of a hotchpotch of vocal tit-bits and virtuoso showpieces. The Philharmonic Society was determined from the outset to make the case for serious symphonic and chamber music, 'that species of music which called forth the efforts and displayed the genius of the greatest masters'. These 'masters' were the living composers of their time: the Philharmonic Society would actively promote new music.

The first of a series of eight concerts was given at the Argyll Rooms, at the corner of Oxford Street and Argyll Street, in March 1813. Recent research has shown that the formation of the Society was not an isolated act but part of the much broader strategy envisioned by John Nash and the Prince Regent in 1811 for a purpose-designed centre for music in London, situated within the heart of an improved West End and complete with music shop and academy. In 1819 the 'old' Argyll Rooms were pulled down and John Nash's new building erected, housing handsome music rooms and a music publishing business.

Performers represented the cream of the national freelance crop.

The first season featured music by the composers that would dominate this era: Mozart and Haydn 'whose sinfonias blazed like a comet in our musical atmosphere' reported the Spectator, and Cherubini and Beethoven. Performers represented the cream of the national freelance crop; celebrity virtuosi like bassist Dragonetti and cellist Robert Lindley staffed the orchestra. The role of the conductor was not yet formalised, and most concerts were directed by a formidable violin-keyboard team: Spagnoletti or Viotti with Clementi, and Salomon with Cramer graced the early seasons. Spohr gives an account of leading the orchestra with a baton during his first visit in 1820, but this seems only to have been in rehearsal. The tradition of conducting from the piano did not immediately change and, as late as 1829, Mendelssohn was 'led to the piano like a young lady' to 'conduct' his first symphony.

The size of audience could not exceed 300, so tickets were much sought-after. It was noted in contemporary newspapers that, although aristocratic presence was welcomed: 'There was no hunting after titled patrons or subscribers; no weak subserviency to rank... They merged all claims of rank and precedence in one great object – the love of their art.' The Society represented a new, egalitarian venture governed by the laws of musical excellence and attracted such a committed audience, it was noted, that 'silence and attention are preserved during the whole performance', something not common at the time.

Carl Maria von Weber was the first Honorary Member of the Society.

At the earliest opportunity, in 1815, Cherubini was invited to conduct a new symphony and overture specially commissioned by the Society, so re-establishing the custom of bringing over foreign composers and their new work to invigorate and inspire London's musical community, dormant since 1793. Carl Maria von Weber, in London for the premiere of *Oberon*, conducted a special concert in 1826 and was made the first Honorary Member of the Society.

Beethoven's works were always high on the agenda. Four of his symphonies were played in the Society's first season, with British premieres of his Symphony No.5 in 1816, and his Piano Concerto No.1 in 1820. A more personal association with the composer was almost derailed in 1815, however, when the pianist Charles Neate, on a visit to Vienna, purchased from Beethoven for the Society the three overtures *King Stephen*, *The Ruins of Athens* and *Namensfeier* for the sum of 75 guineas. According to Beethoven, Neate chose these over better pieces which were also available, and the Society was so disappointed with them that none was heard at the concerts for a generation. A bid was made the following year, too late, to commission the Seventh Symphony, but the Society gave the first British performance in 1817 and, in the same year, the directors offered Beethoven 300 guineas for two new symphonies and his presence conducting in London. The composer could not face the journey, though he did later accept £50 for a symphony, his Ninth. It was not until December 1824 that the Society would receive Beethoven's longest and most radical example of the form. Prior to this, to mollify them for the delay, he sent the overture *The Consecration of the House* 'in token of my love for and confidence in the Society' for which they paid £25.

Bust of Beethoven by J. N. Schaller

Concert programme for the public performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony (1825)

UNDER THE IMMEDIATE PATRONAGE OF

His Majesty.

PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY.

THIRD CONCERT, MONDAY, MARCH 21, 1825.

ACT I.

Sinfonia Letter T. - - - - - - - - - Haydn.
Terzetto, "Tutte le mie speranze," Madame Caradori, Miss Goodall, and Mr. Vaughan (Davide Penitente) - - - - Mozart.
Quartetto, two Violins, Viola, and Violoncello, Messrs. Spagnoletti, Oury, Moralt, and Lindley - - - - - - - Mozart.
Song, Mr. Vaughan, "Why does the God of Israel sleep," (Samson) - Handel.
Quintetto, Flute, Oboë, Clarinet, Horn, and Bassoon, Messrs. Nicholson, Vogt, Willman, Platt, and Mackintosh - - - - Reicha.
Recit. ed Aria, Madame Caradori, "Per pietà," (Cosi fan tutte) - Mozart.
Overture, Les deux Journées - - - - - - Cherubini.

ACT II.

New Grand Characteristic Sinfonia, MS. with Vocal Finale, the principal parts of which to be sung by Madame Caradori, Miss Goodall, Mr. Vaughan, and Mr. Phillips (composed expressly for this Society) - Beethoven.

Leader, Mr. F. Cramer.—Conductor, Sir G. Smart.

To commence at Eight o'clock precisely.

The subscribers are most earnestly entreated to observe, that the Tickets are not transferable, and that any violation of this rule will incur a total forfeiture of the subscription.

It is requested that the Coachmen may be directed to set down *and take up* with their horses' heads towards Piccadilly.

The door in Little Argyll-street will be open after the Concert, for the egress of the Company.

The next Concert will be on Monday, April 11.

TERZETTO.—*Mozart.*

Tutte, le mie speranze
Ho tutte riposto in te!
Salvami oh Dio
Dal nemico feroce
Che m'insegue, e m' incalza
Oh Dio salvami.

RECITATIVE accompanied—Mr. Vaughan.
(Samson.)—*Handel.*

Justly these evils have befall'n thy son:
Sole author I, sole cause. My griefs for this

The Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal

Future performances were often compromised by a lack of resources.

When the score of the Ninth Symphony was finally received, it bore a handwritten dedication to the Philharmonic Society, even though it had been performed twice in Vienna in the spring of 1824, and was eventually published with a dedication to the King Prussia. George Smart was to conduct it in London but, daunted, held back, hoping that Beethoven would agree to come over, 'for I have not the vanity to imagine that I can fully enter into the ideas of the Composer.' In the end Smart went ahead with a 'trial' performance in February 1825 and the first public performance at the concert of 21 March. The recitative bass passages in the last movement were played as solos by the double-bassist, Anfossi. It was a landmark concert in the history of music, not just British music. As *The Times* critic described it at an early rehearsal: 'In grandeur of conception and in originality of style... it will be found to equal the greatest works of this composer.' Another noted, however, that the 'expence of choir and rehearsals may perhaps forbid its ever being done again'. Certainly, future performances were often compromised by a lack of resources, but gradually, through the Society, a real performance tradition was established.

'To the Philharmonic Society and to the whole English nation. God Bless them.'

Two years later, Beethoven was on his deathbed and made a last appeal to the Society who, to his 'pathetic relief and delight' sent him £100. Though the gift was never spent, it was received with touching gratitude, 'to the Society and to the whole English nation. God Bless them.' The gesture later inspired Fanny Linzbauer to give the Society, on the hundredth anniversary of his birth, a bust of Beethoven sculpted by J N Schaller in Vienna. It was brought with due pomp and reverence back to the Society in 1871 and placed on the platform at all subsequent concerts. A gold medal, which became the Society's highest honour, was cast from its image, Joachim, von Bülow, Rubinstein and Brahms being among the first recipients.

2 1830–1845 MENDELSSOHN AND HANOVER SQUARE

In 1830 the Argyll Rooms were destroyed by fire just before the orchestral season began. Initially, the Society was forced to move to the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, but soon negotiated with the Antient Concert to use their Hanover Square Rooms. The 1830s were marked by a happy association with the young Mendelssohn, which produced a string of premieres. The composer was just twenty when, in 1829, he first came to conduct the orchestra in his first symphony. For this concert he replaced the third movement with an orchestration of the Scherzo from his Octet: the audience loved it, demanded an encore and thus began a mutual infatuation. Mendelssohn dedicated the symphony to the Society, who in turn elected him an Honorary Member. On his next visit, in 1832, the Hebrides Overture received its British premiere and he played his Piano Concerto No.1 twice. At one of his 1844 concerts an audience member wrote of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Scherzo as 'very beautiful, and encored, but it is awfully, fearfully difficult, so much so that last Saturday morning Mendelssohn was 7 hours rehearsing…', something the orchestra would not do for every conductor. At the end of 1832 the Society commissioned Mendelssohn to write a symphony, an overture and a vocal piece for 100 guineas. The result was the soprano scena 'Infelice', the 'Trumpet' Overture and the 'Italian' Symphony, described by Ayrton at its first performance in 1833 as 'a composition that will endure for ages.'

An exemplary concert which attracted 'numerous attendance of rank and fashion.'

From its founding the Society has enjoyed the immediate patronage of the reigning monarch. But there was great excitement when its first ever 'royal command performance' was arranged for Prince Albert and Queen Victoria in 1843. Spohr conducted (and played) and there was music by Spohr himself, Mendelssohn, Weber and Beethoven. Mendelssohn presided over the next command performance the following year, adding works by Mozart, Bellini and Schubert to the mix. Mendelssohn was also responsible for introducing fine soloists, such as the young Joachim who played Beethoven's Violin Concerto that year. Yet, despite the esteem in which the Society held him, he was let down by the Society's musicians when he tried to introduce Schubert's Great C major Symphony. Like the Viennese musicians before them, players ridiculed the repeated triplets in the last movement, and the Philharmonic's orchestra did not perform it until 1871, fifteen years after its British premiere at Crystal Palace. At Mendelssohn's final appearance with the Society, in 1847, he conducted his 'Scottish' Symphony (first introduced in 1842) and played Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto from memory, an exemplary concert which attracted 'numerous attendance of rank and fashion.'

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

3

1845–1855 COSTA AND THE MODERN ORCHESTRA

The opening concert of 1845 was well-attended but rapidly fell victim to a barrage of criticism aimed at the conductor Sir Henry Bishop. He was memorably described as 'lenient to torpidity' in rehearsal and 'incorrect in almost every tempo' in concert. The Viennese pianist who had long been active in the Society, Ignaz Moscheles, agreed to complete the season, but a new principal conductor was needed. Mendelssohn and Spohr were approached but it was Michael Costa, a highly successful opera conductor, who finally agreed to become the Society's first permanent conductor. He immediately brought a new discipline to the orchestra. In a long and remarkable document he spelled out the needs of the modern conductor, including absolute authority over the orchestral leader (whose title he thought should no longer appear on concert advertisements), attendance of every player throughout rehearsals, power over the choice of repertoire and at least a fortnight to acquaint himself with new scores. It was also Costa who banned casual visitors from rehearsals and introduced an orchestral arrangement which put the double basses behind the cellos (stars like Dragonetti had hitherto been out in front, drowning out the violins) and lowered the drums and trombones so they were not so prominent. The warmer, more homogenous sound was instantly noticed, one critic writing of Costa's *Eroica* in 1846: 'we have heard no Philharmonic performance to compare,' and discerning a continental style of finish 'approaching Mendelssohn in Leipzig and Habeneck in Paris' – there could be no higher praise.

He spelled out the needs of the modern conductor, including absolute authority over the orchestral leader.

Costa's transfer to Covent Garden in 1846 greatly benefited the Society. His 1848 season featured such stars as Fanny Persiani, Donizetti's original Lucia, and the great Pauline Viardot. He also inspired outstanding soloists such as the cellist Alfred Piatti and bassist Bottesini, to play within the orchestra as well.

With all these star guests, the concerts of this period could have been sold out three times over, but seating in the Hanover Square Rooms was limited, and no attempt was made to perform in a larger venue where box-office takings could be increased. This was doubly unfortunate, since it kept budgets too low for the Society's ambitions. When Berlioz proposed to conduct the first British performance of his *Symphonie fantastique*, Costa responded that there was no question of paying for a second rehearsal to overcome its 'impracticable' difficulty and therefore London was robbed of a seminal work until 1881 (though he did introduce Harold in Italy that season).

Costa resigned in 1853. Spohr was first invited to replace him, then Berlioz, but it was Richard Wagner who eventually agreed to conduct the season of 1855.

Wagner may have been giving London a glimpse of the future of music.

His dramatic *ritardandi* and ability to manipulate the musical line out of its routine jog-trot alarmed many critics, who equated his 'enthusiasm' with immorality. However, few would dispute his masterly handling of Beethoven's Ninth, perhaps the best performance the piece had hitherto received in Britain. Wagner may have been giving London a glimpse of the future of music, but he did not enjoy his four months in the city, complaining about the fog, the philistinism and the prolix concerts.

Sir Michael Costa

4 1856–1880 RISING COMPETITON

Clara Schumann

Following Wagner's departure, it was the solid academic composer Sterndale Bennett who presided over the Society for the next eleven years. He programmed his own piano works no fewer than ten times and included works by lesser British composers. There were highlights, such as Clara Schumann's debut, in a 'masterly and intellectual' Beethoven's 'Emperor' Piano Concerto, and composers who were supported during this period included Schumann, Gounod, Lalo and Rubinstein, whose bravura pianism in the performance of his own concerto both thrilled and terrified with its sheer volume. Nonetheless, under Bennett, the Society began to lose its edge: new orchestras began to represent real competition, particularly the rival New Philharmonic Society, conducted by Berlioz and led by Paganini's pupil Camille Sivori, which played to audiences of 3000 in Exeter Hall near the Strand.

Bennett stepped down in 1867, to be replaced by a modestly competent organist, William Cusins. It was an ill-timed appointment: in 1869 the Society concerts moved from the Hanover Square Rooms to the 2000-seat St James's Hall and needed to attract audiences that were increasingly well-catered for by other series. Guest appearances by stars such as Hans von Bülow and Pablo Sarasate still caused a surge but the Society lost its pioneering reputation during this time, mainly due to timidity and lack of rehearsals. The directors dithered over Brahms: when they did introduce his works, it was a 'coarse and rough band' that ploughed through the first Piano Concerto in 1873, while Joachim, even though he attracted a full house twice for his performance of the Violin Concerto in 1879, warned Brahms against having works premiered at Philharmonic concerts as 'not one qualified fellow stands at the head of this once laudable organisation.' What Cusins's concerts lacked in quality they made up for in quantity, however. An extreme example is a night in 1876, when Beethoven's Second Symphony, Mendelssohn's *Ruy Blas*, and a Spohr violin concerto were preceded by the British premiere of the Brahms Requiem.

'Not one qualified fellow stands at the head of this once laudable organisation.'

5 1880–1911 FRANCESCO BERGER RESTORES FAITH

'The object of the Philharmonic Society is to give public orchestral concerts of the highest class.'

By the 1880s London audiences were enjoying the conducting of consummate musicians such as Hans Richter, fresh from premiering *The Ring*, and Pierre Lamoureux, who brought Lalo, Massenet and Saint-Saëns 'with unprecedented discipline and verve' according to *The Musical Times*. The Society had all but run out of capital. Fortunately, a solution to its problems arrived in the shape of long-standing member Francesco Berger. Taking on the role of Secretary in 1884, this experienced and cosmopolitan musician and impresario refocused the Society's objectives, expanded the membership, restored the art of ambitious programming and balanced the books. He reworded the original document of objectives, resolving that 'The object of the Philharmonic Society is to give public orchestral concerts of the highest class.' That year Dvořák made his first appearance at St James's Hall, introducing his Sixth Symphony, and was made an Honorary Member. There followed the world premiere of his Seventh Symphony (1885), the first British performance of his Violin Concerto in 1886, the 'rich treasure' of his Symphony No. 8 in 1890, and, most glorious of all, the world premiere of his Cello Concerto in 1896, conducted, as the symphony performances had been, by the composer himself.

Though composers were often asked to conduct their own works, a permanent conductor was still seen as vital. Richter, von Bülow and Sir Arthur Sullivan were among those approached to take over as chief conductor. Sullivan conducted three seasons before the post went to the Jewish, Jamaican-born Frederic Hymen-Cowen, an impressive talent. His first concert starred Clara Schumann playing Chopin's F minor Concerto and Liza Lehmann singing Schumann lieder; in his third he made a fine case for Schubert's Ninth.

This initiative was a fine example of the Society's musical leadership.

The opening of the Queen's Hall in 1893 ushered in a new era in London concert life: Berger approached Grieg, who delighted audiences with his Piano Concerto and *Peer Gynt*, and sought out Tchaikovsky, who conducted a triumphant performance of his Fourth Symphony in 1893. Such programming rekindled great interest in the Society's concerts and, in 1894, the audience was treated to the memorable posthumous British premiere of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, the 'Pathétique'. Its final movement was described in the *Athenaeum*: 'no composer ever uttered a final lay more powerful and thrilling.' This initiative was a fine example of the Society's musical leadership and the work quickly spread throughout the country.

Cowen was succeeded by the young Scot, Alexander Mackenzie. He proved to be an energetic and open-minded music director: he recommended Borodin, performing the UK premiere of the Second Symphony in 1896 and invited Glazunov to conduct his Symphony No.4 in 1897 and Strauss his *Tod und Verklärung* a year later.

The Society looked for merit, and nothing but merit in the artist invited… such an invitation became an honour which artists of big reputation coveted.

The music world was becoming increasingly professionalised, with hard-nosed agents negotiating higher and higher fees and the big piano firms sponsoring celebrity artists. The cash-strapped Philharmonic still appealed to composers and musicians, as members of their own fraternity, to forgo their normal fees for the prestige of an invitation. As a *Times* critic put it, 'The Society looked for merit, and nothing but merit in the artist invited... such an invitation became an honour which artists of big reputation coveted.' Indeed, artists like Mendelssohn, Joachim, and later, Kreisler, Cortot and Casals generously gave their services for little or no money. The award of the Society's Gold Medal was also helpful in sealing engagements with composers and artists: Adelina Patti, Paderewski, Eugène Ysaÿe, Jan Kubelík, Fritz Kreisler and Clara Butt were all honoured during Berger's time, while Max Bruch, Alexander Glazunov, Hans Richter, Richard Strauss and Sergei Rachmaninov were made Honorary Members.

Mackenzie resigned in 1899, and was to be the last 'resident' conductor. After this Berger took on internationally-acclaimed maestros for different repertoire. The premiere of Elgar's Violin Concerto, conducted by the composer with Fritz Kreisler in 1910, has rightly been named one of the most memorable performances in the work's history. Elgar by this time had become a huge draw: his Cockaigne overture was premiered in 1901, and, in 1909, two concerts featuring his works by popular request outsold an appearance by the legendary Adelina Patti.

Right hand image: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Thomas Beecham 1879–1961

6 1911–1938 THE BEECHAM YEARS

The charismatic young conductor made an immediate impact.

Despite being granted the right to add 'Royal' to its name at its centenary in 1912, the RPS was finding it increasingly hard to compete with the plethora of successful orchestras in London. Landon Ronald threw them a lifeline when he offered to abandon his New Symphony Concerts if the RPS would engage his band (which was staffed by many of the same players) 'en bloc'. Rationalisation was needed, but the Society refused on the grounds that long-standing members might have to be laid off. Mengelberg, whose concerts had 'obtained fresh glory' for the RPS in 1914, suggested that Thomas Beecham should take over. The charismatic young conductor made an immediate impact, coaxing out fine performances of Debussy's unfamiliar Nocturnes and giving an 'electrifying interpretation' of the long-neglected *Symphonie fantastique*. Beecham kept the RPS going through the difficult years of the First World War, using his theatrical brilliance and his own money to ensure that programmes were eclectic and provocative: the 104th season included Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and *The Firebird*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloë* and the first London performance of Debussy's *Iberia*. The young Adrian Boult needed experience and agreed to perform for no fee in 1919, giving the premiere of Delius's Violin Concerto and Holst's The Planets, which made an 'exciting impression'. A parade of distinguished conductors visited from abroad in the 1920s including Ansermet, Coates, Goossens, Monteux, Walter and Furtwängler: the latter offered Mahler but was turned down, the committee fearing it 'might not be attractive' to London audiences. Despite financial difficulties during this time, the record for premieres was strong and included the first British performances of Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto (1925) and Bartók's Dance Suite (1926), while Malcolm Sargent introduced Vaughan Williams's 'Pastoral' Symphony in 1922.

Nevertheless, a price had been paid for Beecham's largesse during the War years: in 1916 the RPS had gratefully accepted his offer of conducting concerts for five years and raising a capital fund of at least £10,000 on condition he would control all programmes and become Chairman. In 1918, a group from among the directors forced him to resign, and 'restored democracy' in their own view. Beecham, of course, was already deeply involved in other orchestras, and would soon be back (a rapprochement occurred in 1928 when he conducted his own version of Handel's *Solomon* for the RPS and received the Gold Medal).

A more significant resignation in 1918 was that of Percy Pitt, who left to become the first Music Adviser at the new British Broadcasting Corporation. The founding of the BBC in 1927 was to have a long-term impact on the RPS. Having taken over Sir Henry Wood's Proms at the Queen's Hall, it gradually took on the role of major patron for classical music, particularly in the contemporary field. The RPS could not compete in terms of resources and needed to rethink its strategy.

Just as it seemed that sustained concert promotion was becoming unfeasible, the Depression hit. For the music profession in Britain, this came hard on the heels of another catastrophe: 12,000 musicians had lost their work playing for silent movies when the 'talkies' came on stream in the late 1920s. More than this, the advent of mechanical music reproduction spelled the end of the 19th-century piano culture, the means by which amateurs had gained access to repertoire works.

The BBC agreed to broadcast six concerts a year in 1932, a deal which endured and became an important source of income.

Yet this new era offered opportunities for the RPS. The committee was slow to approach record companies, but a series of recordings was made in the 1930s by the 'old' Royal Philharmonic Society Orchestra for the Columbia Graphophone (*sic*) Company (some now reissued on the Naxos label) and, in 1932, the BBC agreed to broadcast six concerts a year, a deal which endured and became an important source of income. That same year Beecham formed his London Philharmonic Orchestra, which henceforth played for the Royal Philharmonic Society's concerts; from this point the Society ceased to have its own orchestra. As the decade progressed, these concerts, many of which were recorded, proved to be ground-breaking, establishing, for example, a performance tradition for Sibelius in Britain. In addition, William Primrose performed Walton's Viola Concerto, Boult premiered Vaughan Williams's Fourth Symphony and Nadia Boulanger arrived in 1937 to play Rameau and Monteverdi on the harpsichord.

7 1939–1960 WAR AND NATIONALISATION

There were grumbles on the committee that too many concerts had become 'easy on the ear'.

Public entertainment was initially banned in London after the outbreak of the Second World War, though the RPS soldiered on with six concerts on Thursday afternoons in 1939. Its new secretary Keith Douglas and treasurer George Baker were determined to continue its work 'which had been unbroken for 127 years'. In addition to the orchestral concerts, they organised a series of chamber recitals at Sadler's Wells and, in 1940 and 1941, even took on the running and promotion of the Proms then abandoned by the BBC. John Barbirolli was persuaded to visit in 1943 to conduct *The Firebird*, but there were grumbles on the committee that too many concerts had become 'easy on the ear' and that more needed to be done to revive the 'unique distinction' of the RPS's ground-breaking concerts. In fact, against the odds, the war years boasted Walton's Violin Concerto, the premiere of Medtner's Piano Concerto No.3, Bartók's Concerto for Two Pianos, Percussion and Orchestra and Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto.

The period up to the 1960s was marked by a renewed commitment to British music.

With Beecham in the States for much of the War, the LPO had become self-governing. Always keen to create a new orchestra, he approached the RPS in 1946 to 'ask if he could finally form an orchestra in their name. Keith Douglas persuaded the Society to agree and in 1946 the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was born. The RPS stood to gain from association with a brilliant ensemble, so long as Beecham was in charge. In fact, the result was often a 'glorious confusion', since other concerts were promoted quite outside the jurisdiction of the RPS. Despite this, the period up to the 1960s was marked by a renewed commitment to British music, including the premieres of Vaughan Williams's Symphony No.6 (1948) and Symphony No.9 (1958, an RPS dedication), together with the London premieres of his *Sinfonia Antarctica*, Tippett's *Ritual Dances*, Howells' *Hymnus Paradisi* and Walton's Partita and Symphony No.2. There were also performances of new works by Hindemith, Martinů, Bloch and Gerhard.

In 1949 Sir Thomas had once more proposed that a capital fund, this time of £100,000, should raised for the Society but, by now, serious questions were being asked internally about the role of the RPS: there were so many orchestras fighting for audiences and the economics of putting on concerts had gone beyond the means of this venerable institution. One member, Ernest Irving, who conducted at Ealing Studios, made the prescient plea that the RPS should take on a more educational role.

8 1961–1988 LAST CONCERTS

Following Beecham's death in 1961 a group of astute and active board members, including Leslie Boosey and Thomas Armstrong, ensured that the Society used what few resources it had to commission new works and honour living composers. While William Glock was taking the biggest risks with new music at the BBC, the RPS nevertheless staged some enterprising events. In 1967 it mounted a major tribute concert to Zóltan Kodály, conducted by Antál Doráti, at which the composer received the Gold Medal. The rest of that season, though loss-making, was exemplary in demonstrating the RPS's aims: Boulez came to conduct Messiaen, Varèse and Boulez; Barbirolli brought Rawsthorne and Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*, and Colin Davis presented a Mozart and Stravinsky programme. Such concerts continued to be presented throughout the 1970s, with limited support from the Arts Council.

In a city with five resident orchestras and concert halls on the South Bank and at the Barbican, there was no longer room for another promoter.

A few years after Beecham's death the Society severed all direct connection with the RPO and returned to the practice of promoting concerts by all the major London orchestras in turn. In its 175th anniversary season (1987/8) orchestras from Leipzig, Paris, and Montreal were invited. Rostropovich played Dvořák's Cello Concerto, Perlman the Tchaikovsky, Nigel Kennedy the Elgar and Simon Rattle conducted Mahler and Sibelius and a new Ninth Symphony was commissioned from Andrzej Panufnik. All this was made possible by the state subsidy and newly-fashionable business sponsorship. But it was not to last: in a city with five resident orchestras and concert halls on the South Bank and at the Barbican, there was no longer room for another promoter. The Arts Council abruptly withdrew funding that same year. The immediate financial crisis was solved by the sale, to the British Library for £600,000, of the manuscript of Haydn's London Symphonies (two of them the composer's autograph), which the Society had owned since 1847.

Right hand image: Mstislav Rostropovich

From top left clock wise:

Rebecca Burch RPS Julius Isserlis Scholar, studying the gyil in Ghana

Kenneth Hesketh RPS/PRSF Composer in the House in Liverpool © Arena Pal/ Pete Jones

Hear Here! – investigating how we listen to music © Kate Lay UCL Ear Institute

PLAY.Orchestra RPS Education Award winner

Leticia Moreno RPS Young Artist

9 1989–2007 A NEW ROLE: BACK TO THE FUTURE

The RPS has returned to the original aims of its founders.

The recent history of the RPS has seen it transformed from concert promoter into a unique organisation at the heart of British music-making. Under the banner 'creativity, excellence and understanding' the RPS supports the next generation of musicians and composers, rewards excellence and promotes audience understanding. In these ways it has returned to the original aims of its founders, who were bringing high quality performances of significant new music to the general public, and recognising the achievements of peers.

In 1997, Tony Fell, newly retired as managing director of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, took on the Chairmanship and, together with new General Administrator, Rosemary Johnson, heralded in a new era in the Society's history. With an imaginative raft of new initiatives and partnerships they set about restoring a central role for the RPS in the creation of a future for music. Collaboration with BBC Radio 3 has led to an extensive commissioning programme for the outstanding BBC New Generation Artists, as well as the *Encore* programme which promotes live and broadcast second performances of works by living British Composers. The *Composer in the House* residencies, jointly initiated with the PRS Foundation in 2005, follow the tradition of the *Kapellmeister* by placing the composer back at the heart of the orchestral community; while *Hear Here!*, a partnership with Classic FM, investigates all the different aspects of listening through live performances and events, on air and online coverage and education initiatives.

In the last decade the Society has also supported the work of the London Sinfonietta, the Philharmonia's free *Music of Today* concerts and the current crucible of international new music, the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. Support to young musicians continues through the John Barbirolli Memorial Foundation, the Emily Anderson Prize, the Julius Isserlis Scholarship and the RPS Composition Prize which, since 2002, has offered two commissions, both linked to guaranteed professional performances. In addition the Society has taken on the administration of several new trust funds and awards. These include the Elgar Bursary, a non-competitive award of a commission to a mature composer; the Susan Chilcott Scholarship, first awarded in 2005, which provides grants to young singers to help them develop their potential, and founded in memory of the greatly admired young British soprano who lost her battle with cancer at the age of 40, and the Drummond Fund set up in 2006, following the death of legendary broadcaster and impresario John Drummond, to commission new works for dance.

The RPS has not only recognised the important, often unsung, work going on British performing groups and arts centres, but has also given it a higher profile.

Back in 1813, the founding members vowed to 'encourage the appreciation by the public of the art of music', and could be said to have invented the first audience development programme. The RPS continues the promotion of understanding with its Annual Lecture debating 'The Future of Music' which, in recent years, has been given by figures as diverse as Ernest Fleischmann, David Pountney, Peter Maxwell Davies, Graham Vick and Steve Reich. It also organises a wealth of talks, concerts and events for its members, who represent a wide cross-section of the listening audience. Excellence is honoured by the continuing award of the Gold Medal and of Honorary Membership and, in what has now come to be regarded as the Society's flagship event, the annual RPS Music Awards. First introduced in 1989, these independent awards offer a celebration of the best in live music-making in the UK. In creating the new categories of Audience Development (2000) and Creative Communication (2004), the RPS has not only recognised the important work being done by British performing groups and arts centres, but has also given it a higher profile and stimulated creativity amongst practitioners. A guest speaker, chosen for an ability to be both authoritative and provocative, provides the Awards Dinner with the element of public debate and the association of the Awards since 2002 with BBC Radio 3 has helped to stimulate significant media and public interest in the Society.

The revival of the RPS's role has been made possible by the sale of the Society's rich archive of scores, minute books, accounts and correspondence to the British Library in 2002. This has provided the Society with the stable financial foundation it has lacked throughout its history and has allowed it to identify new initiatives and seek out new partnerships to bring these to fruition.

In 2006 Graham Sheffield, Artistic Director of the Barbican Centre and formerly at the South Bank, succeeded Tony Fell as Chairman and continues the commitment to the aim of making the RPS a key part of music-making in Britain today. The relevance of the Society's role extends beyond any geographical boundaries, however. As Pierre Boulez has written: 'Without the creative energy of new composers and young musicians, music can only have a past. Membership of The Royal Philharmonic Society gives you the opportunity to help ensure a future for music.'

Helen Wallace, 2008

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