

Give the people what they want:

Sir Hamilton Harty and the Hallé Orchestra in the 1920s

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The criteria used to establish the legacy of a conductor tend to focus on the amount of new works he or she was responsible for producing. Indeed, a cursory glance through the established histories of the four main orchestras in Britain during the 1920s — the London Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, the Queen's Hall Orchestra and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra — suggests that a conductor's worth rests almost entirely with premieres, even if they are a *succès de scandale*, badly performed or poorly attended.¹ Other considerations, such as orchestral standards, personal interpretation and popularity with audiences are of secondary importance, and as a result conductors who largely avoided the avant-garde, such as Sir Landon Ronald and particularly Sir Hamilton Harty, are portrayed as conservative and little else. Such views are grossly unfair for a variety of reasons. They encourage the unjustified neglect of these conductors in the official histories and biographies of orchestras and musicians. One needs only to note the quantity and availability of information on Henry Wood and Thomas Beecham, (conductors who were noted for their performances of 'modern' music), to believe that they must be the most important conductors in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century. Compared to the relatively small, but important, biographies of Sir Landon Ronald and Sir Hamilton Harty,² the casual observer and future generations of musicologists will continue to assume that such conductors are not as important as their eminent colleagues, despite the vital contribution each made to the musical life of Britain. Like Ronald, Harty was an important participant in a general movement which encouraged the dissemination of classical music to the masses in post-war Britain. Since avant-garde music usually failed to capture the public's attention or approval, it is not surprising that conductors like Harty avoided programming such music. New music already had a platform in Britain, primarily at the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts, but equally important was efforts of musician's like Harty to welcome newcomers to the world of classical music with performances of the standard classics. The unpretentious education of the general public was needed first if avant-garde music was to have any future at all. In some ways, this was a much harder and nobler task than performing new music: the public had to be convinced that classical music was worth listening to, especially since Jazz music was all the rage in Britain at the time; ticket prices had to be lowered to

¹ See H. Foss and N. Goodwin, *London Symphony* (London: The Naldrett Press, 1954); M. Kennedy, *The Hallé Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960); J. Doctor and D. Wright (eds), *The Proms: A New History* (London: Thams & Hudson, 2007); D. Cox, *The Henry Wood Proms* (London: BBC, 1980) and B. King-Smith, *Crescendo: 75 Years of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra* (London: Methuen Publishers, 1995) for examples.

² See B. Duckenfield, *O Lovely Night: a biography of Sir Landon Ronald* (London: Thames Publishing, 1991) and D. Greer (ed.), *Hamilton Harty: His Life and Music* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1979).

attract the lower-classes but high enough to ensure the future of the orchestra; the programming must be varied and interesting to attract any audience in the first place; and the standards of the orchestra and personal interpretation of the conductor had to be superlative because they could not rely solely on a *succès de scandale*. This latter point is particularly important since standards take precedence over the amount of premieres a conductor is responsible for — there's no point in producing new music if it is badly performed — and personal interpretation can produce fresh results and ensure interest from the critics and the public alike. Consequently, this paper discounts the primacy of premieres and instead considers Harty's legacy using these other factors to shed further light on an important, albeit neglected, conducting career.

Hamilton Harty's conductorship of the Hallé Orchestra from 1920 to 1933 was criticised mainly for its alleged conservatism in the *Manchester Guardian* by Samuel Langford (1906–1927) and his successor Neville Cardus (1927–1940), and some regular concertgoers like William Norman of the Manchester University Union.³ His career also received heavy criticisms in the most detailed history of the Hallé Orchestra by Michael Kennedy published in 1960.⁴ Interestingly, Kennedy's criticisms are, paradoxically, challenged by his own evaluation in Appendix Four of *The Hallé Tradition*, where he lists what he considered to be the most important works to receive their first performances in England at the Hallé Concerts.⁵ Of the thirty-two performances chosen by Kennedy, dating from 1868 to 1956, fifteen were conducted by Harty, and only six by his successor John Barbirolli, and four by each of his predecessors, Hans Richter and Charles Hallé, the founder of the orchestra. Therefore, according to Kennedy, during the first 100 years of the orchestra's history the Hallé under Harty produced the vast majority of its most important first performances, a challenge perhaps to those who criticised Harty for his conservatism. In addition, recent scholarship by Robert Beale has shown that Harty may actually have performed more works by living composers than any other Hallé conductor in the twentieth century.⁶ Despite being recognised by his contemporaries for his catholic tastes, Harty was chided for promoting relatively lesser known living composers such as Hely-Hutchinson, Bryson, Atterberg, Pizzetti, Respighi, Glazunov and Goldmark while ignoring the major avant-garde composers like

³ William Norman stated 'In the first place, it is common knowledge that it is not just a small minority but a large and increasing body of opinion which is dissatisfied with the Hallé programmes. What particularly annoys us is that we should be fobbed off with contemporary trivialities by Hely-Hutchinson, Bryson, Atterburg [sic], Goldmark etc., when there is so much serious work by Sibelius, Ravel, Stravinsky, Bax, Holbrooke and others...are the Sibelius Symphonies considered too cacophonous for the delicate Hallé ears? And what about the neglected Mahler' in *The Musical Times*, Vol. 70 (Jul., 1929), 639.

⁴ For examples of the histrionic and unjustified criticisms of Harty see Kennedy's *The Hallé Tradition*, 220, 223–226, 228, 230 and 236.

⁵ Kennedy, *The Hallé Tradition*, 392–393.

⁶ On average, 31% of the programmes from 1925 to 1935, in which Harty conducted for 8 years, were given over to works by living composers, more than in any of the other fifty decades analysed by Beale from 1903 to 1995. See R. Beale, *Music Money & Maestros* (Manchester: Forsyth Brothers, 2001), 178.

Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Prokofiev and Bartok.⁷ He was even criticised for his apparent neglect of less experimental composers like Mahler, Ravel, Sibelius, Vaughan Williams and Bax although the extent of this neglect is debatable.⁸ But even if we accept that Harty was not as conservative as once thought, why should Harty's neglect of certain composers receive so much more attention than other factors such as his popularity, interpretative skills and financial success with the orchestra? Although giving lists of important premieres may be more sensational and appealing to some musicologists and historians, surely an examination of a conductor's time with an orchestra should include more and recognise that commercial success, fresh interpretations of the works from the established canon, and the ability to steer an orchestra through difficult economic circumstances are just as important as programming.

Economics

In connection to the Hallé's finances, John Russell⁹ wrote a reply to the criticisms Harty received for his programming in the 1929 May issue of the *Musical Times* stating:

The question of new music at orchestral concerts is, and always will be, the subject of much contention. The critic is, of course, entitled to his view... that the contemporary should not be neglected. At the same time, however, he should not permit personal predilections to outweigh his sense of the economic basis of musical art in this country. Music, like everything else, is a commodity - even though it is spiritual - [and] is subject to the laws of supply and demand. The musical culture of Manchester is, if a very solid and real thing, a little unprogressive [sic] - a fact the Hallé Society has to bear in mind in progressing slowly. The public demand on the big orchestral organizations is for proved and standard works, and if the things they desire to hear are not available, they simply stay away from the concerts.

⁷ *The Musical Times* (MT), Vol.70 (Jul., 1929), 639.

⁸ For example, Harty performed the Manchester premieres of Mahler's Adagietto for Strings and Harp (18 October 1923), Symphony No.4 in G (24 November 1927 - Norah Dahl soloist) and *Das Lied von der Erde* (8 December 1930 - Olga Haley and Frank Titterton soloists), and the English premiere of his Symphony No.9 in D minor (27 February 1930). Harty also performed the Manchester premieres of Ravel's *La Valse* (15 December 1921), *Bolero* (30 October 1930), and the Hallé premieres of his Tzigane for solo violin and orchestra (26 February 1925 - Jelly d'Aranyi soloist), *Daphnis et Chloe* (29 October 1925) and *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (23 February 1933). Furthermore, Sibelius received significant attention from Harty with the English premiere of his *Night Ride and Dawn* (20 November 1930), the Manchester premieres of his symphonic poem of *The Swan of Tuonela* (25 November 1926), Symphonic No.3 in C (16 October 1930) and Symphony No.7 in C (10 December 1931) and the Hallé premieres of his Symphony No.1 in E minor (3 November 1932), Symphony No.4 in A (5 December 1929), Symphony No.5 in E flat (24 October 1929), Violin Concerto (31 October 1929 - Arthur Catterall soloist) and *Tapiola* (24 November 1932). Vaughan Williams did, however, receive limited attention from Harty with just the Hallé premieres of his overture *The Wasps* (8 March 1923), Pastoral Symphony (7 November 1929), and Fantasy on a theme of Tallis (21 January 1932) and the Manchester premieres of his Sea Symphony (1 November 1923 - Carrie Tubbs and Herbert Heyner soloists), Norfolk Rhapsody (27 October 1927) and *The Lark Ascending* (3 February 1927 - Jelly d'Aranyi), which together formed the sum total of performances of Vaughan Williams at the Hallé Concerts during Harty's tenure. Bax was better represented by the premieres of his tone poem *November Woods* (18 November 1920), Overture to a Picaresque Comedy (19 November 1931, which was dedicated to Harty), the Manchester premiere of Symphony No.1 in E flat (4 December 1930), and the Hallé premieres of *In a Vodka Shop* (6 January 1921), *The Garden of Fand* (28 February 1924), the motet *Mater Ora Filium* (7 February 1929), and Symphony No.3 in C (4 February 1932).

⁹ Apart from his position as librarian of the Henry Watson Music Library in Manchester Russell was also responsible for providing the first history of the Hallé Orchestra: John F. Russell's *A History of the Hallé Concerts, 1858-1939* is serialised in *The Hallé Magazine* (Manchester, 1948-1956). This work provided much of the background information that Michael Kennedy used for his histories of the Hallé: *The Hallé Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960) and *The Hallé 1858-1983* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982). According to Kennedy, Russell's work required much revision as a great deal of new material on the Hallé came to light after the World War II.

Since it is the duty of a society like the Hallé to remain in existence and, if possible, pay its way, then it follows that, as a policy, it must give the people a good proportion of the music they want to hear. A small minority (of which I am one), either from curiosity or the wish to keep abreast of contemporary developments, are desirous of hearing more new music... But a minority cannot do much towards keeping the Hallé Society in a flourishing state, and we must be content with the study of scores until the majority, the people who make the concerts possible, cultivate the urge towards modernism. How the urge towards modernism is to be developed is, in my opinion, little concern of the Hallé Society, whose aim is cultural rather than educational.¹⁰

John Russell's defence of Harty's choice in programmes raises two important and interwoven issues which continue to govern all orchestras today: financial security and public tastes. It is important to note that when Harty conducted the Hallé Orchestra he had to contend with several serious constraints. Apart from the effects of the Great War on the orchestra's finances, personnel, and morale — which were common for all British orchestras — the Hallé Orchestra was further disadvantaged. It had to rely on an outdated guarantee system to finance the twenty-one concerts it presented annually for its regular series. In contrast, the LSO could present only ten concerts for the 1920–21 season, eight concerts for the 1921–22 season, returning to their pre-war level of just twelve concerts for the 1924–25 season. Such limitations existed despite the financial backing the orchestra received from major patrons like Lord Howard de Walden, Cyril Jenkins, and Baron Frederic d'Erlanger and its relatively low over-heads as a self-governing orchestra. Therefore, comparisons of programmes between the regular series of the LSO and the regular series of the Hallé are unreliable since the Hallé finances were spread out over many more concerts than the LSO could manage.

In response to Russell's defence of Harty, William Norman stated in *The Musical Times* 'Sir Henry Wood has succeeded in educating London audiences in all the great modern composers, and I see no reason why Sir Hamilton Harty should fail in this respect'.¹¹ Although Norman would not have been aware of the financial particulars of either the Proms or the Hallé it should have been obvious to him that apart from Wood's aesthetic beliefs the main reason he was able to conduct so many modern works was because of the financial backing the orchestra received. Since 1915 the Queen's Hall Orchestra under Henry Wood, which performed most of the modern works heard in Britain at the time, had the benefit of a significant financial backing of Chappell Ltd. Wood estimated that Chappell sustained losses of up to £60,000 from 1915, when they began financing the orchestra, to 1927 — an average of £5,000 a year.¹² The Hallé never even approached half this level in deficits during Harty's time, nor could they afford to (see Appendix on page 22). As a result of this lavish spending, Henry Wood and the

¹⁰ MT, Vol. 70 (May, 1929), 446.

¹¹ MT, Vol. 70 (Jul., 1929), 639.

¹² Doctor and Wright, *The Proms: A New History*, 296. The figure of £60,000 was taken from a letter Wood issued to the press in March 1927, quoted in D. Cox, *The Henry Wood Proms*, 84.

Proms had got themselves into such financial difficulties that in 1927 they were forced to enter into an agreement with the BBC who took over concerts., which consequently became publicly subsidised. Furthermore, the new City of Birmingham Orchestra, which was formed in 1920, also benefited from financial security. The City Council awarded the orchestra an annual grant of £1,250, which amounted to just over 17% of the orchestra's entire annual income.¹³ In contrast the Manchester Council continued to charge the Hallé Orchestra £37, 10s for the rent of the Free Trade Hall for each concert, which amounted to a staggering £777 at the end of a season and worth £36,000 annually in today's money.¹⁴ When the city council paid the Hallé £1,000 for five municipal concerts during the 1924–25 season, rising to £1,890 for nine municipal concerts for every season from 1925 to 1930, the council continued to charge itself rent for use of the Free Trade Hall. There were even protests from *The Manchester Evening News* and the *City News* who attacked the very idea of any public subsidy whatsoever, claiming that museums and galleries offer art of solid enduring worth, whereas music almost immediately disappears into thin air.¹⁵ Such views demonstrate the materialistic nature of Manchester during the 1920s, which no doubt reflect its industrial past.

Thus, the Hallé did not experience the same level of financial backing or patronage that the other three main English orchestras enjoyed. Instead it relied on an out-dated guarantee system which, since the formation of the Hallé Concerts Society in 1895, called upon members of Manchester's business elite to bail out the orchestra only when receipts were not enough to cancel expenses. Not surprisingly, such a system made it almost impossible to accumulate capital and as a result, expensive luxuries like extra rehearsals, large scale works, and, more importantly, performances of difficult modern works which required many more rehearsals, were nearly impossible to plan for, even if the conductor had a taste for the avant-garde. In fact, it was Harty's ability to take over at short notice with little or no rehearsal — no doubt a result of his developed sight reading skills as an accompanist in the early 1900s — which contributed a great deal towards securing his appointment to the Hallé in 1920. Harty had stood in for Thomas Beecham on a number of occasions: on 13 January 1916 (when Beecham was detained in Rome), 19 December 1918 and 27 March 1919 during the Hallé's regular series (when Beecham was deep in financial trouble) and on 3 April 1919 during a Birmingham Choral Society concert (again, due to his financial difficulties). When Mlynarski was unable to travel from Moscow to conduct three concerts with the LSO during the 1916–1917 season, Harty acted as his replacement and in the absence of Landon Ronald, Harty also conducted at the Edinburgh Orchestral Concerts on 25 January 1915. This ability to quickly get to grips with a programme would not have been overlooked by the Hallé Executive

¹³ King and Smith, *Crescendo: 75 Years of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra* 243.

¹⁴ Using the retail price index.

¹⁵ Kennedy, *The Hallé Tradition*, 217

in making its decision to appoint Harty; especially since the budget for the Hallé orchestra was extremely tight and could normally afford only one rehearsal per concert.

Many composers and conductors believed that it would be impossible for Britain to compete on the international stage due to the lack of orchestral cohesion and the failure to promote the concept of a perfect ensemble which results from fewer rehearsals. In October 1910 Gilbert Webb, the LSO's programme annotator, stated 'Mr Nikisch immediately after a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* said to me on my congratulating him on the splendid rendering "And only 2 rehearsals! It is wonderful. I should have required 6 on the Continent"'.¹⁶ The lack of rehearsals for British orchestras continued throughout Harty's career and beyond: when James Soutter, one of the first violins of the LSO, undertook a six month exchange trip in the autumn of 1951 with Arthur Frei, a first violinist of the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra, Soutter remarked how the Zurich orchestra would have the benefit of four to six rehearsals for a single concert, sometimes ten for a famous conductor.¹⁷ Such examples which lie outside of Harty's career demonstrate that rehearsals remained a controversial subject in Britain throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In contrast, Henry Wood believed that three rehearsals were preferable: one for string, one for wind and one for both, with three hours given to each rehearsal making nine hours in total but that twelve hours should be provided for new works. As Neville Cardus records, Harty never came close to such luxuries:

The Hallé of 1957 under Barbirolli would surpass Richter's combination [of players] even at its best simply because all orchestras of the present are able to rehearse more often together... I can never cease to feel amazement when I remember that under Harty most Hallé concerts enjoyed only one rehearsal weekly – on Thursday mornings a few hours before the beginning of the concert itself... Harty was obliged to content himself usually with one rehearsal for each Hallé concert. It is possible an extra would be put on at his disposal for the first performance of new works.¹⁸

Harty believed the reason for the absence of rehearsals in British orchestras was mainly the result of a materialistic attitude, presumably born out of the nineteenth-century industrial revolution, and the expensive London passion for guest conductors:

As if one could run any organisation by having a fresh manager every week. The root reason for the superiority of orchestras in other countries is, bluntly, that the people of those countries think it is worthwhile to spend money on their organisations... while we demand and obtain from our orchestras performances of the most difficult works... I sometimes wonder if we shall ever get over our reluctance to

¹⁶ H. Foss and N. Goodwin, *London Symphony: Portrait of an Orchestra* (London: The Naldrett Press, 1954), 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁸ N. Cardus, *Talking of Music* (London: Collins, St James Place, 1957), 34, 42.

spend money on anything that does not bring a visible material return. It is hardly surprising that our young men of talent are beginning to find that other countries offer them opportunities which do not exist here.¹⁹

Unlike art galleries and libraries, which were publicly or privately funded, concert halls and opera houses received nothing. According to Harty, the British reluctance for spending money on such buildings and the orchestras they employed was the result of the ignorance exhibited by British statesmen who relegated music to the entertainment level occupied by cinemas and football matches: ‘To put it briefly and brutally, we are all for posing as a great musical nation so long as it does not cost us anything to do so.’²⁰

The effects of such attitudes can be seen in the performances, or lack of performances, of large scale works. Apart from any aesthetic considerations, one of the practical reasons why such great compositions like Berlioz’s *Grande Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale* and his *Grande Messe des Morts* were rarely heard in Britain was due to the exceptionally large instrumental forces demanded for their performances which greatly contributed to expenses. Harty, however, must have felt confident in performing the Manchester premieres of these works, on 13 December 1923 and 12 November 1925 respectively,²¹ not only because of his acclaimed skill in conducting Berlioz, his favourite composer, but also the cultivated taste among Manchester audiences for Berlioz which had been established decades earlier by Charles Hallé and ensured public interest.²² Indeed, Harty once stated ‘I should despair of charming London with Berlioz in the way in which Manchester has lately been charmed. This leaning of theirs towards Berlioz suits me, because Berlioz is one of the gods of my idolatry’.²³ Thus, the risk of performing such large-scale works by Berlioz was relatively slight in Manchester during this time. For the performance of the requiem, the critic in *The Musical Times* gave further testament to Harty’s abilities and the orchestra’s standards, stating ‘In thirty years’ experience of Hallé choral concerts, I recall no occasion of a “first performance” so well conceived and executed’.²⁴

¹⁹ Sir Hamilton Harty, ‘The Modern Orchestra: Conductors & Conducting, Lecture V’, Special Collections at Queen’s University, Belfast, MS14/29v, 12.

²⁰ Sir Hamilton Harty, ‘The Discouragement of English Music’, Special Collections at Queen’s University, Belfast, MS14/29ix, 5.

²¹ The performance of the *Grande Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale* Symphony on 13 December 1923 also included Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto in D major (a firm Hallé favourite) and Mozart’s Serenade for Strings *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. The performance of the *Grande Messe des Morts* on 12 November 1925 also included the English premiere of Glazunov’s Symphonic Poem *The Kremlin*. The performance of the symphony attracted an average number of receipts for the season at £327 (a loss of £42 for the concert) as did the requiem mass with £370 made in receipts which despite costs made a profit of just over £11.

²² Charles Hallé never performed the requiem in England because he believed no hall could do it justice. With the Hallé Orchestra, however, he was responsible for the English premieres of Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* (9 January 1879), *La Damnation de Faust* (5 February 1880), *L’Enfance du Christ* (30 December 1880) and *Roméo et Juliette* (29 December 1881).

²³ MT, Vol. 61 (Apr., 1920), 228.

²⁴ MT, Vol. 66 (Dec., 1925), 1132.

As a result of the restrictions on the Hallé budget and Harty's unwillingness to produce risky or unappealing works his programmes for the Hallé's regular series were, in comparison to other British orchestras, incredibly successful financially. Understandably, the seasons that came after 1930 ended with high deficits due almost entirely to the economic crash in 1929 and the resulting worldwide depression. In addition, the high deficit during Harty's first season is an inaccurate representation of the orchestra's success. The heavier expenses in the form of higher fees for the orchestra, conductor and soloists and the loss of Beecham's financial aid, which had been crucial during the war, were the main causes of the high deficit. The Annual Report for the season also states that the concert attendances and the number of subscribers continued to increase and Harty maintained the high standards of the orchestra with 'splendid performances of our Band and Chorus'.²⁵ Furthermore, the high deficit for the 1926–1927 season was largely the result of a dispute over fees between the Musicians' Union and the BBC and the subsequent withdrawal of income from BBC broadcasting for the season. When we consider the archaic mode in which the orchestra was funded and difficult economic circumstances it had to contend with, the Hallé Orchestra under Harty attained almost a perfect balance of artistic exploration and financial expediency (see Appendix on page 22).²⁶

Popularity with Audiences

Contrary to Russell's opinion that the purpose of the Hallé Orchestra was cultural rather than educational, Harty was quite resolute about educating the public and believed it was essential that great music could be felt and appreciated by the mass of people who had no particular training in the art.²⁷ He advised listeners to disregard technical and mechanical knowledge, and instead focus their attention on the amount and kind of emotion the music contains. Harty hoped that such an approach would develop the ability to distinguish between the different styles of various composers in the listener and that this in turn would enhance their listening experience and bring them closer to the composer in a way not possible by intellectual means.²⁸

Such aesthetic beliefs, and Harty's choices in programming, would have been greatly influenced by the new social landscape of 1920s Britain in which Edwardian class structure had been shaken by the war and had produced many social changes, not least of which were the spread of communist and socialist ideas. In the world of music these social changes were most visible with radio broadcasting, gramophone recording and a new cultural movement led by people who wished to disseminate classical music to masses; particularly in organisations like the Community Singing Movement (1926), the Arts

²⁵ Hallé Concerts Society Twenty-second Annual Report, Season 1920-1921, Hallé Archive, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, HS/1/8/22

²⁶ The figures for this table were taken from 'Hallé's Annual Reports', Hallé Archive, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, (HS1/8/20 – HS1/8/34).

²⁷ MT, Vol. 65 (Apr., 1924), 338.

²⁸ Sir Hamilton Harty, 'On Listening to Music', Special Collections at Queen's University, Belfast, MS14/29vii, 1.

League of Service (1919), and the League of Arts for Civic and National Ceremony (1918) Wilfred Stephenson, nicknamed ‘the people’s impresario’, was a friend of Harty’s and is perhaps the best known advocate of such thinking from this time.

In addition, much of Harty’s popularity with the larger Manchester public was assured due to his views on modernism. In 1924 he gave a speech for the Manchester Organists Association, which was recorded in the 1924 April issue of *The Musical Times*.²⁹ In this speech Harty presents his distaste for the avant-garde and what he called ‘the terrible clevernesses [sic] of the moderns’.³⁰ To refer to a composer as clever was, for Harty, a deadly insult, subordinating him to a position no greater than a skilful acrobat. In particular, Harty disliked the neo-classicism of Stravinsky and the emerging surrealism of the Second Viennese School.³¹ Harty viewed those who blindly championed modernism and the avant-garde as ‘musical turncoats’ stating:

As soon as they have transferred their worship to another idol, they are quite willing to see the flaws in the old one they have only just forsaken. The new composer is always the perfect one, and they forget their past mistakes... I think we have been passing through a very unprofitable time in the history of musical composition and I sincerely believe that it is because the greater number of the composers of our time make intellect [logic] the be-all and end-all of their compositions that they are doomed to extinction. Since the towering figures of Wagner and Brahms we have had to deal with a succession of smaller men, each of whom has displayed something individual, something of genius, some new trick or idiom but none of whom who have so far proved themselves equal brothers with the great ones of our art.³²

In other words, to produce a novelty just because it was a novelty had, for Harty, no virtue at all.³³ He believed ‘that with an extraordinary development of the means of expressing the thought of a composer’ came a ‘corresponding diminution in the intrinsic value of the thought itself’.³⁴ In his view, most modern composers had become more interested in the technicalities of the musical tools themselves than

²⁹ Sir Hamilton Harty, ‘Modern Composers and Modern Composition’, Special Collections at Queen’s University, Belfast, MS14/29xiv

³⁰ MT, Vol. 61 (Apr., 1920), 229.

³¹ Harty even had trouble with the mysticism of earlier composers such as César Franck and Alexander Scriabin, Presumably, in Scriabin’s case this refers to what historians call impressionist atonality with chords made up of seconds and fourths to produce extreme chromaticisms. Perhaps his most famous composition in this style is his symphonic poem *Prometheus* (1910). He was unimpressed by the ‘chromaticisms’ and ‘weak mystical style’ of Franck and he had little better to say about Scriabin: ‘[He] is not a composer I wholly believe in. I find it hard to assume his vogue will continue’, see MT, Vol. 61 (Apr., 1920), 228. Of the works by Franck that Harty presented during his thirteen seasons with the Hallé only the Symphony in D minor and the Symphonic Variations for Piano and Orchestra were given repeated performances. Scriabin received even less attention with only one performance of his third and fourth symphonies. After a performance of his piano solo *Poème Tragique* in early 1923 there was not a single work by Scriabin given under Harty for the next seven years until the Etude in D# minor was performed by Nicolas Orloff on 6 November 1930.

³² See MT, Vol. 65 (Apr., 1924), 339 and the Sir Hamilton Harty, ‘Modern Composers & Modern Composition’, Special Collections at Queen’s University, Belfast, MS14/29xiv, 1–3 for the full text.

³³ C. Rees, *100 Years of the Hallé* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1957), 63.

³⁴ Sir Hamilton Harty, ‘The Modern Orchestra: History and Growth’, Special Collections at Queen’s University, Belfast, MS14/29i, 12.

using them to communicate their thoughts and ideas. This belief would have struck a chord with the vast majority of music lovers at the time who also believed that certain areas of classical music were fast becoming a musician's music. Harty noted that even his favourite instrument, the piano, was being used more for percussive ideas than its traditional role as a melodic/harmonic instrument. As a result, Harty was quite prepared to wait on the sidelines with the majority of the British public for such experimentalism to run its course and for the critics and avant-garde musicians alike to return to what he regarded as musical sanity. Consequently, he believed that the next step in compositional style was a return to simplicity and what he called a 'clearness of logic' rather than further complexity. In this regard it could be argued that Harty prophesied Schoenberg's increasing flexibility towards serialism and his partial return to tonality during his later works like 'Theme and Variations for Wind Band in G minor', Op.43a, *Ode to Napoleon*, and *A Survivor of Warsaw*,³⁵ or even the minimalist music which became popular in America during the 1960s and 1970s under Phillip Glass and John Adams.

Rather than condemning Harty for his apparent abandonment of modern composers, which any study of his programmes would find to be grossly inaccurate, contemporary commentators would have been more precise to criticise Harty for not performing works by the major avant-garde composers. For example, he never gave a single performance of any of Schoenberg's compositions and only one performance of Bartok, namely the Manchester premiere of the *Dance Suite*, on 14 January 1926 three years after its premiere in Budapest. More importantly Harty gave the English premiere of Shostakovich's first symphony on 21 January 1932 but it was the only work he gave of the young composer during his time with the Hallé. Stravinsky fared a little better with the English premiere of his *Scherzo Fantastique* in 1921, which Harty repeated in 1928, two performances of *Petrouchka*, two performances of the Suite from *The Firebird*, and a single performance of *Fireworks*.³⁶ Harty had particular distaste for Stravinsky's neo-classical works describing them as vicious, brutal, unhealthy and decadent.³⁷ He believed that with Stravinsky and Scriabin came 'an evil atmosphere in music'.³⁸ It is no accident that Arthur Bliss and Lord Berners, who were both greatly influenced by Stravinsky early in their careers, received only a handful of performances at the Hallé Concerts during the 1920s: the former with the Manchester premiere of his *Mélée Fantastique* on 26 February 1925 and the Hallé premiere of his arrangement of Purcell's 'Airs and Dances' on 15 November 1928, and the latter with

³⁵ 'This return to tonality has given rise to dispute over Schoenberg's artistic significance. There are some who claim that Schoenberg's evolution was marked by a continuous advance. Others that, once he had invented his method, he was unable to make use of his discovery, since, instead of creating new forms which would suggest new musical language, he reverted to old forms and never quite escaped from Romanticism' [see G. Hindley, *The Larousse Encyclopedia of Music* (London: Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd., 1978), p. 383]. His pupil Berg has also been viewed this way.

³⁶ Stravinsky: *Scherzo Fantastique* 20 January 1921, 19 January 1928; *Petrouchka* 23 November 1922, 14 November 1929, *Fireworks* 19 February 1925, suite from *The Firebird* 10 February 1927, 16 February 1933. Prokofiev: March and Scherzo from suite *The Love of Three Oranges*, 21 February 1929 (Manchester premiere); Piano Concerto No.3 in C, 6 November 1930 (Manchester premiere performed by Nicholas Orloff); Scythian Suite *Ala and Lolly* 3 October 1929 (Hallé premiere).

³⁷ Sir Hamilton Harty, 'Modern Composers & Modern Composition', Special Collections at Queen's University, Belfast, MS14/29 XIV, 9-10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

the Manchester premiere of his 'Fugue for Orchestra' on 6 December 1928. Phillip Heseltine, a notable supporter of Schoenberg, also received only one performance under Harty with the Hallé premiere of his 'Suite Capitol' on 7 November 1929.

On occasion, Harty's inability to accept criticism from the press affected his professionalism. According to Michael Kennedy, Harty gave an infamous performance of the Prokofiev's Scythian Suite *Ala and Lolly* in 1929 during which he bulldozed his way through the work as fast and as loud as possible, answering his critics by stating 'If they want modern music, there it is for them'.³⁹ Not surprisingly, Prokofiev was given limited attention by Harty with the Manchester premieres of his Piano Concerto No.3 in C and the March and Scherzo from the Suite *The Love of Three Oranges*. Such performances suggest that at times Harty could be a difficult man. Kennedy asserted that 'He was prone to this kind of "blow hot, blow cold" attitude to people; Neville Cardus has related how one day Harty would be friendly to him and on another, perhaps after a piece of hostile criticism, would ostentatiously "cut him dead" in a restaurant'.⁴⁰

Perhaps the most succinct and yet comprehensive criticism that Harty ever made of the avant-garde can be found in his 1924 speech and embraces several populist ideas, including the disdain for industrialism and the promotion of naturism:

The brilliant young Sons of the Morning... reply to all criticism by saying that their object is to make music truthful to what is happening around them. If it is ugly, hard, cynical, material... that cannot be helped... at least they are being realistic. It may be that the ultimate destiny of music is not to say the wonderful beautiful things that in our souls we dimly perceive, but to be a mere photographic record of our changing, restless material life... but if that time ever were to come, I think music as we know it would be an extinct art, because its noblest function would be gone... that of trying to clothe with sound those aspirations which are too deep and vague to be put into words... I have an instinctive feeling that beautiful creation requires leisure and quiet in order that the children of the mind may be healthy and sane... Everything made by man has become more efficient and works more quickly, but I am convinced that music is one of the things which cannot be speeded up, and that it has been injured by this excessive craving for hustle. Great music is really Nature translated into sound, and Nature persists in remaining at its old "Allegro Moderato" and refuses to be speeded up. I feel sure that it is only in close touch with Nature, and surrounded by the quiet rhythm of country things, that musicians can hope nowadays to write music of solid enduring value.⁴¹

³⁹ J. F. Russell, *Music & Letters* Vol. 22 (Jul., 1941), 219.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *The Hallé 1858–1983*, 19.

⁴¹ See MT, Vol. 65 (Apr., 1924), 331 and the Sir Hamilton Harty, 'Modern Composers & Modern Compositions', Special Collections at Queen's University, Belfast, MS14/29xiv, 10 for the full text.

Harty believed that he was living in a very restless and unsatisfied age created out of a hectic and highly industrialised post-war British society which was endangering the very idea of beauty by threatening a composer's creativity. Indeed, Harty returned to the issue of efficiency in one of his lectures when he laments the passing of the recorder as a regular orchestral instrument stating 'everything for efficiency and brilliancy nowadays'.⁴² Harty's belief that nature should be *the* inspiration for creativity is indicative of its time, particularly among members of the folk-song movement who had become concerned about the survival of the English countryside after a century of unprecedented industrial expansion.⁴³ This relationship between nature and art is apparent in some of Harty's own compositions (such as *The Children of Lir*, the *Comedy Overture* and the *Irish Symphony*), which were inspired by the trips he made home at least once a year and excursions to Portballintrae and Lough Neagh.

Since Harty's personal aesthetic beliefs promoted nature as the source of inspiration, simplicity to express beauty, and distaste of the avant-garde's technical complexity it is not surprising that his programmes offered more popular music or, more accurately, music that was considered easier to assimilate, at the expense of the intellectually challenging music favoured by some music critics. Consequently, Wagner, Strauss, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Berlioz, Dvořák, Elgar and Mozart were firm favourites among the Hallé audiences (see Appendix on pages 22-23).

In fact, Harty believed the dichotomy between the musical tastes of audiences and music critics could even be seen in the case of Berlioz. He alleged that the lukewarm appreciation of Berlioz's music from English musicians and critics, which contrasted with the public's positive attitude, was due to fewer preconceived prejudices on the part of the listener and the inability of many professional musicians to approach Berlioz from a purely poetic standpoint:

Berlioz was a poet first and a musician afterwards; or perhaps it would be better to say that he used music as a means of illustrating literary and pictorial ideas which often, in themselves have no obvious connection with music or musical expression. Very little of his music, indeed, would seem to be thoroughly satisfying if considered as purely abstract music... rather he endeavoured to write music which should express scenes, pictures, literary and poetic images, emotions and states of feeling.⁴⁴

According to Harty, most musicians base their theories of what is good music on techniques employed by the great masters and because Berlioz lies outside of this conventional territory, with no immediate

⁴² Sir Hamilton Harty, 'The Modern Orchestra: Woodwinds and Horns', Special Collections at Queen's University, Belfast, MS14/29ii, 2.

⁴³ P. J. Pirie, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1979), 47.

⁴⁴ See Sir Hamilton Harty, 'The Problem of Berlioz', Special Collections at Queen's University, Belfast, MS14/29xii, 2-3 for the full text. In his article 'On Listening to Music' Harty labelled composers 'men with great human feelings which they fashion and smooth and coerce into sound-pictures', see, Sir Hamilton Harty, 'On Listening to Music', Special Collections at Queen's University, Belfast, MS14/29vii, 2. Such a description can be seen as a tribute to Berlioz who used of music to illustrate pictorial ideas.

predecessors or descendants, they are unable to appreciate his isolated genius.⁴⁵ Harty compared Berlioz to an architect who without any expert guidance was able to design and build his own buildings with bricks and scaffolding he created himself. Thus, Harty argued that any faults on the part of Berlioz should be measured against the ‘inexact instruments which were all he had to check his dimensions’.⁴⁶ Harty also believed that to fully appreciate his compositions one has to understand the moods that provoked Berlioz into creating such music. While it is possible to listen to other composers without any knowledge of personal events surrounding their works Harty proposed this was not the case with Berlioz as he was inspired by purely literary ideas.⁴⁷ Therefore, far from endearing listeners to his music, this approach, which Harty advised for all composers, would require a degree of scholarly effort by the audiences themselves, perhaps contradicting his beliefs that listeners should be able to appreciate great music without any particular training. Even if one accepts Harty’s argument it still seems remarkable that the ordinary concert-going public displayed an incredible willingness, apparently absent in professional musicians and critics of the time, to seek a deeper meaning in Berlioz’s music by studying his life and accepting his music in purely programmatic terms. Nevertheless, Harty cites an example of where an understanding of Berlioz’s personal life is needed to properly appreciate his music, namely the *idée fixe* in his *Symphonie Fantastique*, Harty’s favourite composition, inspired by Berlioz’s famous infatuation for the Irish actress Harriet Smithson:

From an abstract point of view it does not give the impression of much beauty or significance, nor does the disjointed accompaniment seem to fit it very well. But look at it again from Berlioz’s point of view. It is a portrait of his beloved and unattainable Henriette [sic]. He tries by means of the long high floating lines of the melody to give an idea of her grace and purity, and the agitated, almost grotesque, accompaniment with which it is contrasted seems to emphasise the gulf which he felt lay between him and the beautiful object of his desire.⁴⁸

The criticisms Harty received for his populist beliefs in music appreciation also reflect the criticisms of vulgarity that Elgar faced. What may have been described as ‘vulgar’ in the eyes of critics and the musical establishment at the time was perhaps the very thing which maintained Elgar as the most popular composer in the hearts and minds of the British public even after his decline from post-war concert programmes. In their study, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840–1940: Constructing a National Music*, Hughes and Stradling hinted at this possibility:

Elgar, so often hurt by the jibe that his origins were tainted with “trade” and that his music was vulgar and compromised by populism... asserted ‘Vulgarity may in the course of time be refined. Vulgarity

⁴⁵ Sir Hamilton Harty, ‘The Problem of Berlioz’, Special Collections at Queen’s University, Belfast MS14/29xi, 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

often goes with inventiveness, and it can take the initiative'. As Elgar's popularity grew, so did criticisms of his vulgarity, especially after his challenge from Birmingham to the official English musical renaissance. Elgar suggested that the future lay in 'democratising music by attracting "a sixpenny audience" and a "larger public" drawn from the "working classes"'. South Kensington had been too elitist, too concerned to write music for itself, too little regarding of the broader public.⁴⁹

The fact that both Harty and Elgar had such similar aesthetic ideologies may be rooted in the similar musical experiences with which both men had grown up. They came from lower middle-class backgrounds in the provinces and neither received 'proper' music training. In fact, Elgar and Harty were essentially self-taught: Elgar's training came from playing, composing and studying the scores in his father's music shop while Harty did the same with his father's music library at home. The fact that in later life Elgar also relied on the support of his upper-class wife, Caroline Alice Roberts, to help establish his reputation and overcome his social disadvantages demonstrates another striking similarity with Harty's relationship with Agnes Nicholls. The suffocating class system and elitism which Harty and Elgar had to contend with in late Victorian Britain and Ireland is nowhere better demonstrated than by the appointment of Hubert Parry as Professor of Composition and Music History at the RCM. Despite the fact that Parry had yet to prove himself as a composer it was his social credentials that recommended him 'since a more gentlemanly image was needed and as the Earl of Pembroke's brother-in-law he was a decided asset'.⁵⁰ Such a class-conscious society made it that more difficult for unknown and unconnected musicians like Harty and Elgar to establish themselves

Indeed, Harty's populist views on music appreciation proves that he too was at odds with the elitism upheld by the musical establishment and members of the press, despite the fact that both Harty and Elgar craved the awards and accolades which were given to them by the establishment later in their careers. The fact that Harty's programmes largely ignored the post-war pastoralism (which had evolved out of Stanford's pre-war English folk-song movement) could be the result of his isolation from the academic schools in London during his education and career with the Hallé. The oligarch model put forward by Hughes and Stradling is a useful example to demonstrate the elitism Harty faced, particularly the self-promotion and exclusivity of the pre-war folk song movement at the Royal College of Music, and might also suggest a possible reason for Harty's continued neglect by commentators.

Using aesthetics, the oligarchic elite, in this case the RCM, are concerned with the appraisal of individuals, styles, forms, idioms, genres, academic curricula and performance repertoires. They use their aesthetic judgments to justify the position of every stone in the pyramid of musical life in Britain

⁴⁹ M. Hughes and R. Stradling (eds), *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 68, 70.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

including the admission of new members at the bottom, the promotion of ‘Great’ composers to the top and the categorisation and labelling of music throughout.⁵¹ Once they make their decisions they are ‘imposed on the consuming public through, what for over a century was known, quite candidly, as “the training of taste,” operating through concert programming, press treatment [particularly using their allies like Fuller Maitland and H. C. Colles in *The Times*] and organised music appreciation’.⁵²

The rules they use to decide are, allegedly, intangible. They are also infallible because of retrospective self-correction, as in the case of Mahler whose genius was finally widely accepted after World War II. This extrinsic argument is based on standards of production (composers) and standards of performances (executants), which are analysed by a ‘self appointed and self-perpetuating oligarchy system’. Members of the oligarchy ‘can support and advance homophonic, chauvinistic, elitist or nationalistic beliefs, like English folksong and pastoralism, while hiding behind the screen of “objective” appraisal’.

In 1920 the composer and suffragist Ethyl Smith protested that ‘for an English composer, success depends entirely upon being taken up by the Machine. I always felt that the public liked my work when they had the chance to hear it... but it was frowned upon by the Faculty’.⁵³ In applying this model to Harty, an outsider to the English musical renaissance, it is not surprising that composers like Elgar, Walton and Bax received more attention in Harty’s programmes than the folksong offerings by Vaughan Williams, Holst and Butterworth. Theirs were composing styles more continental and were supported by non-London based traditions of criticisms, particularly the *Manchester Guardian*,

Although Harty was not completely innocent from participating in the oligarchic system, since he too wished to educate the public in the classics — or more accurately, what *he* believed to be the classics — it could be argued that his approach was a lot less condescending and corruptible given that his was based on a two-way system which responded to, and relied on, the demands of the people. Thus, the content of Harty’s programmes was the result of financial pragmatism and pressure from below, not from the press or the musical establishment above. Indeed, Harty’s approach was much more democratic, adopting a policy of ‘live and let live’:

One might divide musicians into two camps... those whose appreciation and enjoyment is largely determined by the amount of purely intellectual satisfaction they get from it, and those whose outlook is of a more emotional and instinctive nature. The great thing is to realise to which camp one naturally belongs. And to be true first of all to one’s own temperament without being so narrow as to think that others are necessarily wrong in being true to theirs. It is really only unpleasant hypocrisy to pretend to

⁵¹ Ibid., xv.

⁵² Ibid., xv–xvi.

⁵³ Ibid., xvi.

be thrilled by any music just because most people regard it as great. It is possible to be a good musician and yet to be indifferent to a good deal of even such a towering genius as Bach.⁵⁴

When William L. Norman publicly criticised Harty in *The Musical Times* for his neglect of modern composers he legitimised his position by claiming that ‘it is common knowledge that it is not just a small minority but a large and increasing body of opinion which is dissatisfied with the Hallé programmes’.⁵⁵ The receipts from the Manchester concerts, however, tell a very different story and reveal that Harty’s popularity with the Manchester audiences never diminished during his time with Hallé and actually increased as the seasons progressed.⁵⁶ Only in his last two seasons did receipts for Manchester concerts fall dramatically, and even then only to the same level as when he first joined the Hallé, but again this was due more to the 1929 crash and the subsequent depression than to Harty’s programming. Harty coped with these financial difficulties by restricting the variety of composers he presented but he always maintained a high level of living composers in his programmes – a courageous decision despite the annual deficits from 1930 to 1933 and the consequent reduction in income from Manchester concerts by 14%.

Furthermore, despite calls from press, music critics, and some regular Hallé concert goers like William Norman, most of the public in post-war Manchester was still extremely wary of the avant-garde being performed. The summary of expenses for the Manchester concerts reveal that the biggest crowd puller throughout all of Harty’s thirteen seasons was still Handel’s *Messiah*, performed twice every Christmas, and which accounted for over £1,000 in receipts in nearly every season. In other words, the *Messiah* was responsible for roughly 67% of the annual profits for the regular Hallé series, rising to a staggering 96% of the 1931-1932 season. In every season the *Messiah* could be considered a financial lifesaver which the Hallé relied on to stay solvent. In contrast, concerts which contained new works tended to attract somewhere between the average and the lowest number of receipts for the season depending on how modern the composer was — a clear indication of the ultra-conservative tastes of the Hallé audiences. Some compositions, like the premiere of Bantock’s *Song of Songs*, 10 March 1927, and the premiere of Lambert’s *Rio Grande*, 12 December 1929, did attract larger crowds but they still could not financially compete with the money made by Wagner Evenings and the *Messiah* concerts.

The financial risks of new works can be seen when Harty gave the English premiere of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony on 27 February 1930, seventeen years after its world premiere in Vienna in 1912. Harty

⁵⁴ Sir Hamilton Harty ‘Brahms: Variations on a theme by Haydn’, Special Collections at Queen’s University, Belfast, MS14/29 viii, 10.

⁵⁵ MT, Vol. 70 (Jul., 1929), 639.

⁵⁶ Receipts from Manchester concerts during Harty’s tenure rose from £7,008 in his first season to an average of £8,880 from 1921 to 1927, and finally peaking from 1927 to 1931 with an average of £9,740. It worth noting, however, that from 1926 onwards these figures include money the Hallé made from recording sessions with Columbia.

conducted it alongside well-known works like Berlioz's Overture to *Beatrice and Benedict*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumble Bee* and Smetana's Overture to *The Bartered Bride*. But despite having these familiar works to entice audiences the concert was responsible for a loss of £121, the second largest of the season and the equivalent of in today's money. There were only two concerts that accumulated bigger losses. The first was a choral evening on 21 November, which included Rachmanninov's *The Bells*, Kodaly's *Psalmus Hungaricus* and Dvorak's *Te Deum*, all first performances at the Hallé concerts, and the second was an orchestral evening on 5 December which included the Hallé premiere of Sibelius's Symphony No.4 in A minor alongside well known pieces like Brahms's 'Variations on a Theme by Haydn', Elgar's 'Introduction and Allegro' and Schubert's Overture to *Rosamunde*. All of these works, performed during the 1929–1930 season, occurred during the peak of Harty's career; financially, artistically and in terms of his popularity with audiences.

The 1929–1930 season contained fifteen Manchester premieres, one world premiere, one English premiere and 42% of the season was also devoted to living composers, which is possibly the highest level in the history of the orchestra to date. Despite so many new works, the attendance level was also the highest of Harty's career averaging around 70% and the season ended with a £91 profit overall. Therefore, the financial failure of Mahler's Ninth, Sibelius's Fourth, Kodaly's *Psalmus Hungaricus* and Rachmanninov's *The Bells* in such a prosperous season can only mean that such works were not particularly desired by the public and were extremely financially risky for the Hallé to perform.

The English premiere of Shostakovich's First Symphony on 21 January 1932, the Manchester premiere of Prokofiev's March and Scherzo from the suite *The Love of Three Oranges* on 21 February 1929, the Manchester premiere of his Piano Concerto No.3 in C on 6 November 1930, and the Manchester premiere of Bartok's Dance Suite on 14 January 1926, all tell a similar story. Even Vaughan Williams was a financial risk in Manchester, demonstrating the heavy Germanic tradition of the city which had been established by Richter and Balling and supported by the *Manchester Guardian*. The Hallé premiere of *The Wasps* Overture and the Manchester premieres of *The Sea Symphony* and *The Norfolk Rhapsody* all raised among the lowest number of receipts for their respective seasons.⁵⁷ Without the support of the public and with no adequate local or national funding, criticisms for the neglect of such works seem unwarranted considering Harty and the Hallé executive had to avoid the financial risk of producing too many works which, for the wider public, were undesirable. The fact that he performed them at all during

⁵⁷ The Hallé premiere of *The Wasps* Overture (8 March 1923) was the third lowest attended concert that season with only £314.9.3 raised in receipts. The Manchester premiere of *The Sea Symphony* (1 November 1923) was just as unsuccessful with only £306.0.7 raised in receipts (the lowest that season), as was the Manchester premiere of *The Norfolk Rhapsody* (27 October 1927) with only £306.11.6 raised in receipts (third lowest that season). New works by Vaughan Williams appeared to be financially disastrous for the Hallé.

such difficult economic circumstances gives credit to his courage and abilities as a conductor. Harty had the financial and the democratic right to withhold such risky works from the Hallé programmes.

Standards

When Harty was criticised yet again in *The Musical Times* for neglecting modern composers the author, who choose to remain anonymous, was incorrect when he stated ‘Is it not the plain fact that beyond the immediate neighbourhood of Manchester the Society is gradually declining from the proud position held in former days?’⁵⁸ In fact, under Harty, the Hallé Society’s reputation was never higher. When the Hallé Orchestra visited London on 13 January 1928, Clifford Rees, author of the first history of the Hallé, wrote:

Those of us who lived in London were always hearing about the prowess of the Manchester Orchestra; and there was, I think, a certain amount of natural jealousy on the part of the Londoners (perhaps one should say ‘Southerners’) concerning the ‘competition’ from the North... Domiciled in London, I had the opportunities to hear the London orchestras week after week; professionally I was a member of the London editorial staff of the Manchester *Daily Dispatch*, so that I could not help feeling a more than casual interest in the affairs of the Hallé. This particular concert [13 January 1928] evoked tremendous enthusiasm from the audience and a series of press notices which, for exuberant praise, I have seldom seen equalled. The unanimous view was that London had not an orchestra to equal this; moreover, comparison was made with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (fairly regular visitors) – and in favour of the Hallé; there was no need anymore, it was said, to go abroad to hear superb orchestral performances.⁵⁹

Such views on the standards of the Hallé were not uncommon and many voiced the opinion that the Hallé Orchestra under Harty had become the best in Britain. The programme for this concert included Mozart’s Symphony No.40 in G minor, Beethoven’s Symphony No.5 in C minor, Wagner’s *Forest Murmurs* (*Siegfried*, Act II), Wotan’s Farewell (*Die Walküre*, Act III) and *Sachs’s Monologue* (*Die Meistersingers*, Act III) sung by Harold Williams. *The Times* stated:

In offering such a programme Sir Hamilton Harty and his players were aware that a high standard would be expected of them. They gave it, and they sustained it... This concert of well-worn music was fresh, poetical and exhilarating. Masterpieces ought to sound like that but they often do not for reasons which are understandable but let us now be grateful to interpreters who do not appeal to our curiosity but make us deeply content with every note that we know so well. For that is indeed an all too rare experience.⁶⁰

Indeed in his revised history of the Hallé, published in 1982, Kennedy stated that ‘There is no question — and some re-issue of some of his recordings proves it — that he made the Hallé into the best

⁵⁸ MT, Vol. 70 (Mar., 1929), 262–266.

⁵⁹ Rees, *100 Years of the Hallé*, 62.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 14 January 1928, 10.

orchestra in the kingdom and that the formation of the BBC orchestra and of the London Philharmonic by Beecham in 1932 were London's reply to this northern supremacy'.⁶¹ This suggests that those who continuously criticised Harty did occasionally forget how lucky they were to have a first-class permanent conductor who could offer fresh interpretations of the standard repertoire. Examples of Harty's fresh approach to standard classics were his exceptional interpretations of Brahms. Both Langford and Cardus at the *Manchester Guardian* thought him unsurpassed in conducting this composer's music. Where Brahms had often been previously played in a heavy, sluggish, 'academic' fashion, Harty showed audiences his warmth, lyricism and grace.⁶² However, it should be noted that Harty was not an admirer of all aspects of Brahms's music:

Friends of mine there are who can worship Brahms with impartiality through all the length and breadth of his works; and I sometimes find it hard to share all their transports. The Brahms I most sympathise with is what perhaps I may call Brahms of Resignation – the Brahms of the grey, level serenity of such a work as the "Requiem".⁶³

The frequency of Wagner in Harty's programmes disguises the fact that he also had reservations about the composer's genius and sometimes felt 'a mechanical process at work' in Wagner's music and a lack of intuition, which, in Harty's opinion, placed him below Berlioz. Despite such doubts Harty gave critically acclaimed interpretations of Wagner's music: 'He may have been acceding to public demands in devoting whole evenings to Wagner, but he gave everything with a marvellous sense of dramatic import, and with the full musical value accorded to every "mechanical process" he carried the whole audience with him'.⁶⁴ Such balanced views of two giants in the orchestral canon allowed room for Harty's catholic tastes to develop. Some of the most positive reviews Harty received for his conducting (far too many to list here) reveal as much about his catholic tastes as they do about the versatility of the Hallé Orchestra. They included performances of Debussy's *Prelude a L'Après-midi d'un faune*, Beethoven's Fifth, Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, Dvořák's *New World Symphony*, Mozart's Overture to *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Ravel's *Rhapsodie Espagnole*, and notable interpretations of Tchaikovsky, Strauss and Wagner. His promotion of Sibelius, Respighi, Glazunov and performances of lesser known composers like, Pizzetti, Leoncavallo, Giordani, Nováček and Svendsen also provide further evidence of Harty's catholicity.

⁶¹ M. Kennedy, *The Hallé 1858–1983: A History of the Orchestra* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 14. In the preface to this book, Kennedy admits that 'I have also been conscious that perhaps I dealt less than generously last time with Harty's contribution and I have tried to rectify this', see Kennedy, *The Hallé 1858–1983*, vii.

⁶² Kennedy, *The Hallé 1858–1983*, 17.

⁶³ MT, Vol. 61 (Apr., 1920), 229.

⁶⁴ J. F. Russell, *Music & Letters*, Vol. 22 (Jul., 1941), 220.

Conclusion

Harty's popular appeal, coupled with his ability to raise and maintain the standards of the orchestra, whilst negotiating extremely difficult financial obstacles makes him one of the most important British conductors of the 1920s. Although orchestras in London were comparatively responsible for more new works by major continental and British composers, this should not be the only factor in measuring a conductor's worth. It could be argued that the Hallé's geographical isolation from the London conservatories and its relatively minor role in the English Musical Renaissance (not to mention Harty's absence from the conservatories during his education and the ultra conservative tastes of an economically pre-occupied industrial city) meant that the appeal of the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, at least for British composers, was limited. The Hallé's isolation from the developments taking place in the English Musical Renaissance in London meant that it did not enjoy the same consideration from British composers who had studied either in the Royal Academy of Music or the Royal College of Music and who tended to use annual Festivals, the LSO, the Proms,⁶⁵ or the BBC orchestras as the springboard to launch their careers or to perform a new work — Elgar's promotion in Manchester under Hans Richter and Harty, and the support he received from the *Manchester Guardian*, gives further evidence for this.

In fact, all the London-based orchestras and conductors benefited from close relationships with most British composers, many of whom lived and worked in the London area and knew each other personally through the conservatories and had huge support in the press. Therefore, in spite of changes brought about by the collapse of Edwardian society the 'old-boy' network was still very prevalent in post-war London and, as a result, the provinces and the Hallé were usually one step behind the capital. The atmosphere of artistic experimentalism, such as it was in Britain, and resulting excitement and anticipation among audiences may have been higher in London in comparison to the Manchester tradition which was quite conservative in outlook and saw Elgar and Strauss as the future of music.

Nevertheless, once we examine orchestral standards, economic success and popular appeal it becomes clear that the Hallé during Harty's time was unsurpassed in Britain. Although Harty's aesthetic beliefs were the chief cause for the lack of avant-garde composers in the Hallé's programmes, it is doubtful if any other conductor could have successfully offered avant-garde music at the Hallé during the 1920s. The financial restrictions placed on the orchestra by the guarantee system and the conservative tastes of the Manchester public made it extremely difficult for avant-garde music to be given a proper hearing in the Hallé concerts, regardless of the aesthetic tastes of its conductor. In addition, the reckless finances of

⁶⁵ The support that Henry Wood had from the London academies is evident by letters to *The Times* editor from the heads of the Royal Academy and Royal College who called for the establishment of a private fund for Wood to '[use] at his sole discretion' to enable 'more time to rehearse than could be allowed by the prevailing conditions of management', see J. B. McEwen and H. P. Allen, 'Letters to the Editor: The Promenades: A Rehearsal Fund', *The Times*, 31 October 1925, 8 and 'Sir Henry Wood', *The Times*, 31 October 1925, 13, quoted in Doctor and Wright, *The Proms: A New History*, 296.

the management of the Queen's Hall Orchestra, the limited series of concerts that the LSO could offer, and the significant funding which the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra received from its council give an alternative view of the enviably secure and independent position held by Harty and the Hallé Orchestra during the 1920s. By giving repeated and fresh performances of works from the established canon Harty not only ensured that the standards of the Hallé Orchestra were unmatched in Britain but also made classical music more appealing to the wider public and in doing so, ensured the survival of the orchestra as an autonomous society through difficult economic times. It is by these criteria that Harty's legacy with the Hallé Orchestra should also be judged.

Appendix

Table 1: *Hallé Finances 1920–1933*

Season	Profit	Deficit
1920–1921		£1,527 12s 0d
1921–1922	£30 6s 1d	
1922–1923	£124 5s 8d	
1923–1924		£258 12s 10d
1924–1925	£77 5s 8d	
1925–1926	£57 1s 6d	
1926–1927		£712 11s 9d
1927–1928	£139 15s 6d	
1928–1929	£146 10s 7d	
1929–1930	£91 0s 9d	
1930–1931		£310 17s 7d
1931–1932		£1,583 17s 10d
1932–1933		£737 5s 5d

Figure 1: *Top ten composers during Harty’s thirteen seasons*

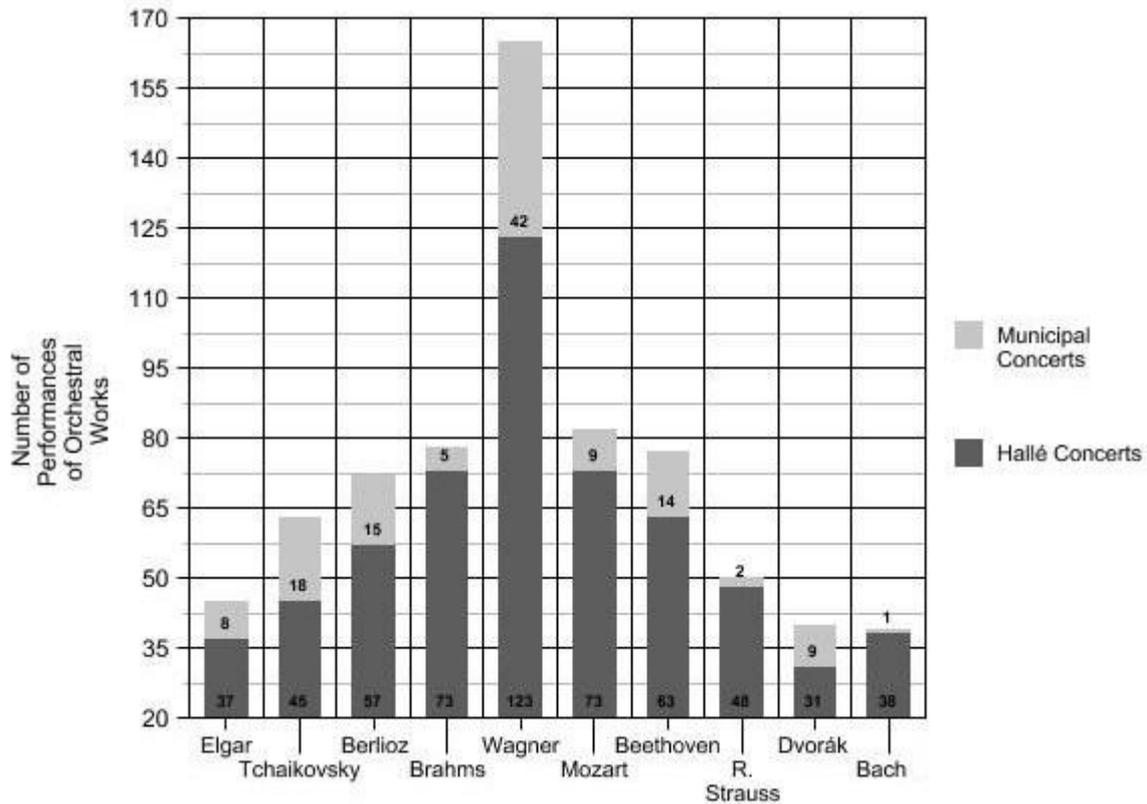


Figure 2: Top ten compositions during Harty's thirteen seasons (excluding Wagner)

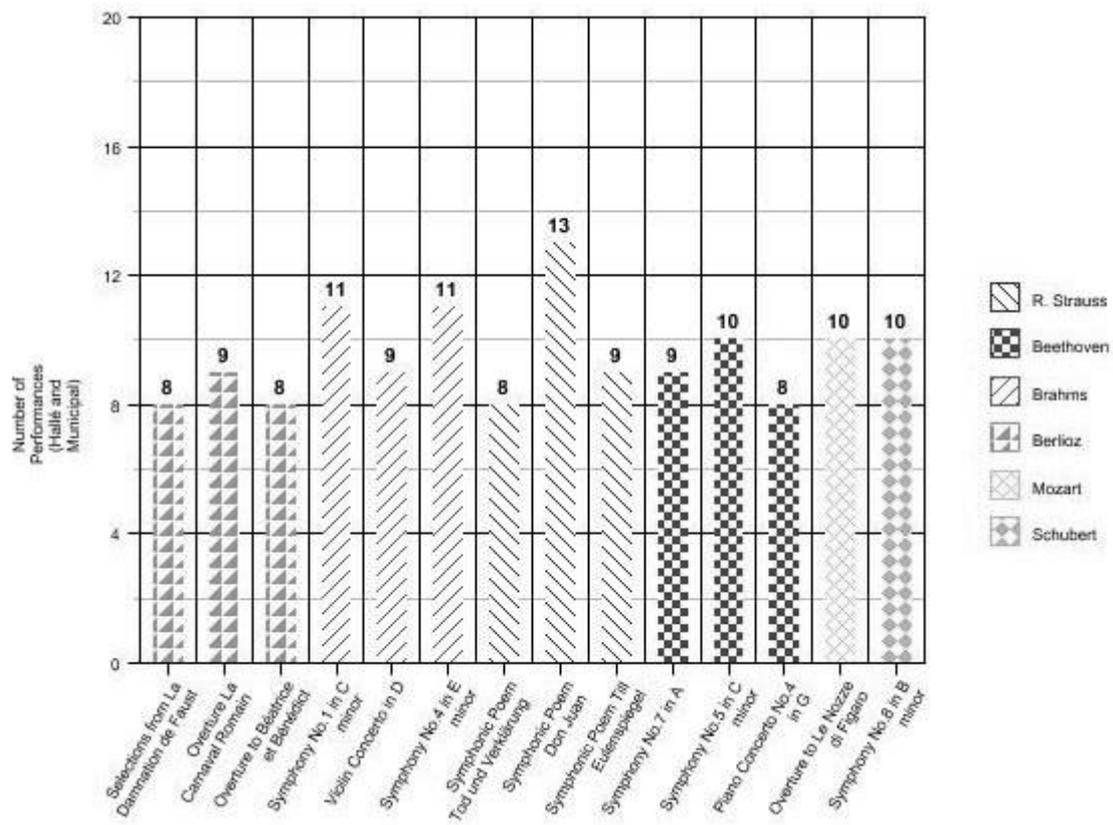


Figure 3: Top ten compositions by Wagner during Harty's thirteen seasons

