Melody
for Orchestra
Opus 13 - 1848

George W.L. Marshall-Hall
1862 – 1915

Edited by
Richard Divall

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Introduction

G W L. Marshall-Hall was born in Hyde Park, London in 1862 and died in Melbourne on 18 July 1915. Born into a medical family, Marshall-Hall studied from the age of sixteen at Kings College, London, and then in Montreux in Switzerland. Destined for the civil service, he decided on music as a career. From 1880 studied in Berlin, before returning to London in 1882 to further study at the Royal College of Music, where his teachers included Sir Hubert Parry and Frederick Bridge. The then Director of the College, Sir George Grove, recognised his talent and his wide interest in literature and in the history of music. He was a man with an ‘inquiring turn of mind’ and ‘there is some evidence of a temper of no mean order’. He was beginning to make a mark for himself as a composer in England, but in 1887 an advertisement appeared for the position of the inaugural Ormond Professor of Music at The University of Melbourne. His application for the position was successful, and he arrived in Melbourne in January 1891 to take up the post. He quickly established a reputation for bohemianism, and as a musician who could inspire both as a teacher and a conductor. His concert programming was adventurous and demanding and his compositional output ranged from two operas to symphonic, orchestral tone poems, chamber works and many songs.

His success was tempered by the publication of a series of provocative poems under the title of Hymns Ancient and Modern, which inflamed the Anglican establishment. Although not devoid of defenders, Marshall-Hall’s tenure as professor was not renewed in 1900. But after a long period of controversy, he was eventually re-appointed as Ormond Professor in July 1914, only one year before his untimely death one year later. His career and music are well examined in Dr Therese Radic’s excellent study G.W.L. Marshall-Hall A Biography and Catalogue (Melbourne: The Marshall-Hall Trust, 2002).

Marshall-Hall had shown support for the young Percy Grainger, and in 1938 Grainger repaid the debt by purchasing Marshall-Hall’s scores from his widow and only son. They are now housed in The Grainger Museum at The University of Melbourne. His grandson, Marshall-Hall Inman bequeathed a sum that provided the resources for the setting up of The Marshall-Hall Trust, which publishes and supports the performance and research into Australia’s earlier music.

Melody for Orchestra survives in a set of orchestral parts. No full score is known and sadly so, for an orchestration list on the original envelope that holds the set of parts calls for an ensemble larger than the parts that survive. However, there is the possibility that the work was written only for the orchestration in this score, which is certainly effective, with its reminiscences of Wagner’s Siegfried Idyll.

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Richard Divall
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