Duncan Barker

«THE KETTLE BEGAN IT!»: MACKENZIE AND STURGIS'S BRITISH VERSION OF *THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH*

In comparison with many of his British peers, the operatic education of the composer Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie (1847-1935) was notably comprehensive. He heard or played a great number of modern Continental operas, «some of them, more's the pity, hardly to be revived again. [...] The singing may not have been of the highest excellence (while it compared favourably with that to be heard on many of the more celebrated operatic stages)», he later reflected, «but ensemble and orchestra playing were as perfect as the artistic conscience could achieve»[1]. In this way Mackenzie encountered performances of a wide cross-section of late-eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century operas as detailed in his autobiography[2]. Many of these works had not yet been produced in London and he recalled that Wagner's advanced musical idiom caused little sensation in the progressive musical community of Sondershausen which noticed few extravagances «to justify the carping criticisms and objections raised»[3]. A few years later, while a pupil at the

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1 Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie, *A Musician's Narrative*, Cassell, London 1927, p. 34 - hereafter referred to as *MN* for brevity. In connection with the operatic performances in Sondershausen, Mackenzie remembered that the Fürst (Prince) had «a carriage which conveyed him each evening directly from the dining-room to his box in the [private] theatre».

2 *MN* , pp. 34-37. Mackenzie lists the following: Mozart (*Die Zauberflöte*, *Figaro*, *Die Entführung*), Beethoven (*Fidelio*), Weber (*Der Freischütz*), Boïeldieu (*Jean de Paris*, *La Dame Blanche*), Hérold (*Zampa*), Auber (*Masaniello*, *Fra Diavolo*), Wagner (*Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*), Gounod (*Faust*), Offenbach (*Orpheus*), Halévy (*La Juive*), Meyerbeer (*Robert le Diable*, *Les Huguenots*, *Dinorah*) and Rossini (*Il Barbiere*, *Guillaume Tell*).

3 *MN*, p. 36.

Royal Academy of Music in London, Mackenzie received his schooling in British opera by accepting «a short engagement as leader with George Cooper's Opera Company at Birmingham»[4]. Unusually for a Briton, Mackenzie had only really heard operas by Continental composers in performance and soon made up for this deficit in his musical knowledge. «The experience gained in playing a pair of operas nightly practically at sight (after short rehearsal), was varied and valuable»[5]. Mackenzie gained further insight into the traditions of French opera during a visit to Paris in the late 1860s[6] and he completed his cosmopolitan operatic education in the early 1880s in Italy when he and his family lived in an apartment in the Via della Pergola, Florence, a few yards away from the famous Teatro della Pergola, having attended native Italian productions of Boito's *Mefistofele* at Turin and Verdi's *Aida* at Pisa *en route*[7].

Through these musical experiences Mackenzie was exposed to the various approaches taken by composers of different national schools to the composition of opera. Influences from Germany, Italy and France proved instrumental in the formation of his own compositional voice in a genre which had developed with marked differences in terms of music and structure in each country. In a 1912 review of a revised version of his first opera *Colomba*, which acknowledges the diverse musical influences on the composer's style, Mackenzie is reported as saying that «he apparently wrote down what came naturally to him»[8]. However, it would be somewhat naïve to believe that Mackenzie had formed his operatic style independent of the Continental mainstream, especially since there were few modern precedents on which he could base a British style in the genre. His lyrical dramas of the 1880s, *Colomba* (1883) and *The Troubadour* (1886), written for the Carl Rosa Opera Company, exhibit facets of German style in the orchestral accompaniment and the methodological interpretation of the 'representative theme', French style in the orchestral episodes, imagery and use of balletic tableaux, and Italian style in the structural vocal forms, such as the aria, the ensemble finale and the scena, underpinning the continuous music. Interestingly, when asked by an interviewer in the «Musical Times» to name the work, which, in his opinion, was «the greatest opera hitherto written», Mackenzie diplomatically

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4 *MN*, p. 50.

5 *Ibid*. Mackenzie also played in the Birmingham Festivals under the direction of Costa during his Royal Academy of Music (RAM) vacations and returned there periodically until the mid-1870s.

6 *MN*, pp. 66-67.

7 *MN*, p. 99.

evaded giving an answer to the question and, in consequence, the inevitable decision between the French and the German schools. «I have an admiration for too many different styles to answer that question. I can hear the *Magic Flute* or *Carmen*, *Faust* or *Die Meistersinger*, each with the greatest delight»[9]. Nonetheless, the whole interview in «The Musical Times» leaves the reader in no doubt that Mackenzie's operatic inclination was to the French school, as exemplified in *Faust* and especially *Carmen*, a work so close in many respects to his own *Colomba*.

Following his major, four-act works of the 1880s, Mackenzie's operatic projects of the next decade were, on the whole, smaller-scale conceptions. This approach was symptomatic of his changing views of the art-form as documented in his interview for «The Musical Times». It also serves to chronicle his attempts to find a literary partner with which he could work productively following the death of Francis Hueffer in 1889 and to complement his cantata and oratorio work with Joseph Bennett. The difficulties Mackenzie and others such as Frederic Cowen encountered working with Hueffer as a librettist are relatively well-documented in both contemporary and more recent accounts[10]. His professional relationship with Bennett was better, though privately Mackenzie was frustrated by Bennett's laid-back approach to delivering librettos for his choral works[11]. In his 1894 interview, Mackenzie deplored the lack of competent English librettists, stating that their talents need to be fostered in the same way as the abilities of native composers. He suggested that playwrights might collaborate with poets 'in French fashion' in order to produce librettos of sufficient quality for operatic treatment. Consequently, as he worked with different librettists, many of his opera scores were left incomplete and he lists these in one of the final chapters of his autobiography as «might-have-beens». They include a lost and unfinished four-act grand opera «dealing with Duke Alva and the Netherlands on a Meyerbeerian scaleplaywrights» to a libretto by an unknown author (c. 1890)[12]; a comic opera in three acts, *Phoebe*

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8 *Royal College of Music*, *Performance of Mackenzie's* Colomba, «The Musical Times», 1 January 1913, p. 18. «The Musical Times» is hereafter referred to by the abbreviation MT.

9 *Musical Times Interviews. No. 1: Dr Mackenzie on opera*, MT, 1 January 1894, pp. 11-13.

10 Duncan Barker, *The Music of Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie (1847-1935): A critical study*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 1999, p. 55.

11 *Ivi*, pp. 115-118.

12 The only evidence for the existence of this opera is given by the composer himself in *MN* under the list of his «might-have-beens» (*MN*, p. 243).

(1893-4), with a book by B. C. Stephenson which was «completed and – shelved»; a partly-written opera, *Le Luthier de Crémone* (c.1894), which was abandoned when the libretto, translated by Sutherland Edwards from François Coppée's original play, was lost; and a one-act opera based on a Cornish theme (c.1896), on which he worked with his RAM colleague Frederick Corder and which was fully sketched in short-score[13]. From this period of abandoned and lost works, it was only his Savoy opera, *His Majesty or the Court of Vingolia* (1897), to a libretto by Francis Burnand and Rudolph Lehmann, which eventually reached the stage. Despite its generally-commended music and its run of 61 performances at the Savoy Theatre, *His Majesty* was always going to pale in comparison with the works of the legendary partnership of Gilbert and Sullivan[14].

For his final operatic project of the century, Mackenzie drove a middle course between the seriousness of his earlier lyrical dramas and the comic excesses of the Savoy to produce *The Cricket on the Hearth*, based on one of Dickens's *Christmas Books*. Although he had no direct connection with Dickens or his family, Mackenzie noted in his autobiography that

> I had the good luck to see the great author on two occasions. Once, in my RAM days, I stalked him closely from Oxford Street to the end of Wardour Street, and noted that – probably in search of material for the concoction of those queer names he loved – his attention was concentrated on the signboards. A waistcoat of assertively reddish hue also impressed me. And again, at a respectful distance, when he visited Edinburgh on a Reading Tour[15].

The subject matter for the opera was suggested by the American-born barrister and writer Julian Sturgis (1848-1904) to whom Mackenzie had applied for a libretto. Known as both an athlete and an aesthete during his formal education, Sturgis took his experiences at Eton and Oxford to launch his career as a writer, using these as the basis of a

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13 See discussion of these works and their surviving sources in BARKER, *The music...*, pp. 151-158.

14 SELWYN TILLETT, His Majesty *or the dead end of comic opera*, *in* Mirette *and* His Majesty*: A study of two Savoy Operas*, The Sir Arthur Sullivan Society, Coventry 1996 and BARKER, *The Music...*, pp. 158-63.

15 *MN*, pp. 55-56. Mackenzie also notes that the writer's elder sister, Fanny Dickens (1810-1848), was one of the first students at the Royal Academy of Music. «The pleasant legend has it that her famous brother (about twelve) frequently waited in the hall to take her out on Saturdays».

number of light comic novels – *John-a-Dreams* (1878), *An Accomplished Gentleman* (1879), and *Little Comedies* (1880) – written in his late twenties and early thirties. During the 1880s he must have caught the attention of Carl Rosa and his circle, since he combined forces with the composer Arthur Goring Thomas, providing him with the libretto for his opera *Nadeshda* (1885), the second such work that Thomas had provided for Rosa and his company[16]. Writing about this period, the music critic Hermann Klein noted, «If I had to fix a date in the history of the Carl Rosa enterprise when the fortunes of what we now call British opera stood at their rosiest, I should name the spring of 1885. That year saw the production, on April 16th, of Goring Thomas's second opera, Nadeshda». He also went on to describe Sturgis's libretto for the work as «one of the most poetic and elegant in the English language»[17]. Through his work on *Nadeshda*, it was inevitable that Sturgis would encounter his next operatic collaborator and Goring Thomas's former composition teacher at the RAM, Sir Arthur Sullivan, for whom he adapted Sir Walter Scott's novel, *Ivanhoe*. Indeed, the suggestion that Sullivan should work with Sturgis came from none other than Gilbert himself. «From me, the press and the public will take nothing but what is, in essence, humorous. The best serious librettist of the day is Julian Sturgis. Why not write a grand opera with him? *My* work in that direction would be, deservedly or otherwise, generally pooh-poohed»[18]. The production of *Ivanhoe* in 1891 was Sullivan's only foray into grand opera and was used to spearhead the opening Richard D'Oyly Carte's Royal English Opera House on Cambridge Circus[19].

The British musical establishment kept a keen eye on Carte's grand operatic project. It was one of a succession of attempts during the late nineteenth century to establish a National Opera House in London, a campaign of which Mackenzie, Sullivan and Charles Villiers Stanford, all of whom collaborated with Sturgis as a librettist, were staunch allies[20]. «Thrice I took an active part in fruitless endeavours to establish

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16 The previous opera was *Esmeralda* (1883) produced to a libretto by Theo Marzials and Alberto Randegger.

17 Hermann Klein, *Musicians and Mummers*, Cassell, London 1925, p. 108.

18 Letter from W. S. Gilbert to Arthur Sullivan dated 20 February 1889 and reproduced in Arthur Jacobs, *Arthur Sullivan*, *A Victorian Musician*, 2nd ed., Ashgate, Aldershot 1992, p. 288.

19 Subsequently renamed the Palace Theatre.

20 In his *Studies and Memories* (A. Constable, London 1908) Stanford published a persuasive chapter devoted to the subject which detailed the history of various projects and rationalised the request for a National Opera house into three por-

National Opera», Mackenzie later wrote[21]. «On the first occasion Rosa had architect's plans for a permanent home prepared, and armed with these, we gained admission to the Mansion House without any result». Rosa's subsequent death in 1889, which was a considerable blow both for his own Company and for British opera in general, delayed any further representations on the subject to the City, Government or the newly-created London County Council, consolidated by the Local Government Act of 1888. It was not until 1898, following the lightning success and failure of Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* in 1891, that another attempt to lobby the authorities on the matter of National Opera was made. «Again, the chairmanship of an exceptionally representative committee, backed by favourable public opinion, imposed many months' work upon me, as well as the privilege of presenting a petition to the London County Council and of being well heckled on that occasion». The committee of nineteen, headed by Mackenzie and including Sullivan among others, presented its petition signed by 140 distinguished people to the LCC on 27 June 1898, and it was referred to the General Purposes Committee. Supplementary evidence was also submitted in support by other interested parties and experts such as Richard D'Oyly Carte, James Mapleson, and Hans Richter. Despite an extremely strong case and a deputation headed by Mackenzie to report on the subject, the Committee recommended in its conclusions delivered almost a year later in May 1899 that it would not advise the creation of an opera house, but favoured the encouragement of higher forms of art in London by the State or the Municipality[22]. Although one of the central arguments of the case was that the National Opera House would need «the provision of a repertoire to obviate reliance on the success — or other — of a single opera», the case study provided by the failure of *Ivanhoe* was often quoted in opposition to their request. «"If Sullivan could not keep the Palace Theatre open, how can you expect to do so?" This was the burden of the song», reported Mackenzie[23].

Despite the popularity of Dickens during the nineteenth century,

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tions: a site, a building and a subvention. He also made comparisons with the amount the Government spent on the other arts in the form of the National Galleries in London and the British Library.

21 *MN*, p. 172.

22 See Eric Walter White, *A History of English Opera*, Faber&Faber, London 1983, p. 329 ff.

23 MN, p. 172. Carte's English Opera House, latterly known as the Palace Theatre of Varieties, was the same theatre in which Mackenzie's opera *The Knights of the Road* was premiered in 1905.

there had yet to be produced in English an opera based on one of his novels or short stories until Mackenzie and Sturgis chose *The Cricket on the Hearth* for their collaboration. The possible reasons for the lack of Dickens operas are discussed at length by David Chandler in his recent article on *The Cricket*, where he also provides a comprehensive examination of the dramatic potential of the story itself[24]. In Mackenzie's words, Sturgis considered *The Cricket on the Hearth* «a promising subject for a wholesome and lively English comic opera [and] the amiable author of *Nadeshda* and *Ivanhoe* could hardly have been induced to employ his pen so devotedly to the project by any expectation of financial gain»[25]. The idea for the opera must have taken root in the mid-1890s, probably before the production of *His Majesty*, since Mackenzie remarks on Goldmark's use of the same novel for his *Heimchen am Herde* (Berlin, June 1896) to a libretto by Willner. Before his untimely death in the same year Augustus Harris had visited the Continent to hear Goldmark's setting of the opera. Obviously anxious about using the same literary material for an opera, Mackenzie remembered that «To my questions regarding its merits, the experienced impresario replied: "There isn't any cricket, and the hearth is a German stove!" A tersely-expressed verdict which seems to have been verified»[26].

The composer recalls that both he and Sturgis «worked harmoniously together *con e per l'amore*»[27] on the score, suggesting that Mackenzie had at last found a librettist with whom he could happily work. Indeed, Sturgis's agreeable manner and professional approach to writing seem to have enabled him to work competently and effectively with the large and sometimes demanding personalities of composers and opera impresarios. Percy Lubbock, writing alongside Arthur C. Benson in «The Monthly Review» a few months after Sturgis's death in 1904, commented on his temperament and creativity as follows:

> Within the limits that he so carefully marked out for himself, his work is nothing less than admirable. His firm seizing of his point of view, his intimate knowledge of the people with whom he has to deal, the refreshing sense that life has forced its way into words and has not merely been laboriously written round, his limpid style, as exquisite in his occasional political and economic writings as in his creative work – even in his ear –

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[24] David Chandler, «Beef and Pie» *Fairies and Failure: The First English Dickens Opera*, «Doshisha Studies in English» 83, October 2008, pp. 39-67.
[25] *MN*, p. 206.
[26] *MN*, p. 207.
[27] *MN*, p. 206.

> liest books there is no amateurishness in all this. What he touched he did well; the bold task of adapting Scott and Shakespeare for opera he accomplished with delicate tact and judgment[28][.]

Rather than start from scratch with his libretto, Sturgis adapted much of the spoken dialogue in *The Cricket* from Dickens' original novel and supplied lyrics for the musical numbers where necessary. Two typescript copies of Sturgis's libretto of *The Cricket* (MSS 1247 and 1249) are preserved in the RAM Library as part of the Mackenzie Bequest of 1936 which also includes a working score and notes on the libretto by the composer (MS 1110) and the final full score of the work (MS 1111)[29]. The earlier of the two librettos (MS 1249) has been dated 19 April 1899 by Sturgis and, given that the final full score by Mackenzie is dated proudly 'Jan 1900' at the end, it is possible to deduce that the work took eight months in total for the composer to complete following the delivery of the book. The libretto itself contains a number of handwritten markings: enhanced stage directions, additional lines of text or alternatives for single words, directions for re-ordering existing verses[30], suggestions for moving numbers elsewhere in the drama[31], and a major alternative version of Caleb's song from Act I (No. 4: «'Tis money makes the mare to go»)[32]. The majority of these amendments were integrated into the later MS 1247, appearing in typescript, and consequently it contains far fewer handwritten markings. It is interesting to note that at this stage, having been presented with the first version of the libretto by Sturgis, Mackenzie was more concerned to ensure that the verse for the musical numbers was correct and hardly any amendments were suggested for the spoken dialogue by either man.

In addition to these markings in the working libretto, MS 1110 contains a set of more general notes on the drama in Mackenzie's hand. Written on RAM letterhead and obviously designed as a discussion

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28 Percy Lubbock and Arthur C. Benson, *Julian Sturgis*, «The Monthly Review», Vol. 16, July-Sept. 1904, pp. 111-117 (Lubbock) and pp. 117-128 (Benson).

29 In addition, there are other similar typescript versions of the libretto in the Library's main collection which may well date from the RAM's production of the work in 1914.

30 Finale, Act II: Dot: «The lark on his breast takes the glory of the morning».

31 Mackenzie suggested moving Tilly Slowboy's lullaby (Act II, No. 4) with the comment: «better in Act III immediately after John's Exit» and «better in Act 3 provides more comic work and the public would be surprised at the snatches Song of Tilly at the End». The suggested placements of the lullaby are then shown in the libretto in Act III.

32 *The Cricket on the Hearth*, vocal score, London & Leipzig, 1901, pp. 50-55.

document for Sturgis, the notes cover the entirety of the libretto[33]. Mackenzie offers not only specific comments on the length or nature of the text that Sturgis has provided («This ought to have *another verse. Too short*», referring to Edward's song in Act I), but also on the staging («How does the curtain fall? i.e. what do John and Dot do? What is the picture?», referring to the end of Act I), the distribution of musical numbers in the acts and the work as a whole («*May* has a very bad part throughout the opera. *Bertha* nothing in act III at all»), and the general nature of the material («NB: On the whole there is no lively or *comic music* in *this act*. [Act I] *Chiefly sentimental*»). His most extensive comments are reserved for the Act II finale, the dramatic crux of the opera and it is worth reproducing his notes in their entirety:

> Notes on Finale [Act II]
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> There ought to be no speaking at all till the curtain falls.
> Difficult to take up the music again after supper scene, as there is nothing to sing.
> Rather too many entrances of first Bertha fainting and secondly May. Hardly to be avoided, however.
> The ball must be kept rolling. After May's exit with Bertha and Caleb.
> Edward's conversation with Dot carried on simultaneously with something [*sic*] business for John and Tackleton (in a rage).
> (Why not keep Caleb on to brighten the scene? C. exit afterwards.)
> Fill in with something to give time for Edward and Dot to be seen. Tackleton and John must carry it on until then.
> Most foolish and risky for him to reappear with Dot. Dumb-show at window might suffice. Keep them off until they all retire.
> Words for finish. Can't make much music out of the finish.
> Tackleton sneering, John in despair[34].

These manuscript notes and the amendments to the original libretto show that Mackenzie, with his considerable experience of writing for the stage, had a significant impact on the dramatic flow of the opera throughout and did not just confine himself to providing musical settings of Sturgis's verse. It appears from these sources that there was a real professional working partnership between Sturgis and Mackenzie, with both men aiming to ensure that the drama and the music under-

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[33] Although these notes are not dated, the letterhead carries the RAM's Tenterden Street address meaning that they were written before 1911, well before the RAM moved to its new accommodation on the Marylebone Road where the first production of the opera took place in 1914.

[34] RAM, MS 1110.

pinning it are as effective as they can possibly be. As in *His Majesty*, Mackenzie's musical language in *The Cricket* represents a decided change from the elaborate through-composed structures of *Colomba*, *The Troubadour* and the incomplete operas of the mid-1890s. «Musically Mackenzie develops a sort of neoclassicism», explains Stephen Banfield, «still tonal, indeed unadventurously diatonic, but with fresh progressions, turns of phrase and part-writing»[35]. There is no doubt that the primary recommendation of this score is the lyrical accessibility of the sixteen musical numbers and the clarity of the orchestral palette used to accompany the vocal lines[36]. It is as if Mackenzie had intended the work from its inception to be performed by young voices and tailored the music to this end. The tight ensemble performance which would result from a good production of this opera is exactly the formula for which Mackenzie had been searching in his incomplete operas of the 1890s and also in *His Majesty*, though this latter work became bogged down in the literary and satirical conventions of the Savoy even before it was begun. Since the majority of *The Cricket* comprises musical numbers in the form of relatively simple ballads and songs – see Table 1 below – Mackenzie has allowed greater dramatic licence in his setting of the finales to the three acts and the melodrama at the beginning of act III, in all of which the majority of the opera's pivotal drama occurs. The finales are lengthy ensemble pieces which make use of most of the cast in some capacity, especially those of the second and third acts, reflecting the composer's previous work in *His Majesty*. At the centre of the entire opera, the finale to the second act of *The Cricket* concentrates on the picnic brought by John and Dot Peerybingle with Caleb's rousing drinking-song, «We'll drown it in the bowl», poignantly masking John's private grief at his wife's perceived infidelity[37]. In relation to this point in the story, Chandler comments that «Mackenzie, who at this point has seemed more like a talented song writer than a composer with theatrical instincts, pulls off a powerful *coup de théâtre*»[38]. This emotion is carried through into the wordless melodrama at the start of Act 3 during which John, fired with thoughts of his ruined marriage, considers attacking Edward with the old gun over his mantelpiece. Before he achieves this, John is

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35 STEPHEN BANFIELD, *The Early Renaissance - Mackenzie, Smyth and Stanford*, in *British Opera in Retrospect*, British Music Society, London 1985, pp. 63-68; 64.

36 As evidenced in the recording of the Overture, in Sir ALEXANDER MACKENZIE, *Orchestral Music*, (Hyperion Records 1995: CDA 66764).

37 *The Cricket*..., Vocal score (henceforth: vs), pp. 31-65.

38 CHANDLER, «*Beef and Pie*»..., p. 61.

calmed by the Cricket Fairy with a vision of Dot as a young girl and her words assuring him of his wife's love.

Act 1	
Overture	
No. 1	Introduction: «We be silver-footed fays» (Chorus, Fairy, Dot), p. 19.
No. 2	The Carrier's Song: «The stars above shine frosty bright» (John), p. 40
No. 3	Ballad: Hawthorn of the May: «They talk of orchid plants that grow beyond the western sea» (Edward), p. 47
No. 4	Song «The money makes the mare to go» (Caleb), p. 50
No. 5	Song «I'm not superstitious, I» (Tackleton), p. 56
Act II	
No. 1	Toy Duet «The martial drum goes ra-ta-ra-ta-plan» (Bertha, Caleb), p. 91
No. 2	Blind girl's song «Soft falls the rain at night» (Bertha), p. 106
No. 3	Duet «Here we come with greeting gay to celebrate our wedding day» (Dot, John), p. 112
No. 4	Tilly Slowboy's Lullaby «And did'ums go riding, a duck and a dear» (Tilly), p. 123
No. 5	Quartet «A Shepherd piping on the hill» (Dot, May, Edward, Tackleton), p. 127
Finale	(John, Caleb, Chorus, Edward, Tackleton, Bertha, Dot, May), p. 131
Act III	
No. 1	Introduction «Come away, fairy fair» (Chorus, Fairy, Edward, Dot, John), p. 166
No. 2	Wedding Bell Song «Now let the wedding bells ring out» (Dot), p. 189
No. 3	Melodrama and Ballad «O green and pleasant England» (Edward), p. 198
Finale	«Now one and all, both great and small» (John, Dot, May, Edward, Tackleton, Caleb, Bertha), p. 204

Table 1. Musical numbers in Mackenzie's *The Cricket on the Hearth*.

In a score littered with charming, memorable songs and ballads, two of the most tender are given to the character of Edward. The ballad,

Hawthorn of the May, «They talk of orchid plants that grow beyond the western sea», is one of these (see musical example)[39]. Built around two identical musical strophes, each verse simply modulates to the dominant and then back to the tonic, differing only in the arrangement of the accompaniment each time. Similarly, the folksong *O green and pleasant England*, *My heart goes out to thee*, sung by Edward offstage as part of the penultimate number in the third act, is as effective for its dramatic situation, being the unveiling of his true identity to his father and blind sister, as it is for its melodic and tonal simplicity. In this opera Mackenzie found a style with which he was completely at home and which allowed his natural lyricism full rein. Representative of the work as a whole is the Overture – marked over the first few bars of the vocal score with «The kettle began it» – which combines the themes of Hawthorn of the May, The Carrier's Song, Dot and John's remembrance of the first time they heard the cricket on the hearth[40], Caleb's song «We'll drown in in the bowl» from the Finale of Act II, and Edward's homecoming ballad «O green and pleasant England». Given Mackenzie's facility for orchestral colour and thematic dexterity as exhibited in his other, stand-alone orchestral overtures such as *Britannia* from around the same period, it is no surprise that the music whetted the public's appetite sufficiently for Francis F. Barrett in «The Musical Times» to remark,

> We have long been tantalised by the inviting character of the Overture which has been heard in the concert-room; and the work in full is no less pleasing and gratifying. It is truly remarkable for the way in which the composer has caught the Dickens spirit. Simply and homely though it be, it is nevertheless the English spirit[41].

The full score of the opera was completed in January 1900, just after the turn of the century, and was published in vocal score the following year by the German publisher Bosworth & Co. together with text in both English and German[42]. Interest in securing the performing rights for the opera was shown by the Carl Rosa Company even before the

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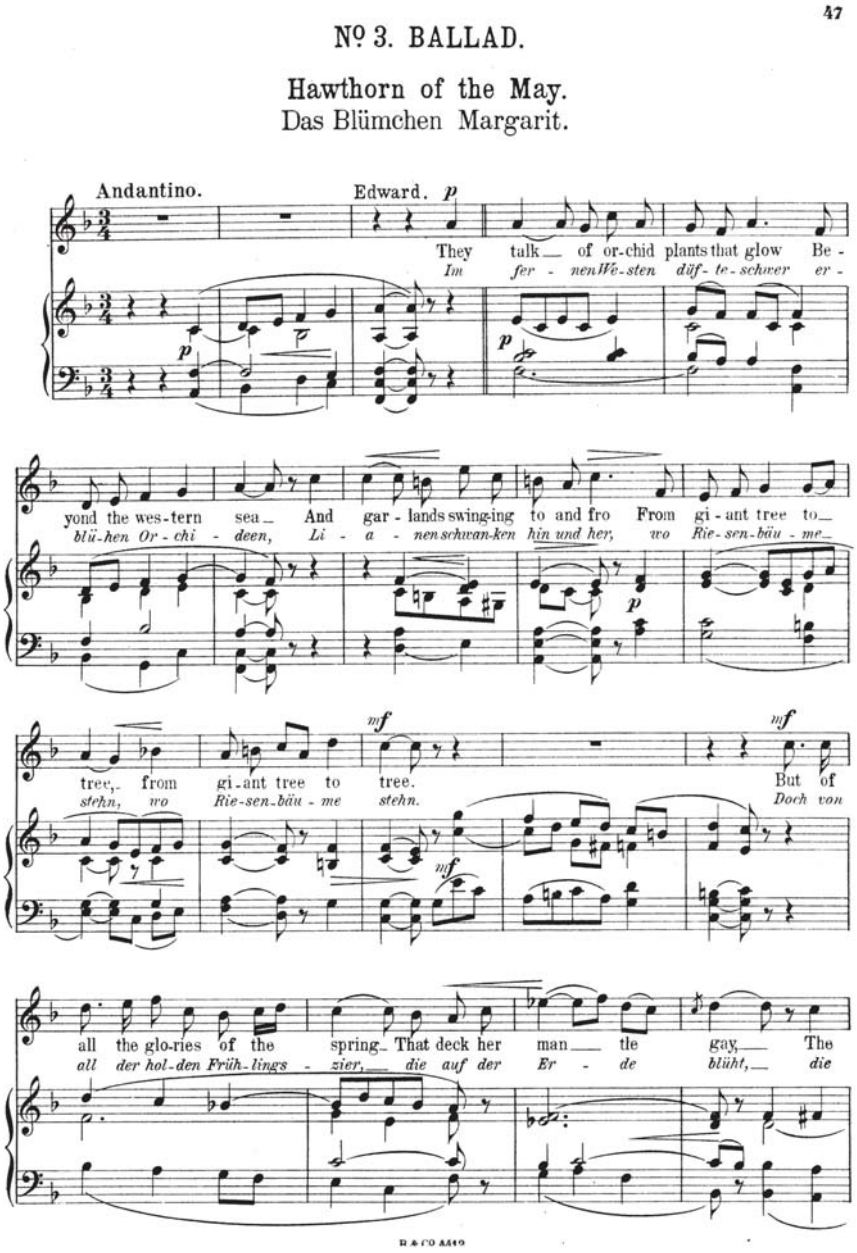
39 *The Cricket...*, vs, pp. 47-49.

40 Vs, pp. 77-80. This is also used at in the melodrama at the start of Act III when the cricket stops John from bashing in Edward's door in his misconceived fit of jealousy.

41 Francis F. Barrett, The Cricket on the Hearth *Sir A. C. Mackenzie's opera*, MT, 1 July 1914, p. 460.

42 In the light of Harris's remarks about Goldmark's 'German stove', what Mackenzie made of releasing his *Cricket* in both English and German can only be imagined!



Music example : The beginning of the ballad, *Hawthorn of the May*, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, Act 1.

work was complete. However, the company could not commit to a London production. «I therefore, rightly or wrongly, withheld the opera», reported the composer. Not to be dismayed, the Carl Rosa management soon took up Goldmark's rendering of the story, «so, for the time being», commented Mackenzie, «there could hardly be room for a couple of crickets on the operatic hearth»[43]. A further reason for the lack of immediate production may well have been the fact that at the time Sturgis was working with Stanford on another literary adaptation for the opera house, Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, which followed hot on the heels of the completion of *The Cricket.* Stanford wrote the majority of the opera during the summer of 1900 and it was premiered quickly at Covent Garden in 1901 with a second production given by the students of the Royal College of Music in the autumn of the same year[44]. With Sturgis preoccupied with his Shakespeare project, it is likely that he did not exert pressure on Mackenzie to seek out a production of *The Cricket* once the Carl Rosa proposal had fallen through. Mackenzie did, however, allow the Overture to receive its premiere at one of the Philharmonic Society's concerts in July 1902 and also took it with him on his tour of Canada in 1903 to represent British music and to complement his other works that formed part of the repertoire for this great undertaking[45]. In fact, like most of the composer's orchestral works, the Overture enjoyed a successful life in the concert hall independent of the full opera which had given it birth. Mackenzie's reasons for not seeking a more immediate performance of the opera are not documented beyond the fact that he wished it to have a London production and that he was being overtaken at the time by «absorbing scholastic duties» at the RAM. As he recalls in his autobiography, he was even offered support from one of the RAM's wealthy benefactors for a production of *The Cricket*:

> Of the late Mrs Ada Lewis's kindness of heart, which prompted the gift of eighteen thousand pounds, in the foregoing year, to establish the fifteen scholarships bearing her name, another instance may be told. In the

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43 *MN*, p. 207.

44 Jeremy Dibble, *Charles Villiers Stanford: Man and Musician*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, pp. 332-334 and Paul Rodmell, *Charles Villiers Stanford*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2002, pp. 204-205 and pp. 208-209. The RCM production took place at the Lyceum Theatre on 29 November 1901.

45 Duncan Barker, «*From ocean to ocean...*»: *How Harris and Mackenzie toured British Music across Canada in 1903*, in *Europe*, *Empire*, *and Spectacle*, in *Nineteenth-Century British Music*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton, Ashgate, Aldershot 2006, pp. 171-183.

> course of conversation over the tea-cups the lady inquired about my recent compositions, and when informed that this opera had just been finished her instant reply was: «Well, when you want a thousand pounds to help it on its way, you are welcome». What any other composer might have done under similar circumstances I know not; but let it be solemnly stated that the spirit moved me to decline the generous offer, with the cordial thanks I felt. To say, however, that the rash act has not been regretted would not be in strict accordance with the truth[46].

The first production of the opera eventually took place a few weeks before the declaration of the First World War in June 1914 – long after Sturgis had passed away in 1904 – when the «*Cricket*, aetat twelve, sang for a week in a series of excellent performances (with a double cast) on the Academy hearth»[47]. There may have been a number of reasons for this choice during this period, not least of which the 'Britishness' of the subject matter and the creators (author, librettist and composer). In addition, over the past few years, Mackenzie had renewed an interest in his operatic works, instigated by a concert performance of *Colomba* at the RAM in December 1909[48]. Following this he revised the score to recast it as a three-act opera with an updated version of the libretto by Claude Aveling and this version was produced by Stanford and the Royal College of Music opera class three years later in December 1912[49]. Alongside the reworking of his lyrical drama, Mackenzie also revised his 'operatic' oratorio *The Rose of Sharon* from 1884 for a performance by the Alexandra Palace Choral Society in London in November 1910, again losing some of the original material and tightening the dramatic structure of the work. During the same period, he sketched out a considerable amount of his unfinished oratorio *The Temptation* based on Milton's *Paradise Regained*. All of this compositional work did not detract from his administrative responsibilities as Principal of the RAM – in fact, this seems to have been a 'golden period' in which all aspects of Mackenzie's life were fully active, even though he had passed his sixtieth year. He acted as Chairman of the Internationale Musikgesellschaft, attending its congress in Vienna in 1909 and organising the extensive congress in London in 1910, and finally saw the long-awaited realisa-

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46 MN, p. 207. Ada Lewis (1844-1906) was the wife of the moneylender and philanthropist Samuel Lewis (1838-1901).

47 *MN*, pp. 245-46.

48 The performance took place on 11 December 1909 in the RAM concert hall. *Royal Academy of Music - Revival of* Colomba, MT, 1 January 1910, p. 25. See also a more extensive review and discussion in CHARLES MACLEAN, *Mackenzie's* Colomba, «Zeitschrift der International Musikgesellschaft», XI (1909-1910), pp. 142-145.

tion of plans to move the Academy to its new site on the Marylebone Road in 1911.

It was not uncommon for operas to receive their first performance or revival performances at the London conservatoires during this period. As Eric Walter White states in the appendix to his extensive survey of English opera, «The Royal Colleges have naturally played an important part with their student performances and public rehearsals»[50]. Although Mackenzie's *Cricket* appears to be the first opera premiere of a native professional composer at a British conservatoire, it is soon followed after the war by an enviable list of first performances at the RCM in the 1920s[51]. Chandler notes that «As Mackenzie was Principal of the Royal Academy, this probably sent out the unfortunate message that *The Cricket* was being performed there because no one else wanted to do it»[52]. This, however, overlooks the fact that the RAM often performed new works by its student members[53] and that it is often highly beneficial for young opera singers in training to create and be heard in new roles rather than be directly compared with the performances of professional singers in standard repertoire. In addition, Mackenzie had been Principal of the RAM for twenty-five years and had worked on a series of operas in his early years in the role that may have been 'road-tested' by his students, yet, notwithstanding the concert performance of *Colomba* a few years earlier, this was the first time that one of his 'new' operatic works had been produced by the Academy.

Mackenzie recalls the premiere of *The Cricket* in his memoirs with great fondness:

> Many of the young actors and actresses whose lively support gave me so much pleasure are now well known on the English operatic stage. To mark its appreciation of the event, the student-company presented me with a silver kettle, which «began it» by sending forth clouds of steam – produced by liquid oxygen – at a merry tea-party, none guessing that our stage would henceforth be occupied solely by female students who,

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49 The afternoon of 9 December 1912. *Royal College of Music - Performance of Mackenzie's* Colomba, MT, 1 January 1913, p. 18.

50 Eric Walter White, *The Rise of English Opera*, Lehman, London 1951), p. 313.

51 Vaughan Williams' *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1922), *Hugh the Drover* (1924) and *Sir John in Love* (1929), Armstrong-Gibbs' *The Blue Peter* (1923), Smyth's *Entente Cordiale* (1925), Webber's *Fiorella* (1928).

52 Chandler, *«Beef and Pie»...*, p. 52.

53 Frederick Corder, *A History of the Royal Academy of Music 1822-1922*, F. Corder, London 1922, pp. 89-91, 99-101. He mentions works by Harry Farjeon, Paul Corder, Emma Lomax, Bertram O'Donnell, Cuthbert Nunn and Arthur Sandford alongside Mackenzie's *Cricket*.

> when put to the test, thought it great sport to continue the operatic and dramatic classes without interruption during the grim time before us[54].

The RAM Club magazine of November 1914 provides a fuller account of the tea party organised by Lady Mackenzie on 25 June following the conclusion of the run of performances. «Addressing those present after tea was over, Sir Alexander remarked that it had been an historic and unique occasion for the Academy to produce a new opera by one of its own members, with a double cast, and to play it for a whole week successfully»[55]. Earlier in the article the anonymous correspondent writes, «As regards the music, the composer has not essayed the Wagnerian style, but has preferred to write it on the lines of real English opera, with simple tuneful strains appropriate to the character of the story». In addition, a favourable review in «The Times» congratulates the composer for «having ready to his hand a company of young singers who can play his opera and sing his music and with the zeal and ability which the students of the Royal Academy of Music showed on Saturday afternoon»[56]. It also, in the particularly positive tone in which reviews were couched in the institution's own magazine, congratulates the students «on having a principal who can give them so many jolly tunes to sing».

> Sir Alexander Mackenzie has got hold of two things for which we love our Dickens, his honest and unblushing sentiment and his love of making everyone, even the insect-scrunching Tackleton, happy in the end. We leave the characters dancing Sir Roger de Coverley with a feeling that the world is a very comfortable place, and we hum Sir Alexander's jolly tunes as evidence of the fact.

This review touches on comments made by Chandler in his study, where he points out that at certain instances in the opera Sturgis and Mackenzie ignored the dramatic situation with regard to Tackleton. Although he does join the «festive jollity» at the end of the work, in the middle of act II Tackleton participates in a pastoral ensemble with May, Dot and Edward when it might have been more appropriate at this point to create a «separate sound world» for the character to distance him from the rest of the protagonists[57].

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54 *MN*, p. 246.

55 *The Cricket on the Hearth*, «RAM Club Magazine», vol. 43 November 1914, pp. 17-19.

56 The Cricket on the Hearth *Sir A. C. Mackenzie's new opera*, «The Times», Monday 8 June 1914, p. 56.

57 CHANDLER, «*Beef and Pie*»..., pp. 58-59.

The opera received three further outings at the Royal Academy of Music, the first two as part of the centenary celebrations of the institution in July 1922 and also after the composer's death in 1936[58]. According to a *Music in the Provinces* round-up article in «The Musical Times», there was also a performance of *The Cricket* at the Theatre Royal Halifax on 3 September 1923 under the direction of Mr J. Ainslie Murray[59] and a further performance at the Glasgow Theatre Royal in the same year[60]. A recording of the Overture to the opera conducted by Mackenzie was issued by HMV in 1917 together with works by Elgar, Stanford, Cowen and German also conducted by the composers[61].

In evaluating Mackenzie's operatic output in comparison with his contemporaries Stanford and Ethel Smyth, Banfield isolated the composer's two late operas as his most pleasing.

> *The Cricket on the Hearth* (Bosworth, 1901) and *The Eve of St John* (Ascherberg, 1923) undoubtedly contain Mackenzie's most original operatic music, and show, as does Stanford's *The Travelling Companion*, how beneficial could be the retreat from grand opera and Wagnerian mythology, not into operetta but into fairytale opera or something similar. Both are good vehicles for a student or young professional cast[62].

Although Mackenzie did not originally intend his opera to have its first production by a student – or rather young professional – cast, it by no means suffered artistically as a result and fitted the younger voices well. The only drawback of its first production is the fact that operas in a conservatoire setting never have the opportunity for multiple performances due to the confines of the limited budget and teaching programme of the institution. Indeed, such productions are planned from the outset to be fleeting in their existence compared with the fully pro-

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58 *The Royal Academy of Music. 1822-1922*, MT, 1 July 1922, pp. 469-474: the performances took place on 12 and 19 July in the Duke's Hall at the RAM, alternating as part of the centenary celebrations with Goring Thomas and Sturgis's *Nadeshda* on 14 and 22 July. *Academy and College Notes: Royal Academy of Music*, MT, 1 August 1936, pp. 742-743: the performances took place at the New Scala Theatre between 14 and 18 July, alternating with a production of *Falstaff* and plays by the drama class.

59 *Music in the Provinces*, MT, 1 October 1923, p. 730.

60 CHANDLER, «*Beef and Pie*»..., p. 52. The present author has not found direct evidence of this performance in Glasgow, but presumes that it is part of a touring production that also included the performance in Halifax.

61 Display advertisement in «The Times», 23 May 1917, p. 8.

62 BANFIELD, *The Early Renaissance*..., p. 64.

fessional expectation that a new work would enter the repertoire for revival or touring productions. Nevertheless, in repeating *The Cricket on the Hearth* at its centenary and following the death of its long-lived Principal in the 1930s, the RAM ensured that later generations of musicians were able to revisit and re-evaluate the sound-world of British music at the end of the nineteenth century through a combination of one of its key musical figures and its most favoured novelist.