

A Tale of Two Wagnerites: G.W.L. Marshall-Hall and John F. Runciman

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In 1914, George William Louis Marshall-Hall, the first Ormond Professor at the University of Melbourne, who was at that time in his early fifties, looked back upon his youthful exploits as an English Wagnerite:

In those seventies and eighties the whole musical world was convulsed with the quarrels of the Wagnerites and anti-Wagnerites ... Only those living in European musical circles can have any idea of the ferocity with which this storm in a tea-pot raged ... I remember how a party of us, indignant that a work so opposed to our cherished dramatic principles, should appear on the stage, went in a body to hear Rossini's 'Semiramide,' at Covent Garden. The great Patti was singing. But at every point we considered the majesty of art was ignored and insulted, further gallery-voices were raised in protest. Finally, the police were called in, and we were hauled out, and paraded the street with wild gestures, furious, indignant, a wonder to the passer-by. We were all for heroic tragedy then.¹

Marshall-Hall was an important figure in the history of music in Melbourne, and has been the subject of a significant amount of scholarly scrutiny, at least by the standards of Australian music history.² Of particular note is Thérèse Radic's 2002 *Biography & Catalogue* and her recent book of essays, co-edited with Suzanne Robinson, *Marshall-Hall's Melbourne: Music, Art and*

¹ G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, 'On Music and Musicians: The Nineteenth v. the Twentieth Century,' *British-Australasian*, 18 May 1914: 12.

² A complete bibliography of Marshall-Hall scholarship can be found at www.marshall-hall.unimelb.edu.au.

Controversy 1891–1915.³ Although Marshall-Hall's story is well known (at least in Melbourne), I will begin by briefly retracing the aspects of his biography that are relevant to this article.

In late 1890, the twenty-nine-year old Marshall-Hall was appointed the first Ormond Professor at the University of Melbourne, arriving in Australia early the following year. The position was first advertised in 1887, and the then twenty-six-year-old Marshall-Hall, whose formal musical education consisted of a brief three months at the Royal College of Music (RCM),⁴ was amongst the applicants. The selection committee—made up of members of the English musical establishment including Alexander Mackenzie, Charles Villiers Stanford and Charles Hallé—failed to make an appointment, but the position was readvertised in 1890 and, as a result of testimonials from George Grove and Frederick Cowen, Marshall-Hall was offered the job.⁵

Marshall-Hall successfully established a solid teaching program, and a good orchestra, something that Melbourne desperately lacked at the time.⁶ Nevertheless, the taste for battle and the intemperateness hinted at in his youthful defence of Wagner soon earned him some bitter enemies. In August 1898, a scandal blew up, ostensibly about some 'lewd'—and it is universally agreed, terrible—verse that he published under the provocative title *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.⁷ He had, however, also been upsetting the good people of Melbourne for quite some time with his outspoken views on a wide range of topics, including the philistinism of the local population. In August 1898, he gave an impromptu speech from the podium at a Melbourne Liedertafel concert in which he proclaimed that war was 'a good thing. Nay! The best thing. It is a symptom of vitality, energy, super-abundant strength.'⁸ This bellicose manifesto generated a great deal of ill feeling, and within days the *Argus* newspaper began what Thérèse Radic termed a 'witch hunt' against Marshall-Hall and his verse, which was described as not only lewd, but also immodest, impious and irreligious.⁹ He held onto his position in the short term, but in 1900, when his contract with the University came up for renewal, it was not extended.¹⁰ Marshall-Hall established a rival Conservatorium in Albert Road, East Melbourne, taking many of the staff he had recruited with him. He returned briefly to England in 1913, in an attempt to promote the performance of his opera *Stella*. In this he was largely unsuccessful, and in 1914 he was reappointed to the University Conservatorium. This rapprochement was, however, short-lived: he died of peritonitis just twelve months later.¹¹

³ Thérèse Radic, *G.W.L. Marshall-Hall: A Biography & Catalogue* (Melbourne: Marshall-Hall Trust, 2002); Thérèse Radic and Suzanne Robinson, eds, *Marshall-Hall's Melbourne: Music, Art and Controversy 1891–1915* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012).

⁴ J.F.R., 'Professor Marshall-Hall,' *Magazine of Music* 9 (June 1892): 109; Radic, *Marshall-Hall*, 28, n. 18.

⁵ For more on Marshall-Hall's appointment, see Radic, *Marshall-Hall*, 5–7.

⁶ For a discussion of early attempts to establish a permanent orchestra in Melbourne, see Thérèse Radic, 'The Victorian Orchestra 1889–1891: In the Wake of the Centennial Exhibition Orchestra, Melbourne, 1888,' *Australasian Music Research* 1 (1996): 13–101.

⁷ Radic, *Marshall-Hall*, 14–15.

⁸ The speech was widely reported in the press; for a transcript see, for example, 'Much Ado. Professor Marshall-Hall Relieves his Feelings: A General Onslaught,' *Argus*, 2 Aug. 1898: 6.

⁹ 'Professor Marshall-Hall Published New Verses. Immodest and Impious. A Public Scandal,' *Argus*, 6 Aug. 1898: 9.

¹⁰ Radic, *Marshall-Hall*, 14–18. For an extremely detailed, if controversial, discussion of Marshall-Hall's departure from the Conservatorium, see Joseph Wolfgang Rich, *His Thumb unto His Nose: The Removal of G.W.L. Marshall-Hall from the Ormond Chair of Music* (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1986).

¹¹ Radic, *Marshall-Hall*, 25.

Most Marshall-Hall scholarship has tended to focus on his strengths, particularly, but not exclusively, as a composer. Richard Divall, for example, in his Foreword to Radic and Robinson's *Marshall-Hall's Melbourne*, claims that in editing and performing Marshall-Hall's music, he came to 'truly see the greatness of the man and the musician.' He goes on to extol Marshall-Hall's 'strengths as an orchestrator, innovator and unique voice in Australia's musical history.'¹² In their Introduction, the editors quote an obituary, originally published in the *Musical Times*, and reproduced in the *Australian Musical News*, which praised Marshall-Hall as 'so rare a man—so splendid a genius.'¹³

Most of this scholarship looks at Marshall-Hall from the Australian perspective, and with the benefit of hindsight. This is, of course, perfectly reasonable: while Marshall-Hall was a significant figure in the history of music in colonial Melbourne, he was a very minor figure in the history of English music, and there are, therefore, relatively few primary sources that predate his arrival in Australia. In this article, however, I wish to focus on the youthful Marshall-Hall prior to, and immediately after, his appointment to the Ormond Professorship.

I will examine this through the published writings, particularly in the *Magazine of Music*, of Marshall-Hall's friend, colleague and fellow Wagnerite, the eccentric and irascible John F. Runciman, which give a glimpse of both the friendship between the two men, and of the kinds of circles in which Marshall-Hall moved in London. In so doing, I will pay particular attention to the importance of their mutual love of Wagner and of their hatred of what they saw as the rule-bound, conservative English musical establishment.¹⁴

John F. Runciman was a music critic, four years Marshall-Hall's junior. He was described by the third Mrs Arnold Dolmetsch as 'a fiery-faced Yorkshireman, with a flaming shock of red hair and an equally fiery pen.'¹⁵ Runciman in turn described Marshall-Hall as 'the owner of a large massive head, and a great shock of black hair.'¹⁶ Runciman's mentor George Bernard Shaw recommended him in a letter to Arnold Dolmetsch as 'a skilled professional musician and a slashing journalist.'¹⁷

He was, like Marshall-Hall, a self-declared Wagnerite. In 1898, he published a collection of his criticism, entitled *Old Scores and New Readings*; a revised and expanded edition was released in 1901.¹⁸ Of the twenty-two chapters in the revised edition, eight dealt explicitly with Wagner, and many others, such as the chapters on Verdi, were really about Wagner's superiority to all forms of Italian opera. Runciman also published a weighty, and surprisingly down-to-earth,

¹² Radic and Robinson, *Marshall-Hall's Melbourne*, vii.

¹³ Radic and Robinson, *Marshall-Hall's Melbourne*, xii.

¹⁴ It has long been recognised that Marshall-Hall's passionate enthusiasm for Wagner was an important part of his personality, and this has been examined in two recent student dissertations: Matthew Donald Adrian Lorenzon, *The Literary Works of G.W.L. Marshall-Hall: 1888–1915* (MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 2010); Dallas Kunig, *Siegfried II: Performance and Promotion of Wagner by G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, 1888–1914* (BMus Honours dissertation, University of Melbourne, 2012).

¹⁵ Mabel Dolmetsch, *Personal Recollections of Arnold Dolmetsch* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 24. Runciman was, in fact, born in County Durham.

¹⁶ J.F.R., 'Professor Marshall-Hall,' 110.

¹⁷ Letter dated 31 Jan. 1895, quoted in Margaret Campbell, *Dolmetsch: The Man and his Work* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975) 85.

¹⁸ John F. Runciman, *Old Scores and New Readings: Discussions on Music and Certain Musicians* (London: Unicorn Press, 1898; rev. ed., 1901).

book on Wagner in 1913,¹⁹ although it has been rather overshadowed by Shaw's *Perfect Wagnerite* and Ernest Newman's various works on the subject.²⁰

In the mid-1890s, Runciman enjoyed a modest prominence as spokesman for the 'new criticism' practised by Shaw.²¹ He had no formal musical education (not even three months at the RCM, like Marshall-Hall) and he was a violent and outspoken opponent of what he saw as dry academicism and the 'old' critics' 'profound references to consecutive fifths, and the birth- and death-dates of composers.'²² Marshall-Hall, on the other hand, appears to have despised *all* critics, dividing them, in an article in the *School*, into '1) those who are honest but incapable, 2) those who are capable but dishonest and 3) those who are both dishonest and incapable.'²³

Stanford, Parry and Mackenzie—indeed most of the people on the committee who somewhat grudgingly appointed Marshall-Hall to the Ormond Professorship—were all on Runciman's personal hit-list. A fellow critic dubbed the unceasing and indiscriminating zeal with which Runciman pursued his campaign against the academic establishment 'Runcimania.'²⁴ To give just one example of Runciman's contempt for the English musical establishment, in a review in which he praises Marshall-Hall's *Study on Tennyson's Maud*, he writes:

I was attracted by a new sonata for violin and piano by Doctor Stanford ... The workmanship of the sonata is faultlessly commonplace, its themes characteristic of Brahms at his dullest, and their treatment ingeniously schoolmaster-like.²⁵

For Runciman, Marshall-Hall's early departure from the RCM was something of a badge of honour:

Those who know Mr. Marshall-Hall will not be surprised to hear that he did not get on well there. He learnt quickly enough; in fact, too quickly, and became impatient with the college's slow ways and slower professors.²⁶

Marshall-Hall essentially shared these views of the academic establishment: in August 1888 he wrote that 'there are ... many pretenders high in office, who hold their position by reason of sheer ignorance and indifference to those beneath them,'²⁷ and this article was followed by several others in the same vein, including 'The Professor, the Student and Wagner,' which is discussed further below, and 'Some Faults in our Educational System.'²⁸ After his departure

¹⁹ John F. Runciman, *Richard Wagner, Composer of Operas* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1913).

²⁰ George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Ring of the Nibelungs* (London, 1898); Ernest Newman, *A Study of Wagner* (London, 1899), *Wagner as Man and Artist* (London, 1914), *The Life of Richard Wagner* (London, 1933).

²¹ Nigel Scaife, for example, in the *New Grove* article on 'Criticism' described Runciman as the 'self-appointed leader of the "New Criticism"' ('Criticism: §II: History to 1945: 3. Britain: (ii) 1890–1945,' *Grove Music Online*, OUP, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/article/grove/music/40589pg2). Runciman's fullest discussion of criticism old and new is found in 'Musical Criticism and the Critics,' *Fortnightly Review* 56 (Aug. 1894): 170–83.

²² John F. Runciman, 'The Gentle Art of Musical Criticism,' *New Review* 12 (June 1895): 617.

²³ G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, 'The English Musical World,' *School*, undated clipping, Prof. G.W.L. Collection, University of Melbourne Archive, Melbourne, Australia.

²⁴ James Huneker, *Saturday Review* 116 (6 Dec. 1913): 709.

²⁵ J.F.R., 'Some Concerts,' *Saturday Review* 86 (17 Dec. 1898): 814.

²⁶ J.F.R., 'Professor Marshall-Hall,' 109.

²⁷ G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, 'Music: Tone Poetry,' *Magazine of Music* 5 (Aug. 1888): 199.

²⁸ G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, 'The Professor, the Student and Wagner,' *Monthly Musical Record* 19 (Oct. 1888): 220–1; 'Some Faults in our Educational System,' *Magazine of Music* 5 (July 1888): 154–5.

for Australia, it was rumoured that he left England because he was 'disgusted with the state of English musical affairs.'²⁹

At the time of his appointment as Ormond Professor, Marshall-Hall had had only one public performance of one of his compositions, a *scena* from his opera *Harold*; an excerpt from the same opera, 'Where the Thorny Brake,' was published in the *Magazine of Music* in 1888.³⁰ (*The Magazine of Music* also published a number of articles by Marshall-Hall in that year, several on Wagnerian subjects.)³¹ Runciman played an organ transcription of the *scena* at several concerts in the following years, but *Harold* was not a critical success. The *Athenaeum* review is, unfortunately, typical:

the composer has taken Wagner in his most advanced style as his model, and, as a matter of course, has failed in the most lamentable way to render his music agreeable or even tolerable to the ear ... the best advice that can be given Mr. Marshall Hall is to burn his score and recommence at the other end of the scale.³²

It is possible that Marshall-Hall's article, 'The Professor, the Student and Wagner,' published in the *Monthly Musical Record* in 1889, was a response to such criticism. The titular Professor had been complaining that Wagner's malign influence on his students led to 'wild extravagance' in 'the place of sober reason.' Marshall-Hall responded:

It were as wise to expect the iron to run from the magnet as to suppose there were any logic or technical consideration which could cause the youthful heart, warm with aspiring enthusiasm, to shun the life-glowing music of Wagner. Any resultant harm must be ascribed, not to this, but to the short-sighted method of teaching which prevails ... The *mind*, the *emotions*, rather than the fingers, require cultivation ... What requires to be enkindled and ever fed in the student is enthusiasm, glorious, heart-firing, life-breathing enthusiasm, the parent of love, veneration, and all great deeds.³³

From late 1891, Runciman was actively involved in editing the *Magazine of Music*;³⁴ he frequently used his own columns to report—always favourably—on Marshall-Hall's activities in Australia, and several of Marshall-Hall's public lectures were published in full. Runciman frequently recounted personal anecdotes about Marshall-Hall and described him as a close, or even 'intimate,' friend.³⁵ He claimed that he, Hamish MacCunn, and Alfred Schulz-Curtius (Marshall-Hall's agent and the impresario who had brought the *Ring* to London in 1882) had given Marshall-Hall a 'send-off dinner' before his departure for Australia,³⁶ and he was

²⁹ 'Personalialia,' *Musical Standard* 44 (11 Mar. 1893): 185.

³⁰ G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, 'Where the Thorny Brake,' *Magazine of Music* 5 (Sep. 1888): 44–8. For a discussion of *Harold* and its sources, see www.marshall-hall.unimelb.edu.au/stage/Harold.html.

³¹ The anonymous author (possibly Runciman) of 'Music in Australia. Marshall-Hall to the Fore,' *Magazine of Music* 10 (Mar. 1893): 56, reported that the *Magazine of Music* continued to support Marshall-Hall for 'precisely the same reason that we engaged him some years ago to write for this magazine, namely, because we knew him to be a thoroughly competent, practical musician and a thinker.'

³² 'Music: The Week,' *Athenaeum*, 11 Feb. 1888, 189.

³³ Marshall-Hall, 'The Professor, the Student and Wagner,' 220–1.

³⁴ The official editor was J.W. Coates, but by 1894, Runciman was reported as 'assisting' Coates ('Our Music Magazines,' *Review of Reviews* (Feb. 1894): 184.

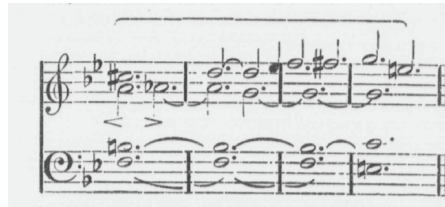
³⁵ See, for example, J.F.R., 'The Composition of the Month. An Overture by Professor Marshall-Hall,' *Magazine of Music* 10 (Feb. 1893): 38; 'Three Concerts,' *Saturday Review* 80 (28 Dec. 1895): 867.

³⁶ J.F.R., 'The Case of Mr. Marshall-Hall,' 602.

obviously delighted that one of his confreres had managed to breach the walls of academe, even if only in the barbarous colonies.

In February 1893, *Magazine of Music*'s 'Composition of the Month' was Marshall-Hall's Overture in G minor,³⁷ which was to be performed under August Manns at the Crystal Palace the following month. This was the first London performance of Marshall-Hall's music since the scena from *Harold*. Runciman devoted several column inches to defending the work, and particularly the passage shown in Figure 1, against accusations of undue Wagnerian influence.

Figure 1. Excerpt from Marshall-Hall, Overture in G minor, *Magazine of Music*, 10 (Feb. 1893): 39



Runciman argued that all composers were influenced by others, including his heroes Wagner and Beethoven, and asserted, with some justification, 'that those who know *Tristan* best will feel the great unlikeness as well as the likeness of this theme.'

Nevertheless, Runciman was not the only person to notice the similarity, and other reviewers were less forgiving. Indeed the *Musical Standard* drew together a number of negative reviews under the heading 'The Pillory.' Most remarked on the Wagnerian overtones; one of the more critical reviews, in the *Daily Graphic*, suggested that once the 'reminiscence of *Tristan*' had been removed 'the residue is chiefly remarkable for its pretentiousness, restlessness, and above all, conscious avoidance of simplicity.'³⁸ For Runciman and Marshall-Hall, however, this was no doubt just further evidence of the blindness and stupidity of the majority of critics, and confirmation of their own superiority.

Despite this negative press, the *Magazine of Music* continued to report frequently and positively on Marshall-Hall's activities in Australia.³⁹ In June 1894, for example, it published a glowing report of the recent all-Wagner concert performed in Melbourne by Marshall-Hall's newly formed orchestra (see Figure 2), and placed Marshall-Hall in a direct Wagnerian lineage:

In these concerts we have been brought face to face with those carefully studied interpretations of modern works inculcated in the first place by Richard Wagner, and spread over Europe by such men as Von Bulow, Hans Richter, etc., amid the same insensate opposition. This marks an era in the musical history of Australia.⁴⁰

³⁷ J.F.R., 'Composition of the Month.' A string quartet in three movements by Marshall-Hall was also one of the 'compositions of the month' in September; *Magazine of Music* 10 (Sep. 1893): 179.

³⁸ Quoted in 'The Pillory. Marshall-Hall's New Overture,' *Musical Standard* 44 (11 Mar. 1893): 185.

³⁹ See, for example, 'Music in Australia,' *Magazine of Music* 8 (June 1891): 118; 9 (Apr. 1892): 76; 10 (Mar. 1893): 56; 10 (Nov. 1893): 263; 11 (June 1894): 129–30.

⁴⁰ G.G.M., 'Music in Australia,' *Magazine of Music* 11 (June 1894): 130.

Figure 2. Program, Grand Wagner Concert, Melbourne, 2 June 1894

Town Hall, Melbourne.

SATURDAY, 2nd JUNE, 1894, AT 3 O'CLOCK.

Grand Wagner Concert

Orchestra of 63 Artists.

Hon. Conductor:
Professor G. W. L. MARSHALL-HALL.

Hon. Vocalist:
MADAME ELISE WIEDERMANN.

Committee:

Herr F. DIERICH	Mr. E. MOFFITT
Sig. A. CEGHINA	Mr. B. SMITH
Mr. J. R. MAIR	Mr. W. STONEHAM.
Mr. BERNHARD SMITH <i>(Hon. Secretary.)</i>	Mr. ERNEST MOFFITT <i>(Orchestral Secretary.)</i>

TICKETS, 3/- (Balcony and Reserved Chairs),
2/-, and 1/-

BOX PLAN AT ALLAN'S.

BARN, 207A & 207B, PRINCE STREET.

NEXT CONCERT—SATURDAY, JULY 7TH, AT 3 P.M.

Beethoven's "C MINOR" Symphony; Mendelssohn's Overture to "A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM."

Siegfried—Dyall .. Richard Wagner

This remarkable work must be reckoned among Wagner's masterpieces. The tenderness which breathes through every bar has never been surpassed. Originally written to celebrate the first anniversary of the birthday of his son Siegfried, it was performed as a surprise for Madame Wagner, on the staircase of Wagner's house in Switzerland, at an early hour of the morning, by a select band of musicians. Wagner himself stole from his bed to witness the scene, and Hans Richter played the trumpet part.

It is not without emotion that in this exquisite tone-poem one sees the world-weird, fortune-battered, fate-defying Richard Wagner at the quiet bedside where sleep the woman he loves and her babe. What a feeling there is of peace, hope, consolation. Hear this constantly reiterated sigh of the violin and cello—what an intoxicating tenderness! To this mesh-suffering, mesh-enduring man, how healing a moment is woe-befallen! The harsh, evil-tongued world is vanished from his ken; forgotten the bitter life-long fight of one against many. He stands there, a father, and as he looks down upon the innocent sweetness of the world-ignorant little one, what possibilities, what fears, what hopes throng through his mind. Unconsciously in his youthful paternal pride, the thrones associated with the heroic career of his great "Siegfried" fill his heart with hope prophetic, and he dimly traces out a wondrous world-beating future for his year-old son. So stands he, rapt in wondrous reverie, dreaming things immortal, "lovely, loving, and beloved!"

The *Idyl* is prefaced by the following beautiful stanzas addressed to Madame Wagner:—

Es war Dein eiferndmüdig beherer Will,
der meinest Werk die Vorderstätte fand,
vor Dir gewohnt zu wehender Stelle,
wo mich ein weiches und köstlich umstrand,
die Heldenwelt um zanderl zum Idyll,
wollen Fern zu räumen Heimatland.
Erachelt ein Ruf da froh in meine Weisen:
"ein Sohn ist da!"—der musste Siegfried
heißen.

Für ihn und Dich darff' ich in Tönen
danken—
wie gab es Liebeshaben heiklen Lohn?
Sich segnen wir in uns'ren Helmschrauben,
die stille Frensch, die hier ward zum Ton.
Die sich um tree erwiesen ohne Wanken,
so Siegfried' hold, wie freundlich um'sem,
Sohn,
mit Deiner Hand'elstehen jetzt erschossen,
was sonst als töndel Glück wir still
genossen.

Introduction and Closing Scene } "Tristan and Isolde" .. Richard Wagner

THE CLOSING SCENE WILL BE SUNG BY
MADAME ELISE WIEDERMANN
(WHO HAS KINDLY GIVEN HER SERVICES.)

Wagner wrote, alluding to this work, that he had striven to ally through the forms of art that longing for ideal women which remained without realisation in his life. Truly no such wonderful depiction of the power of passion has ever before been known. It is the love not of a sentimental youth, but of a fully developed man of power and energy, in whom the long pent-up flood of passion has, by a woman's glance, been set free, and now rushes, impetuously, irresistibly, through his being, so that he gives himself over utterly to its all-absorbing influence. This wondrous woman's glance, and the response which it awakens, are marvellously portrayed, in the first few bars, by the passionate *crescendo* of the violoncello, and the heart-oppressed sigh of the wood-wind—in truth, the whole introduction is but the history of a sigh.

Isolde—Mild und leise wie er lüchelt, wie das Auge hold er öffnet,— sieht ihr, Fremde? Sieht ihr's nicht? Immer höher wie erleuchtet, Stern-um-strahl't lockt sich her? Sieht ihr's nicht? Wie das Herz ihm muslig schwellt, voll und hehr im Bessern ihm quillt? Wie den Lippen, wonnig mild, süßer Athem sanft erstweht? Fremde! Sohnt Führt und seht ihr's nicht? Hör ich nur diese Weise, die so wunder— voll und hehr, Wonne-Magennd, Alles-sagend,	mild vernehmend aus ihm törend, in mich dringet, auf sich schlinget, hold erleuchtet um mich klingen? Heller schallend, nich um-waldend sind es Wellen sanfter Lufte? Sind es Wellen wonniger Lüfte? Wie es schwellen, nich um-räuschen, soll ich atmen, soll ich lauschen? Soll ich schlieren, stern-tauchen? Sies in Dufem nich verhaschen? In dem wogenden Schwall, in die Wellen—Alles wachsenden All ertrinken, verstraken,— unbewusst— hochlos Laut!
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Overture .. "Die Meistersinger" .. Richard Wagner

No sooner do the first few bars of this masterly comedy sound, than stern Time seems to fast, falter, turn tail, and run back a few centuries, and, like the worthy glibbed councillor of Hans Andersen, we wake up to find ourselves a hundred or two years younger, wandering through the queer old streets of Nuremberg, in the company of those famous master-singers of whose quaint customs we have so often read. We seem to see it all—the warden guide in procession with banners flying; the impetuous passionate Isabella Walther, head-over-ears in love with Master Goldsmith Pappas's daughter; and under little Eva, who shyly returns his passion; the brilliant apprentice, mimicking the somewhat nervous airs of their masters; and, as in a dream, scenes the most diverse succeed one another without incongruity, conjured up by the spell of the music.

INTERVAL OF TEN MINUTES.

From late 1894, however, the frequency with which Marshall-Hall's name appeared in the *Magazine of Music* decreased sharply. This was probably due to Runciman's appointment as music critic at the *Saturday Review*, which presumably ended or severely limited his involvement with the *Magazine*.⁴¹ Runciman's advocacy of Marshall-Hall was less obvious at the *Saturday Review*, possibly because he had less control over its editorial direction, but in November 1898 he devoted his weekly column to 'The Case of Mr. Marshall-Hall.' The first half of the article is a fairly positive review of Marshall-Hall's *Idyll*, which had recently been performed under Manns at the Crystal Palace. Runciman considered the *Idyll* 'a work by one of the most truly original composers this country [i.e. England] has ever produced—a man simply miles above our Parrys, Stanfords, Mackenzies and the rest.'⁴²

He tells of its inception while Marshall-Hall was 'lying on the sea-beach in Tasmania':

The strangeness of nature in that strangest of lands took possession of him; he felt as if existence were an unreal dream; he seemed to be taken back a thousand years to the far-off beginnings of the world. Stillness and sunshine and the eternal sea—these made life.⁴³

Runciman admits, however, that while the beginning and end are 'magnificent,' he finds the middle section 'a trifle scrappy,' and he even hints that the 'reminiscences' of Wagner in this section might be considered a weakness.

The second half of the article is a diatribe against the benighted Melbourne establishment, and particularly the *Argus*, for their treatment of Marshall-Hall over the *Hymns Ancient and Modern* scandal, which had erupted just weeks earlier. Yes, Runciman concedes, Marshall-Hall 'made mistakes; he was youthful; and he fired off mad speeches from the conductor's desk or made indiscreet remarks in his lectures.'⁴⁴ He also admitted that writing was not Marshall-Hall's strong suit, and condemned the poetry of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* as irredeemably bad:

He had never, so far as I could see, the slightest literary instinct. His articles were mere strings of uncouth phrases. The thought was right, but it almost needed dynamite to get at the thought. One would have thought that he wrote first in German and then had a literal translation made. Certainly his writing was based on a conscientious study of Wagner's prose.⁴⁵

This is perhaps a little unfair—Marshall-Hall did write one or two quite lovely Wagnerian program notes⁴⁶—but it also contains a kernel of truth. Nevertheless, Runciman was emphatic that in every way that counted, Australia was very lucky to have Marshall-Hall, whose friends, he claimed, thought it 'something like a crime that such a man should be wasted on a half-civilised city, in a nearly totally barbarous continent.'⁴⁷

⁴¹ Nigel Clifford Scaife, *British Music Criticism in a New Era: Studies in Critical Thought 1864–1945* (PhD thesis, Exeter College, Oxford, 1994) 64.

⁴² J.F.R., 'The Case of Mr. Marshall-Hall,' 602.

⁴³ J.F.R., 'The Case of Mr. Marshall-Hall,' 603.

⁴⁴ J.F.R., 'The Case of Mr. Marshall-Hall,' 603.

⁴⁵ J.F.R., 'The Case of Mr. Marshall-Hall,' 603.

⁴⁶ See, for example, his notes for the Grand Wagner Concert mentioned above. Programs for the Marshall-Hall Orchestra concerts can be found at <https://digitised-collections.unimelb.edu.au/>.

⁴⁷ J.F.R., 'The Case of Mr. Marshall-Hall,' 602.

In 1897, Runciman wrote a review of the recent Covent Garden production of *Siegfried*, later reprinted in *Old Scores and New Music*, in which he claimed that the opera

is simply the most glorious assertion ever made of the joy and splendour and infinite beauty to be found in life by those who possess the courage to go through it in their own way, and have the overflowing vitality and strength to create their own world as they go. Siegfried is the embodiment of the divine energy that makes life worth living ... which enables one to make the world rich with things that delight the soul; he is Wagner's healthiest, sanest, perhaps most beautiful creation; he is certainly the only male in all Wagner's dramas who is never in any danger of becoming for ever so brief a moment a bore.⁴⁸

I think that it is possible that in the 1890s both Runciman and Marshall-Hall saw themselves as Siegfried figures: 'all for heroic tragedy,' courageously going their own way, slaying dragons and breaking the spears of the rule-bound English musical establishment.

There is certainly some evidence that Marshall-Hall identified with Wagner's youthful hero. Back in February 1889, Marshall-Hall's brother John had written an article on *Tristan and Isolde* for the *Musical World*.⁴⁹ The next issue carried correspondence on the subject, which was followed by a letter to the editor signed 'Siegfried II'.⁵⁰ A clipping of the article in the Grainger Museum identifies the writer as George Marshall-Hall (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Letter signed 'Siegfried II'

I have the following suggestions to make. With Mr. Parker I take the love potion to be symbolical. Apparently at the point of death, Tristan and Isolde declare their love. At that very moment King Marke arrives: there is then no opportunity for explanation. Act II. *Isolde and Marke are not yet married*: she is in fact living alone with her maid, and in all probability the time is adjacent to that in Act I. Tristan meets her; they are discovered by Marke, who reproaches Tristan with his treachery. Now notice. To Marke's question "The unexplained, unpenetrated cause of all these woes who will to us disclose?" Tristan raising his eyes compassionately to Marke replies, "O, monarch I may not tell thee truly; what thou dost ask remains for aye unanswered," and now, for the first time, his eyes are opened to his treachery. Hitherto so blinded has he been by love that it has never occurred to him. Instantly he resolves that the only atonement he can make is to give his own life. He turns to Isolde and asks, "Where Tristan now is going wilt thou, Isolde, follow?" then calling on Melot, his betrayer, to guard himself, he, letting his own sword fall, rushes on Melot's sword-point, thus redeeming his character as a hero.

I offer this as an explanation. Whether Wagner's own intentions are represented by it will probably be a matter of opinion.

Truly, yours,
SIEGFRIED II.
g w l W H

London, N.W., Feb. 6.

In true Siegfried fashion, however, this tendency to stride through life, sword drawn, had landed both Marshall-Hall and Runciman in quite a lot of hot water. I have already briefly discussed the difficulties that Marshall-Hall encountered from 1898. Runciman, too, had developed a reputation as a critical loose cannon; in 1896 he was embroiled in two successful

⁴⁸ J.F.R., 'Siegfried,' *Saturday Review* 84 (3 July 1897): 11.

⁴⁹ John E. Marshall-Hall, 'Tristan und Isolde,' *Musical World* 69 (19 Jan. 1889): 37–8.

⁵⁰ Louis N. Parker, 'Tristan und Isolde,' *Musical World* 69 (2 Feb. 1889): 70–1; 'Siegfried II,' 'Correspondence,' *Musical World* 69 (9 Feb. 1889): 90.

libel suits: one against him personally, for calling a reciter of poetry an 'ass';⁵¹ the other taken out against the *Saturday Review* by Alexander Mackenzie for comments made in one of Runciman's columns.⁵²

Furthermore, by the late 1890s, an appreciation of Wagner's music was no longer particularly radical.⁵³ In 1896 and 1897, Runciman attended the Bayreuth Festival, and wrote articles describing his experiences. The 1897 article opened with some flippant comments about Germanic casting—the average Bayreuth Fricka, he suggested, 'looks and behaves like Hera suffering from severe indigestion and probably corns'—while,

In Germany, feminine beauty is reckoned in hundredweights. No lady of under eighteen stones is admired; but one who is heavier than that, instead of staying at home and looking after her grandchildren, is put into a white dress and called Sieglinde, or a brown robe and called Kundry; and a German audience accepts her as a revelation of ideal loveliness through the perfection of human form.⁵⁴

In the end, however, his main complaint was that Bayreuth itself was becoming too respectable:

it is fast driving away all sincere lovers of Wagner; it lives now on fashionable ladies, betting men, and bishops: when the fashion changes and these depart, the Bayreuth festivals will come to an end. Bayreuth is only an affectation; not one pilgrim in a hundred understands the "Ring" or "Parsifal"; not one in a thousand is really impressed by anything deeper than the mere novelty of the business.

Perhaps inevitably, both Marshall-Hall and Runciman mellowed as they grew older. As already mentioned, Marshall-Hall was, finally, reinstated to his position at the University, and he was sadly mourned after his unexpected death. Our opening quote captures a sense of the distance that separated the mature man from the radical youth. Runciman, despite the libel suits, kept his position at the *Saturday Review* until he died, in 1916, aged only fifty, just a year after Marshall-Hall, and affectionate obituaries were published in both the *Musical Times* and the *Saturday Review*.⁵⁵

Runciman's book on *Richard Wagner*, published in 1913, not long before his and Marshall-Hall's deaths, was not particularly scholarly, and had a few notable errors and omissions, but it was praised for its 'swift, brilliant, naked narrative.'⁵⁶ In it, Runciman seems to have completely revised his assessment of the character of Siegfried:

In a letter to Liszt Wagner says he would not have undertaken the toil of completing so gigantic a work as the *Ring* but for his love of Siegfried, his ideal of manhood. It is as well, from one point of view, that his love of his ideal was so intense, for in

⁵¹ The elocutionist C.E. Fry was awarded £200 damages, sending Runciman bankrupt. For a very full discussion of the case, see 'The Autocrat,' 'Comments and Opinions,' *Musical Standard* 8 (6 Nov. 1897): 289. The offending comments were found in an unsigned article, 'Musical Life in London,' *Magazine of Music* 12 (Dec. 1895): 257.

⁵² The case was widely reported; see, for example, 'Sir A. C. Mackenzie Wins!,' *Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review* 19 (Sep. 1896): 825–6. The article at the centre of the case was J.F.R., 'English Music, Past and Present,' *Saturday Review* 81 (4 Jan. 1896): 11–12.

⁵³ Paul Rodmell notes the increased frequency of performances of Wagner in London in the late 1890s: see *Opera in the British Isles: 1875–1918* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013) 81.

⁵⁴ Runciman, *Old Scores and New Reading*, 230, 236.

⁵⁵ 'Obituary: John F. Runciman,' *Musical Times* 57 (May 1916): 250 and 'J.F.R.,' *Saturday Review* 121 (15 Apr. 1916): 371.

⁵⁶ James Hunker, 'Wagner,' *Saturday Review* 116 (6 Dec. 1913): 708–9.

consequence we have the *Ring*; but from another point of view it is not so well, for the youth Siegfried is the least lovable, perhaps the most inane and detestable character to be found in any form of drama. He is a combination of impudence, stupidity and sheer animal strength—mere bone and sinew; his courage comes from his stupidity. The courage and strength and impudence carry him through to his one victory; then his stupidity leads him straight to destruction. He possesses not one fine trait: he is as weak in will and intellect as he is strong in muscle.⁵⁷

It is perhaps not entirely surprising that modern scholarship tends to portray Marshall-Hall's appointment and subsequent travails as a rare case of genius triumphing over narrow-mindedness. I hope that in this article, my examination of Runciman's writings about, and friendship with, Marshall-Hall, will remind us that the young, radical, anti-establishment Marshall-Hall was in many ways a most unlikely candidate for such a senior academic position, and that the difficulties that he subsequently encountered can be seen as an entirely predictable outcome of the decision to appoint Siegfried II to the Ormond Chair.

⁵⁷ Runciman, *Richard Wagner: Composer of Operas*, 378.

