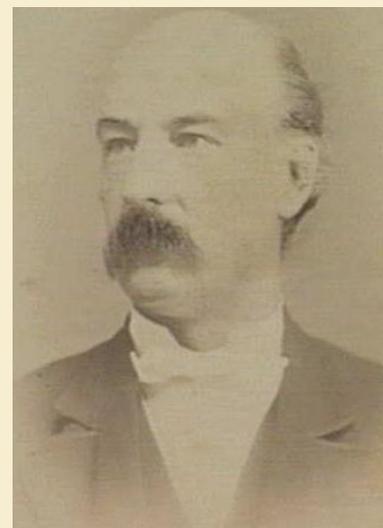


CHARLES HORSLEY

Charles Horsley was employed in England as an organist, composer and teacher before travelling to Australia in 1861, where he served as organist to several Melbourne churches and conducted the Orpheus Union. He later collaborated with R. H. Horne on *The South Seas Sisters* (1866), composed a number of cantatas, and acted as conductor for the Melbourne Philharmonic Society. Horsley returned to England in 1871 after four years in Sydney (1867-70).

The son of composer William Horsley, Charles Edward Horsley's born in London, England on 16 December 1822. With his family closely associated with Felix Mendelssohn, William Horsley took the famous composer's advice and sent his son to Germany to study under Moritz Hauptmann and Louis Spohr. Upon his return to England Charles found various employment opportunities as an organist, composer and music teacher. His achievements during his early career include composing two oratorios, *David* (ca. 1846) and *Joseph* (ca. 1849). He was also the organist at St John's, Notting Hill in London between 1853 and 1857.

In 1861 Horsley travelled to Australia, where he settled in Melbourne. He was appointed to various positions over the next ten years, including those of organist at Christ Church (South Yarra), St Stephen's (Richmond) and St Francis' (Melbourne), along with, in 1866, the conductorship of the Orpheus Union (a musical society devoted almost exclusively to part-singing). During his time in Australia Horsley also acted as a music critic, wrote a number of compositions (including several cantatas), and conducted the Melbourne Philharmonic Society. In his history of the society, W. A. Carne records that Horsley's association with the society was not a happy one, though. Although considered immeasurably



Source: State Library of Victoria

superior to most of the musicians in the colony, he was voted out of the position in 1864 "and suffered a further humiliating defeat when he recontested the position in early 1866" (qtd. Fotheringham 195). Richard Fotheringham's introduction to *The South Sea Sisters* (arguably Horsley's most significant Australian work), indicates that the composers personality and eccentricity was at part to blame for his fallout. "He was apparently a highly introspective individual who could forget that he was playing the organ for a church service and begin improvising." Fotheringham further notes that his conducting allegedly suffered from his inability to beat time clearly (195).

Horsley was forced to move from Melbourne to Sydney in 1867 after being declared insolvent. His bankruptcy was the result of heavy losses he incurred the previous year as organiser of the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition's music festival. Despite the financial problems, the highlight of the music programme was undoubtedly Horsley's lyric masque, *The South Sea Sisters*, composed to a libretto by Richard Henry (Hengist) Horne. One particular feature, aside from the sheer size of the cast (some three hundred singers and musicians) was Horsley's imitation of an Aboriginal corroboree – which the *Age* records was encored three times (A: 25 Oct. 1866, 7). The *Argus* notes, too, that it electrified the audience and brought forward 'thunders of applause' (27 Oct. 1866, Supp 4). Interestingly, the musical programme which Horsley put together appears to have largely comprised Philharmonic Society members, including its leading soloists (Fotheringham 195). Another of his compositions to be presented as part of the musical programme was "The Exhibition March." The work's popularity saw it revived several times over the next decade, one such time being a concert put together in early 1878 by its original organist David Lee (Melbourne Town Hall, 2 February).

In 1870 Horsley returned briefly to Melbourne in order to undertake a commission to compose a cantata to one of Henry Kendall's poem. The work, titled *Euterpe* was performed at the Melbourne Town Hall in August 1870 (it also received a performance in London in 1976). Not long after completing the cantata Horsley returned to England, but by 1873 he had again moved on, this time to New York. It was here that he became both the organist at St John's Chapel and conductor for the Church Music Association. He died on 28 February 1876 in New York.

MUSIC THEATRE WORKS

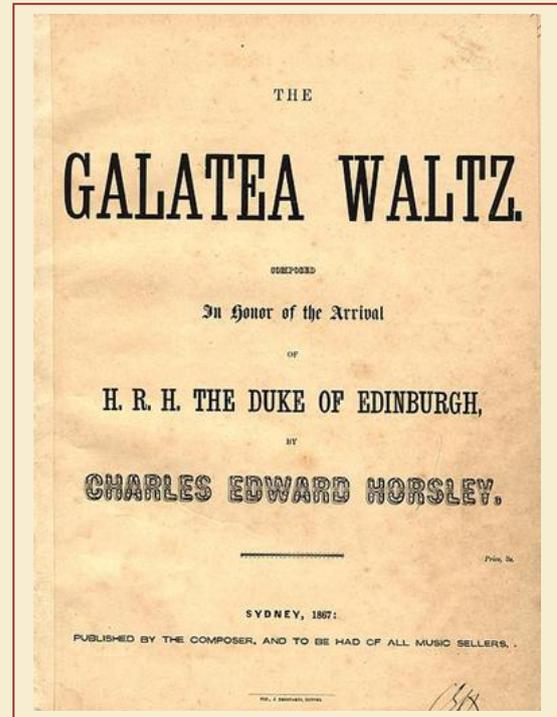
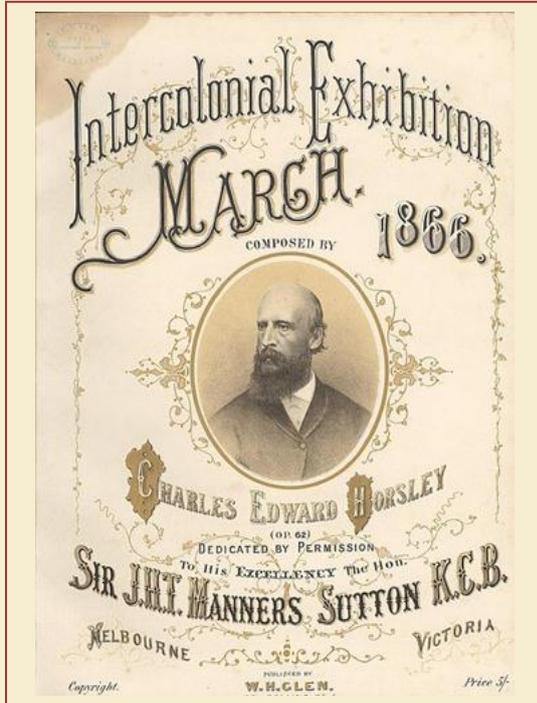
1866: **South Sea Sisters** [musical masque]

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

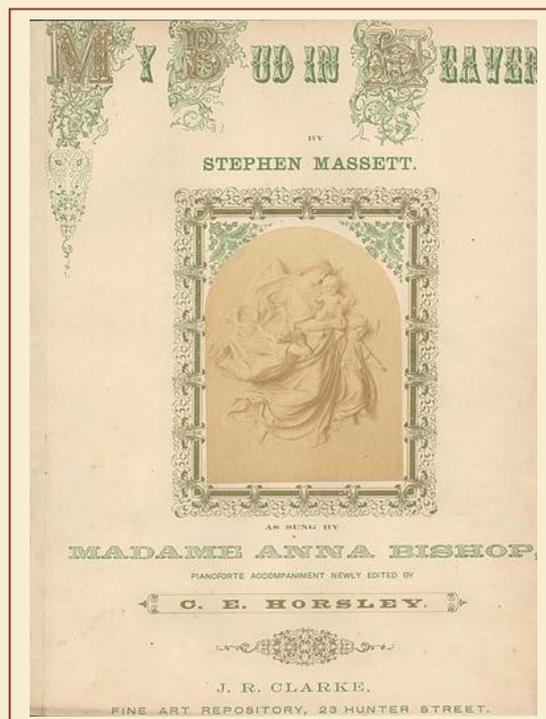
1. The "Corroboree Chorus" from *The South Sea Sisters* was later incorporated into Helen Benlow's drama *For Sixty Thousand Pounds*, first staged at the Princess's Theatre, Sandhurst (Vic) on 2 November 1974.

FURTHER REFERENCE:

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Source: National Library of Australia



Last updated: 2/05/2012

Expanded and updated from Clay Djubal, "What Oh Tonight." Ph D Diss. U of Qld (2005), Appendix D.

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