

MORITZ HEUZENROEDER – A MUSICAL PIONEER

When Moritz Heuzenroeder died suddenly at the age of 48, soon after he'd returned from his customary early morning walk through the Barossa Valley township of Tanunda, his shocked friends mourned the loss of one whose musical abilities and love of his adopted country had contributed so much to music-making in South Australia in the latter quarter of the 19th century. His reputation as a gifted pianist and teacher was enhanced by the opportunities he had created for public concert-giving, especially by the amateur musical societies he had himself founded, and more personally by the music he composed for his friends and students to perform and for the enjoyment of a wider audience. Only a few days before his death, friends had remarked on his splendid form and excellent health at an impromptu musical party at nearby Angaston "where he was a favourite with everyone", and where he delighted his audience with his "poetical playing" of Chopin's music which was his special forte and had always featured on his recital programmes. His death threw a gloom over the German and musical communities in South Australia. From the eloquent obituaries and other sources contained in the South Australian Archives it has been possible to piece together a picture of his life and personality.

A photograph in the possession of the late John Heuzenroeder's family who still run the family legal practice established in Tanunda in 1895, shows Moritz as a dark, handsome young man with an intense and lively expression. The youngest son of an Ottersburg doctor of medicine, he probably first visited Adelaide in his youth sometime before 1865. Why he came is impossible to discover. It seems unlikely that he was one of the disillusioned German intellectuals and bourgeoisie who were assisted by the Schomburgk Migration Society to escape from a revolution-torn Germany after 1848, and who numbered many talented musicians including the composer famous for his "Song of Australia", Carl Linger of Berlin. Perhaps he sought independence and adventure. Whatever the cause, he soon found that the precocious musical talents he had shown since early childhood, when he was so "devoted to his art" that he often spent all day at the piano, oblivious even of hunger, could scarcely be advanced in a new colony without further training, so he enrolled at the Royal Academy in Stuttgart to study composition with Dr. Sebter for several years before again taking up a career in Adelaide in 1872.

On his return he took a bachelor residence on East Terrace overlooking the olive groves and parklands surrounding the

city, and began to teach the piano and singing. Loathing publicity, there was nothing he preferred more than organising private concerts in his home where he and his best pupils often attracted a small crowd in the street below the open windows who gathered to listen. If ever Moritz became aware of his uninvited audience, he would slam the window shut and close the piano too. He did however give a series of concerts in the Victoria Hall, Gawler Place for an invited audience in 1883, when "all the best people" attended including the then-Governor Sir William Robinson, himself a composer of popular songs and a keen patron of music in three States. A previous Governor, the Earl of Kintore, had less cause to support the Herr Heuzenroeder who had created a public furore by refusing to teach singing to the Earl's daughter on the grounds of her incompetence! He preferred the company of his more talented students like Messrs. Nitschke, Holder and Martin and Miss Minna Schrader, all of whom made a name in Adelaide musical societies. He would invite them for tea which he expertly cooked and served, after which the group would spend the evening around his piano.

Many of his intimate friends were members of the SA German Club and fine instrumentalists who formed Adelaide's first concert orchestra. For them and the Männergesang (the male-choir which he trained), Moritz wrote a little comic opera in German, "Faust und Gretchen" in 1883. This followed the success of his operetta "Onkel Becker's Geschichte" which was performed by an amateur company at the Theatre Royal in 1882. Encouraged by growing community interest in choral singing and opera, he formed the Adelaide Harmonie Society, directing them in performances of light operas made popular by the visiting Opera Companies of W.S. Lyster in the days before Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas swept the Australian theatres. They included von Suppé's "Boccaccio," Lecocq's "Madame Angot" and Benedict's "Lily of Killarney" which were current 'hits'.

But Moritz' outstanding operatic venture was his collaboration with the local writer Harry Congreve Evans in an original Australian comic opera in 2 acts entitled "Immomeena", premiered at the Adelaide Theatre Royal in October 1893. Set in a homestead on the banks of the River Murray, the loose-knit plot was described by a contemporary critic as "a lyric of the Australian bush ... of merry-making and holiday-keeping amongst cultured people as well as the stockmen, the rousabout and the ordinary stationhand". It thus presented a more realistic picture of colonial society and the democratic spirit than most "exotic" indigenous dramas. Characters include Harry Crosby the squatter, his cousin Kitty and her

friend Violet who are both intent on amorous intrigue with the handsome Police Trooper Alex Fergus and his friend James Main, a bush adventurer. Visitors to the fancy-dress party in the homestead's ballroom include a pompous Alderman who is looking for his long-lost son, an eccentric scientist and 'new chum' Professor Bingham who is looking for the mythical Bunyip and succeeds in an unconvincing scene with the help of Billy-the-Hatter, a crazed shepherd-stockman "gone daft in the sun". An ingratiating fellow caller Harold Montague is described by his creators as a "masher" and an "exquisite", whilst an Irish servant girl, Maggie, sings sentimental ballads about the "little green isle of the sea". Choruses of stockmen, stationhands and girls crowd the stage for dances and spirited choruses.

The entirely amateur cast performed well, especially Edith Roberts (in her "Skirt Dance"), who had been thoroughly trained by Miss Millie Osborne, a professional dancer with the Williamson-Musgrove Comic Opera Company. Regrettably the company had only one stage rehearsal before the first night, and although the score was neither over-exacting nor difficult to master, it was unfortunate that the composer's place on the podium was taken at the last minute by Mr. Quinn while Moritz, suffering from a heavy cold, had to sit in the auditorium. The performance was, however a huge success. The audience loved it, and the two authors not only had to acknowledge the applause at the end of Act 1, but were "met with great cheering" at the conclusion by a crowded and enthusiastic house. Remarking on the composer's great melodic facility, his bright, swinging style, and the boldness of the experiment which was essentially new and Australian and deserved to succeed not only in the colonies but "as a novelty at home" (viz, England), the local press nevertheless admitted that some of the music was reminiscent of "things heard before" and lacked any great distinction. Alas, apart from another performance in 1894, "Immomeena" has disappeared. Of all the songs, duets, choruses and interpolated dance music, only an Irish ballad survives, together with the libretto booklet published at the time which contains the spoken dialogue and lyrics.

At its conclusion the cast grouped before an allegorical tableau depicting bush scenes and sang a patriotic "Song of Australia" glowing with local pride and fervour. This was not Moritz' first essay in national song, as his "Australia" to words by C.C. Presgrave is still extant. Like so many late-nineteenth century patriotic odes it failed to evoke the necessary nationalist sentiment still apparently considered vital for community singing on public occasions in 1973!

But its lyrics inspired a German-born composer to the heights of romantic and hyperbolic drawing-room song:

Oh, beauteous land of radiant light,
And cloth'd in nature's loveliness;
Where silver, gold, and rubies bright
Adorn her virgin youthfulness;
Surrounded by the mighty main,
Who can foretell thy future fame?
For our fair land we shout Hurrah!
Australia, Australia, Australia.

No other clime so dear to me,
Thou art my own, my native land,
And older nations wond'ring see
Thy mighty strides and cities grand;
And tho' the ocean rolls between,
Our hearts are with our Empress Queen,
For Queen and country shout Hurrah!
Australia, Australia, Australia.

Moritz Heuzenroeder's other contributions to national music include a "Coo-ee" chorus in "Immomeena":

Men (offstage) : Coo-ee!
Girls : Coo-ee!
Men : 'Tis our Australian cry
 In peril or in fear
 Or when our friends are near
 We raise our voices high!
Girls : Coo-ee!

and his attempt to describe in notation the famed Bunyip, who "has eyes at the back of his head, Of a terribly fiery hue". Billy's "dolorous tones" describe the animal's curious croon in a descending chromatic wail ending with a high-pitched shriek! In the same opera, Moritz called on his eager students to make baa-ing and moo-ing sounds and other quaint sound effects. In the face of such realism, the *Advertiser* critic regretted the omission of some *real* "natives of the soil", and felt that a "patter song from King Billy or a love duet between him and his lubra in the real aboriginal tongue would be amusing if not entirely new".

Besides his operatic activities, Heuzenroeder occasionally accompanied visiting celebrity singers and gave piano recitals to the predominantly German musical societies of Gaw-

ler and the Barossa Valley. He finally moved to Tanunda 8 months before his death where he formed an orchestra and began a choral society at Angaston which was to have given its first concert 3 days after his death. The late John Heuzenroeder's grandfather, who acted to wind up Moritz' estate, found he had died virtually penniless, and unmarried so the family erected to the memory of one but distantly related to them a tombstone in the Langmeil Cemetery in Tanunda. It reads :

In affectionate memory of
MORITZ HEUZENROEDER

R.A. Stuttgart

Born 15th July 1849

at Ottersburg, Germany

Died 9th November 1897

ELIZABETH WOOD