

# Knowing the Score: The Veech Library Church Music Collection

*by Kit Smith*

*This article originally appeared in a slightly different form in The Catholic Weekly August 13, 2000 (p. 15)*

The concept that music and society are inextricably linked is not new. Indeed, in this context, Confucius (c.551-479 B.C.) is often quoted: 'If you want to know if people are well-governed, and if its laws are good or bad, examine the music it practises'. As recently as 1991, Mark Roosa, in his opening address during a Library Association Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, spoke of music as a 'barometer of society'.

Until the present digital age, most of our existing music resources were in print-based form, that is, sheet music. It is a fascinating exercise to trace Australia's history, with its changing social values, through its sheet music. In the same way, changing styles and fashions in church music are relevant to scholars and historians.

For some time, Hans Arns, well known for many years as Veech Librarian before his retirement, had been concerned about the future, and indeed survival, of a major church music collection in the library's care. The Veech Library is the principle theological information resource of the Catholic Church in New South Wales, and forms an integral part of what has become the Catholic Institute of Sydney. The library, which began as a collection in Bishop Polding's first Catholic Seminary in 1836, was relocated, with the Institute, from Manly to Strathfield in 1996.

The church music collection consisted of printed music from St Mary's Cathedral Sydney, St Columba's College Springwood, and St Patrick's College Manly. Most of the items had never been professionally catalogued nor even safely stored. Music librarians are ideally trained musicians, proficient in sight reading, and familiar with the literature and bibliography

of that body of material. Hans Arns was well aware of the importance of this criteria. Responding to his advice, in December 1997 Father Brian Lucas, Archdiocesan Secretary, offered a contract to this writer to catalogue the Church Music Collection. The proposal had enthusiastic approval and support of the present Veech Librarian, Anne Hocking, and work commenced on the collection in February 1998.

The collection comprised eight large tea chests of loose, unsorted, extremely dirty sheet music items, three four-drawer steel filing cabinets of manuscripts and photocopied music, and approximately six hundred and twenty-five bound volumes of hymnals, collections of oratorios, and miscellaneous sacred vocal music. The bound volumes were all in excellent condition. The collection was to be housed, as are all other special collections, in compactus steel shelving on the second floor of the library. There is no public access to this area, and constant temperature and low humidity is maintained.

With the bound volumes safely on shelves, work began immediately on sorting the music in the tea chests. Each item had to be carefully lifted from the container, gently brushed and

---

*Kit Smith has been employed, over a number of years, in various theological libraries in Sydney, including the Colin Library, Catholic Theological Union, Hunters Hill NSW. Until 2003, Kit was Music Curator at the Veech Library, Catholic Institute of Sydney, Strathfield NSW, where she continues to act as church music consultant when required. She is currently a PhD candidate at Australian Catholic University, undertaking research on the ritual role of music in contemporary Australian Catholic worship.*

creases carefully straightened before being laid out for identification and sorting. Many works had become detached from their bindings, so it was only one of many challenges to identify separated pages and restore them to their original format. Much of the collection had, over the years, been exposed to rodent and insect infestation, atmospheric pollutants, light, and inadequate storage. Many of the items are acidic, with torn, brittle paper and mould stains. Nevertheless, the music notation is, on the whole, clear and unfaded, and it was sheer joy to watch these works gradually emerging once again as the precious items they undoubtedly are.

By the end of March, the eight tea chests had been emptied (except for the rodent droppings!) and removed from the library. Classification and cataloguing could now proceed - but significant preservation issues could not be ignored.

In negotiating a contract to have the Church Music Collection professionally catalogued, there is no way that the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney could have foreseen the now obvious preservation needs. However, we at the Veech Library recognized that it was not feasible to catalogue the material without some simultaneous preservation investigation and archival storage measures being undertaken.

Apart from the fragile condition of much of the music, the storage of scores was a vital consideration. The Collection includes some hundreds of mass, oratorio, cantata, motet and instrumental scores. Music scores have significant characteristics which distinguish them from other library materials. First, they often have several separate vocal or instrumental parts. These are all catalogued and shelved together, but must be physically separate pieces so that performers can use and study them individually. Any preservation treatment must leave these items separate. Second, they are often quite thin and flimsy, with lightweight paper covers. This makes them very vulnerable to damage when shelved in an upright position. Third, they must open freely and stay open so that they can be easily used by musicians in performance situations.

To prevent further deterioration, especially from acid migration, it is ideal for as much of the material as possible to be stored in acid-

free containers. Many companies throughout Australia are now marketing such products at quite reasonable prices. Within the constraints of the library budget, the Veech Library purchased a quantity of polypropylene music satchels, in a variety of sizes. Polypropylene is an inert plastic which is strong, stable and very adaptable to archival design demands. The satchels are ideal for thin, unbound material requiring support on the shelf without exposing the items. While some of the material in multiple copies were catalogued and shelved in labelled pamphlet boxes awaiting further consideration, most catalogued items (with the exception of the bound volumes) have been stored in polypropylene satchels, thus preventing further deterioration.

Good news travels fast - even in church music circles! Many boxes of unsolicited but very fine donations of sheet music items for the Collection have already arrived at the Veech Library. Even without publicity, there has been a steady stream of enquiries, and requests for assistance in researching church music, indicating the real need for such a central resource. In 1999, the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney recognized the value of the work already completed and extended the time of the original contract.

### Items of special interest

The major portion of the collection is made up of material which has clearly been influential in the development of church music in Sydney, from the early nineteenth century. There is, for example, a large collection of hymnals which includes material from a variety of Christian traditions.

A smaller, but significant and valuable portion of the Collection includes music composed, edited or arranged by Australians, or in Australia. Many people who attended Catholic schools during the first half of the twentieth century will affectionately recall learning to sing *Australia* (God bless our lovely morning land!), a national anthem composed by Father Maurice J. O'Reilly CM (1866-1933). This, as well as his other published works, are held.

Much to the delight of a Sydney musicologist currently researching works by Paolo Giorza (1832-1914), the Veech Library Church Music

Collection yielded a number of 'treasures' hitherto inaccessible. Paolo Giorza was the most significant nineteenth century Italian composer to visit Australia, where he worked from 1871 to 1884 as composer, conductor and organist. His Australian compositions included a significant amount of superb church music.

One of the greatest privileges of this project has been a growing appreciation of the personal and professional qualities of Father Joseph Muset-Ferrer (1890-1957). In all the history of music at St Patrick's College Manly, it would be difficult to discover a priest more beloved and admired than this saintly and talented man. One the very first morning of work on this project, several faculty members spoke inspirationally of his work, and many users of the Collection who experienced his teaching and value his music, continue to 'sing his praises'. Father Joseph Muset-Ferrer, world famous organist and prolific composer, was a Spanish priest who came to Australia at the instigation of the Apostolic Delegate in 1939. As Professor of Sacred Music at St Patrick's College Manly until 1945, Father Muset-Ferrer raised the standard of choral singing there to an amazingly high level. His many motets and major organ works were often composed overlooking the ocean at Manly, or among the gum trees of Springwood. His work is described as being possessed of a profound spiritual quality, and is regarded by many as 'the greatest music ever produced here by a Catholic' (Richard Connolly, *The Catholic Weekly*, 14 March 1957). He was renowned for his humility, and for his unflinching patience and compassion for all. It has indeed been a privilege to process his published and manuscript works as precious items in the Veech Library Church Music Collection. His memory warrants infinitely more perpetuation than these few lines can provide.

A significant number of manuscripts by local composers, too numerous to discuss in this article, are now catalogued and safely stored. At the bottom of the last tea chest, however, lay a most precious gem - an *O salutaris*, in original manuscript form, signed 'J.A. Delany 15 August 1900'.

John Albert Delany (1852-1907), layman, was Director of Music, and sometimes organist, at St Mary's Cathedral Sydney, from 1872 to 1877, in 1882, and from 1886 to his death in

1907. Delany was a composer of considerable output and a brilliant conductor, who 'scaled musical heights yet to be exceeded and left behind him a name that will never be erased from the history of Australian music' (Errol Lea-Scarlett, *Musicology V*, 1979). Delany's genius as a conductor and arranger is unquestioned, and prints of lithographic master sheets in his own fine notation, prepared for various occasions, are among the most valued items in this Collection. His greatest achievement was the presentation of the Australian premiere of Sir Edward Elgar's oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius* in Sydney Town Hall in 1903, to mark the golden jubilee of Cardinal Moran, Archbishop of Sydney.

Delany's own works are incredibly beautiful, and music-loving Sydney often hailed him as 'The Australian Gounod'. In 1993, to celebrate the 175th anniversary of St Mary's Cathedral Choir, Delany's *Mass in A flat*, first performed for Christmas 1892, had its first modern performance at a concert given and recorded by St Mary's Cathedral Choir, and Sydney Conservatorium Choir and Chorale, conducted by David Russell. This glorious sacred music is readily available for purchase on a Walsingham Classics CD, and is a fitting tribute to the work of a great Australian musician. Let us hope that future performances of Delany compositions will include the superb *O salutaris*, now safely rescued from the tea chests!

### The future

The Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, and the Catholic Institute of Sydney Strathfield, in encouraging and actively supporting this work, have facilitated an invaluable contribution towards the preservation of and access to an extremely important and probably unique resource. But this Collection has never been intended as an exhibit in a museum. It is a vital source of information that is meant to be used. The Collection is already attracting many users - and the rewards are magnificent. The second floor of the Veech Library may be 'library quiet', but to those of us with a passion for sacred music the compactus shelves now resound with glorious harmonies.

The potential for development of this Collection is enormous. The donations of sheet music already mentioned have served to fill some

gaps in the original collection, and have provided some much needed post-Vatican II church music. There undoubtedly exist many more collections whose owners are concerned about their future preservation and usefulness. The tragic possibility that our knowledge of the past will disintegrate with the paper that carries it, is only too real. The Veech Library staff would be most interested in discussing these issues with possible donors.

It will come as no surprise, of course, that one of the most difficult problems connected with this ongoing work is that of finance. Both the Archdiocese and the Catholic Institute of Sydney have been more than generous in extending their budgets to meet the demands of preservation resources and professional staff. There is serious doubt as to whether this financial support can be continued indefinitely.

This is our history, our heritage, our 'barometer' of the liturgical, spiritual and theological

life of the Australian Church almost from its beginning. Could there possibly be a more profoundly beautiful way to promote the Gospel message than through music? Our prayer is that we can continue to maintain and develop these unique records of our rich ecclesiastical heritage for the benefit of many, many future generations.

Enquiries can be made to: Kit Smith or Anne Hocking, Veech Library, Catholic Institute of Sydney, 99 Albert Road, Strathfield 2135.  
Telephone: 02 9752 9530; Fax: 02 9746 6022;  
e-mail: [ahocking@cis.catholic.edu.au](mailto:ahocking@cis.catholic.edu.au)

*A further article by Kit Smith entitled "The Veech Library Australian Church Music Collection," can be found in The Australasian Catholic Record Volume 82, No. 2 (April 2005) : 189-201.*

---

## OFFICERS OF ANZTLA FOR 2005/2006

**President: Tony McCumstie**

Mannix Library, Catholic Theological College  
P O Box 146, East Melbourne Vic. 3002  
Phone: 61 3 9412 3350  
Email: [tmccumstie@ctcmelb.vic.edu.au](mailto:tmccumstie@ctcmelb.vic.edu.au)

**Treasurer: Kim Robinson**

Moore Theological College Library  
1 King Street Newtown NSW 2042  
Phone: 61 2 9577 9897  
Email: [kim.robinson@moore.edu.au](mailto:kim.robinson@moore.edu.au)

**Vice President: Philip Harvey**

Carmelite Library  
216 Richardson Street  
Middle Park Victoria 3206  
Phone: 61 3 9682-8553  
Email: [koan@alphalink.com.au](mailto:koan@alphalink.com.au)

**2006 Conference Representative:**

**Blan McDonagh**

Australian Lutheran College Adelaide  
Phone: 08 8267 7376  
Email: [Blan.MacDonagh@alc.edu.au](mailto:Blan.MacDonagh@alc.edu.au)

**Secretary: Rhonda Barry**

Mary Andrews College  
28 Carillon Ave Newtown NSW 2042  
Phone: 61 2 9517 5333  
Email: [rhondabarry@netspace.net.au](mailto:rhondabarry@netspace.net.au)

**NZ Representative: Judith Bright**

Kinder Library, St John's College  
Private Bag 28 907 Remuera  
Auckland New Zealand 1136  
Phone: 64 9 521 2725  
Email: [Judith@stjohns.auckland.ac.nz](mailto:Judith@stjohns.auckland.ac.nz)