

ROBERT BEALE, *CHARLES HALLÉ: A MUSICAL LIFE* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), ISBN 978-0-7546-6137-5, xxi + 278pp, £60.

In the early 1850s, in a determined effort to raise playing standards in the Manchester Gentlemen's Society orchestra, Hallé wrote to the orchestra's leader: 'Will you be kind enough to direct the enclosed letter to our second Bassoon, whose address I do not know? He is going to leave us; I wish he would take the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Clarinet with him' (65).

Any British-trained orchestral musician identifies (Sir) Charles Hallé (1819–95) with the eponymous Manchester-based orchestra. The acute accent on the final vowel of his name promises something a little more exotic than might be readily associated with industrial Northern England and the implied French connection is misleading since Hallé was actually of German origin. In Robert Beale's monograph, published within Ashgate's *Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain* series, Mark Elder, the current Music Director of the Hallé Orchestra, supplies a short foreword written on the cusp of the 150th anniversary of the Hallé Concerts in Manchester. What most British-trained orchestral musicians may not know is that Hallé was a multi-faceted musician and, like so many of the success stories of his generation, capable of a portfolio career. His career stemmed from his apparently nuanced and thoughtful performances as pianist. He gave the first complete cycle of Beethoven piano sonatas in London and altered the British musical map by generating orchestral life outside the capital with a longevity perhaps even he could not have anticipated. Wisely he sustained his instrumental profile alongside his conducting work so that he was perceived as a highly-competent, rounded, practitioner. Out of necessity he ensured that income from teaching was reliable when making career decisions including the one to establish himself both in London and in Manchester.

Beale, longstanding music critic for the *Manchester Evening News*, exploits the experience that his connection with the city's cultural life provides in his gathering of source materials. He states tellingly in the Preface how Hallé's work depended heavily on the 'supportive intervention of the Manchester political and business community at a critical early point' (xvi); Beale notes wryly that in our own times this support remains just as much of a necessity. Manchester boasted a well-to-do, newly-moneyed, German community and in this regard Hallé's birthplace (Hagen, Westphalia) gave him an advantage. His long career casts light on and touches the lives of great composers and musicians of the century and the core of his repertoire as conductor remains central to the programming of major Western orchestras today.

Beale's remit is an ambitious one given that Michael Kennedy, like Beale a Manchester-based newspaper critic, furnished substantial histories of the Hallé Orchestra and its founder across a period extending from 1960 to 2004. In this new study Beale therefore contrives to supply a biography which offers new perspectives on Hallé the

man, businessman and musician. In the Preface he writes that 'Charles Hallé is one of the nineteenth century's most important musical figures' (xv) and, although Hallé's historiographical treatment has been coloured by the fact that his recollections end in 1860, Beale argues persuasively that there is a hidden story still to be told, not least in relation to his advocacy for mid-nineteenth-century English-language opera.

It is by Chapter 3, in which Beale examines Hallé's enterprising exploitation of the opportunity to supply an orchestra for the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition (1857) that the book shifts into purposeful tempo. The fact that Hallé shrewdly gathered a fifty-strong orchestra of players drawn from his Gentlemen's Society orchestra, but also from London and Paris, is interesting in itself. That he also managed daily afternoon concerts for the duration of the Exhibition (May–October), but generally conducted them himself only on Thursday afternoons, is but one example of his businesslike approach. Beale clearly locates the creation of the Hallé orchestra to 1857 and his account of the ensuing struggle to establish the orchestra and his Manchester Choral Society and eventually garner a profit (against a backdrop of competing local activities and the simultaneous continuation of his London-based work) makes for fascinating reading. 1861 marked a watershed with the establishment of a 22-week subscription series of 'Grand Orchestral and Choral Concerts' attracting 600 subscribers; a highlight for audiences was Jenny Lind's return to the city and the performance of Handel's *Messiah* boasted 3,709 in the audience. Beale points out that the model created in 1861 remained the basis for Hallé's Manchester concerts until his death. A decade later he faced defection and competition from his principal flautist, Edward de Jong, who set up a rival orchestra. His takings were unaffected but the frustrations of issues surrounding the poaching and borrowing of players and eminent soloists must have tested his patience.

Beale paints a picture of an articulate and driven man who saw it as his vocation both to educate and to satisfy his audiences. Some of Hallé's claims for being remembered by future generations include setting up and stoically developing (1858–95) a permanent symphony orchestra outside London, combining this with a starry career as solo and chamber pianist, editing and teaching, and founding a conservatoire. His self-promotion skills were good and he did not shy away from controversy for the sake of his art and his career.

Beale's work highlights anew the conditions within which orchestral players worked not least in relation to onerous travel arrangements and limited rehearsal opportunities. More contextualization of interesting matters relating to string section ratios could have deepened the reader's appreciation of Hallé's methods and outlook. Did he deliberately contrive, for instance, in his early years in Manchester, to amass larger numbers of double basses than violas or was this simply a result of issues of

supply? Discussion of fees paid to players could similarly have drawn more extensively on the growing literature relating to the accounts of other orchestral institutions. In discussing Hallé as composer and editor, Beale supplies a catalogue without broadening the section to relate his activities here to his other work. Clearly Hallé did not see his own compositions as the best vehicle for his performing career.

After eight chapters which offer a chronological biography, the ninth discusses 'Hallé's Business Model and Methods' and is of particular note due to the material Beale presents and interprets. Hallé has generally been credited with moving his concert series into profit within four years with an upward curve thereafter. Beale shows, however, that the definition of profit in these claims is a superficial one. Not only did Hallé meet some of the orchestral costs from his private funds but his income from the so-called 'profits' was fundamentally variable. It is in this chapter that we understand clearly the complexities of Hallé's portfolio career. Aside from his concert commitments, he was a prolific teacher with hundreds of pupils listed in his timetables and address books. The joint income he derived from combining work in London and Manchester was crucial. Beale shows that the railway offered a lifeline to more than a handful of Hallé's players who fulfilled duties in the orchestra of Her Majesty's Theatre in London alongside their Manchester-based work. Over time Hallé developed a weekly rate for a proportion of his regular players which enabled him to set up tours during the winter season. The account books for the Manchester concerts are used as the basis for a telling analysis of audience numbers, expenditure and income. Hallé's strategic management of subscriptions and wise cooperation with the Choral Society are just two examples of his approach to consolidating his work in Manchester. Rules were clear. His handling of player exclusivity, sick pay, competitors, and careful categorization of players according to types of engagement reveal an attention to structures and processes which lies at the heart of his sustained presence in concert life. The monograph's appendices extend this chapter and codify data on Hallé's London performances (1848–94); premieres conducted by him in Manchester; a provisional list of chamber music premieres given by him; and the works most frequently performed in his Manchester concerts 1857–95. Detailed tables complete the appendices and these are illuminating. Beale applies the Herfindahl index (derived from economics) to examine the patterns of performances of composers' works in Hallé's Manchester concert series alongside average attendance against venue capacities. Hallé may not have got rich from his hard work, but Beale shows that he established the high standards and strong work ethic at the heart of his orchestra's identity to the present day.

The book has its frustrations for the reader. The overall structure is an understandable one but leads to a rather cursory approach in some sections. The Epilogue, 'An Appreciation of Hallé as a Person', does not take the opportunity to provide a

cogent analysis of preceding material, but is instead a collection of anecdotes about Hallé the man. The Introduction is useful but does not prepare us for the architecture of the monograph as a whole or provide a sense of the relative importance of the aspects of Hallé's career it discusses and there is little sense of conclusion as the book reaches its end. Beale explains, in his prefatory note on referencing methods, that his primary sources are generally unpaginated but this does not justify his omission of the source itself when clarifying, for example, the sequence of events leading to Hallé's acceptance of the role of conductor within Manchester's Gentlemen's Society orchestra (61). Also, why not supply Hallé's dates at the outset? Beale's written style can be a little ungainly and perhaps chapter titles could have been more elegant. Sometimes lengthy quotations are left unevaluated in the narrative, sentences are often multi-clausal, and paragraph divisions are occasionally unexpected. Editing (including final proof-reading) leaves something to be desired. Citation practice is variable—in places footnotes abound without use of standard formulae such as *ibid.* and elsewhere sources are bracketed within the body of the text—there are many careless misspellings, and the author tantalizingly cites 'Berger, 1994' (8) yet the bibliography yields no detailed entry for the reader.

Overall what stands out in this book is Hallé's capacity for hard work and his shrewdness in business and networking (including with famous composers and soloists, dignitaries and persons with royal connections). There were demanding dualities in his life as exemplified by his separate careers in London and Manchester and the tensions of sustaining his instrumental performance against his conducting career. Beale's contribution to our understanding of not just Hallé's career but also the working conditions of his 'band' is strong in its careful analysis of data. This is a useful book which adds to our understanding of Hallé's dual-marketplace career and enduring legacy.

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