LEON CARON AND THE MUSIC PROFESSION
IN
AUSTRALIA

Bonnie Jane Smart

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Music
University of Melbourne
2003

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
Faculty of Music

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the thesis presented by me for the degree of Master of Music comprises only my original work except where due acknowledgment is made in the text to all other material used.

Signature: Bonnie Smart

Name in Full: Bonnie Jane Smart

Date: 7 July 2003
Abstract

Léon Francis Victor Caron (1850 – 1905) was one of the major figures in Australian nineteenth-century opera and orchestral circles. He was a well-known and well-liked public figure, regarded with respect and affection by musicians and audiences alike. Little has been written concerning Caron’s career. Given the amount he contributed to the Australian stage, an assessment of his importance within the music profession is warranted.

Most areas of Caron’s life are, as yet, totally unexplored; it falls outside the ambit of this thesis to present every detail pertaining to his varied and extensive musical career. Nevertheless, new information about a selection of Caron’s ventures is drawn upon here for the first time. Much of this material is used to examine the impact of Caron’s conducting on the orchestral profession in Melbourne and Sydney. Many of Caron’s performances (orchestral or otherwise) often featured the popular music of the day. The popular aspect of Caron as a composer is also considered, with particular reference to the incredibly successful pantomime *Djin Djin*.

An examination of Caron’s performances gives great insight not only into the part he played in the wider music profession; but it also sheds light on orchestral standards, performance practices and public tastes of the time. His contribution to the music profession in nineteenth-century Australia is extremely significant.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Kerry Murphy, for teaching me so much over the last year, and for being so generous with her time and support. I would also like to express my gratitude for the assistance provided by the staff of the Grainger Museum, and by Lena Vigilante in the Baillieu Music Library.

In addition, a big thank you to my Mum for her help with proofreading, and to my husband for his ongoing encouragement. Last but not least – thanks to Minty and Compost for sitting with me and keeping me company while at the computer!
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Biography</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: On the Podium</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Composing for the Populace</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Bibliography</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Illustrations

Picture of Caron (The Herald 21 May 1949) i

The Melbourne Music School 21

"At the Opening of the Federal Parliament" 22

Professional Musicians’ Association of Sydney 25

"Wanted, An Orchestra" 35
Introduction

Léon Francis Victor Caron ¹ (b. 13 January 1850 – d. 29 May 1905)² was a driving force within the musical scene of pre-Federation Australia. Through his activities as a composer, conductor, violinist and entrepreneur, Caron played a decisive role in establishing professional standards of music making in the late nineteenth century.

Only a few secondary sources concerning Caron exist, and when considered in total, various discrepancies arise regarding dates and repertoire. References are made to several relatively unexplored concert series and operatic productions in which Caron was involved. In addition, listed among Caron’s compositions are a number of works which have disappeared from the public domain. Yet, despite various points of disharmony, all accounts of Caron’s activities convey the sense that he had an important part to play in the development of the Australian music scene. An investigation into Caron’s career will serve two purposes – firstly, to bring the work of an important musician to light, and secondly, to enrich our understanding of turn-of-the-century musical culture.

My intention in this thesis is to assess Caron’s significance to the music profession of his time. This end will be achieved through consolidating the narrative of Caron’s life, and by considering aspects of this narrative within the context of existing knowledge about the Australian operatic and orchestral community of the time.

¹ Caron’s middle names are ordered differently in available sources, and sometimes Francis is given as François. I have chosen the order and spelling of names which appear on Caron’s marriage record, lodged with the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages in 1894 (reg. no. 1888).

² In Jennifer Royle, “Caron, Léon Francis Victor,” Oxford Companion to Australian Music, ed. Warren Bebbington (Melbourne: OUP, 1997) Caron’s date of death is listed as 1915, however the New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages gives 1905 as the date.
The scope of Caron's career is well covered in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB) article written by Kenneth Hince (published in 1969).\(^3\) Many of Caron's main activities are documented, and the article opens several lines for further enquiry, referring to such intriguing ventures as the Orpheus Club and the Caron English Opera Company.

In the early stages of my project, I hoped not only to find out more about such musical ventures, but also to discover more about Caron's instrumental music. According to several sources, Caron wrote "a choral symphony, three string quartets, a violin concerto and a grand opera – *Mati Miti*.\(^4\) As Caron was a violinist by training, it would be particularly interesting to examine the string quartets and violin concerto.\(^5\) Library catalogues around Australia house only a portion of Caron's music, and none of these are his string works.

I contacted Kenneth Hince to ask if he had further information on the whereabouts of Caron's instrumental pieces. He replied that all the information he had found regarding Caron had been presented in the *ADB* article.\(^6\)

The Grainger museum has the largest collection of archival material pertaining to Caron's life. Despite this, the only music it houses is the *Victoria Cantata* and the song

---


\(^4\) M.P. Greenwood-Adams, 'Lén Caron: Violinist ... Composer ... Conductor 1850 – 1905,' ts., Léon Caron Boxes, Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne, 3. These works are also referred to in *The Australian Star* 30 May 1905.

\(^5\) Some selections from one of the string quartets were performed at the Orpheus Club concerts (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October 1887).

\(^6\) Kenneth Hince, letter to the author, 5 March 2002.
"Ave Maria." Within this collection, a mix of assorted material - programmes, photos, some letters and articles - can be found.⁷

One of these articles is a several page outline of Caron's career which Marmion Percy Greenwood Adams presented to the Grainger museum in 1948. Greenwood-Adams was, in fact, Caron's son-in-law, and he had a small number of other publications to his credit - including an article on Caron in The Herald.⁸ While informative and engaging, this account is unreferenced. Given that Caron died in 1905, and Greenwood-Adams married Caron's daughter in 1919, it is quite possible that he may never have met Caron and that he was writing this script with the aid of his wife's memory. She would have been over fifty years of age at the time. Nevertheless, it presents a strong narrative of Caron's working life, and many of the facts are verifiable in other sources.

This typescript also gives one clue in its final paragraph as to the whereabouts of Caron's quartets: "Irma Caron (Mrs M.P. Greenwood-Adams) controls the music of her brilliant and prolific father. . ."⁹

I decided to find out whether there might be any living descendants of this family whom I could contact. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find death records for either Marmion Percy or Irma Greenwood-Adams using the Victorian Deaths Index. The particular difficulty with this procedure was the constantly changing names - both given name and surname - for both husband and wife! Firstly, Irma's maiden name appears

---

⁷ This collection contains a variety of souvenir programmes (mostly from the period 1899 – 1902), the script for Djin Djin, quite a number of photos of Caron, his family and colleagues, some books belonging to his wife and his own elementary harmony book. There are several letters, and an invitation to the Opening of the first Commonwealth Parliament.

⁸ The Herald 21 May 1949.

differently on her marriage and birth certificates.\textsuperscript{10} Secondly, her husband’s surname switches from Adams to Greenwood-Adams to Greenwood in the various sources which I found in the Grainger Museum and on the internet.\textsuperscript{11} I ordered a death certificate search within the state of Victoria for Leonie Irma Greenwood between the dates 1 January 1948 and 31 December 1992. This search returned no result. Nevertheless, there are probably other permutations of Caron’s daughter’s name that might return a result – perhaps in a different state too.

Another early lead which I followed came from the internet. The Waverley Historical Society listed Caron as one of the many notables buried in their local cemetery.\textsuperscript{12} I contacted the Waverley Library, which is affiliated with the Historical Society, and was sent some obituaries and press clippings, but unfortunately no music.

Given the time constraints of my project, and the strong possibility that Irma Caron may have had no living descendants, I decided to discontinue my search for Caron’s music. In the meantime I was compiling a considerable amount of new information on Caron’s career, enough to illustrate the way in which he used his musical talents in Australia.

The most useful addition to the already mentioned accounts of Caron’s musical activities is that by Kerry Murphy, “Léon Caron: His Role in the Musical Life of 19th Century Melbourne,” Explorations 2 (1985), 10 – 13. Most of the information presented

\textsuperscript{10} The birth record, listed in NSW, (reg. no. 2895/1891) gives her name as: Leonie I. C. On her marriage record, listed in Victoria (reg. no. 8153/1919) she is named: Irma Leonie Tasma. Greenwood is the surname listed on this record.


here has been drawn from two Table Talk articles featuring Caron’s life story. Both of these newspaper articles are referenced in the State Library of Victoria’s Biographical Index. The first Table Talk article appeared in the leadup to Caron’s debut with the J.C. Williamson firm (in April 1889). It is reasonably accurate in its portrayal of Caron’s career – so much so that one can only assume that the details would have been presented to the press by Caron himself. The second Table Talk article, dating from 1902, reads, “as Madame Caron and their pretty little daughter are spending the day at Mentone, and as he [Caron] has just finished a rehearsal of The Runaway Girl, he will have time to write a letter, and to give some account of his musical career. It is impossible to tell the story quite as entertainingly as M. Caron does. . .”\textsuperscript{13}

These two articles are very useful for recreating the picture of Caron’s working life. Murphy goes further, however, than merely relaying Table Talk’s biographical matter. Her article is the only source which provides a context for Caron’s musical activities. Observations about his compositional influences are alluded to, and review excerpts are provided. These give some sense of the public’s appreciation of his talents as a composer and conductor. Murphy concludes that “The most striking impression one has of Caron as a musician, is that of a professional. . . Caron’s influence on Melbourne’s musical scene warrants further study. . .”\textsuperscript{14} Indeed this exhortation was part of the reason I undertook this project!

These are the most important writings on Caron’s life of which I am aware. I must also mention several other sources, primary and secondary, which, while not specifically about Caron, have provided most useful information. Given the scarcity of archival material solely about Caron, and my desire to draw upon as many different sources as possible, I searched the archives of contemporaneous musicians and entertainment institutions held in the State Library of Victoria. I looked into documents from the Princess

\textsuperscript{13} Table Talk 13 February 1902.

\textsuperscript{14} Murphy 12.
Theatre, and two other sources – the papers of Ada Mary Norcott, and the collections of Robert Cane. Ada Mary Norcott (otherwise known as the singer Ida Osborne) made only one mention of Caron in her fastidious diaries. Nevertheless, her scrapbooks, containing press cuttings from her time with the J.C. Williamson Royal Comic Opera Company, furnished me with many useful reviews of Caron’s conducting. Likewise, the collection of Robert A. Cane, a violinist, contained programmes for the majority of Caron’s Melbourne Orchestra concerts.

Insofar as secondary sources are concerned, Alison Gyger’s Opera for the Antipodes: Opera in Australia 1881 – 1939 fills in many (though not all) of the missing pieces of information concerning Caron’s work as an opera conductor, detailing the premieres he conducted, and quoting reviews. Gyger acknowledges the difficulties in her research, stating that “Because so little has been written about the period - and that generally so inaccurate – my research tools have been almost exclusively the primary sources, the newspapers.” Of course, one may argue with Gyger’s comment, replying that using the newspaper as a reference tool is no assurance of accuracy.

While my telling of Caron’s story has been influenced by all of the abovementioned materials, I too have been largely reliant on the press for much of the new information I have presented. Wherever possible, I have tried to verify information found in the press with other sources.

2. George Musgrove Records – business / performances at the Princess Theatre MS 12450, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria


As little has been written about Caron’s life, the first chapter of this thesis is a
general biography. This biography outlines the most important aspects of his work, and
provides some background information on his earlier activities in Europe and America.

The second chapter examines Caron’s role as a conductor, considering his choice of
music, the qualities of the orchestras with which he worked, and his attributes as a musician
and entrepreneur. Some inferences are drawn about the possible impact Caron may have
had on the Australian orchestral scene. The third chapter is concerned with the popular
aspects of Caron’s compositions. This is examined primarily through his involvement in
the successful pantomime Djin Djin.

Finally, I will discuss some salient features which characterise Caron’s musical
career in Australia overall. This discussion culminates in a conclusion which interprets
what the work of this musician could have meant to the musical world of his time.
Chapter One: Biography

Léon Caron’s training began in his native Boulogne-sur-Mer with violin lessons. He received local acclaim quite early on, and by the age of ten was ready for formal music studies at L’Ecole Communale in Boulogne. Here he studied harmony with the renowned organist Alexandre Guilmant. Guilmant, later teacher to Marcel Dupré and Nadia Boulanger, left Boulogne during 1860 to pursue his own organ studies in Brussels, and therefore could only have taught Caron for a few months. Nevertheless, it is said that Caron kept up correspondence with Guilmant throughout the rest of his life. Other notable musicians with whom Caron came into contact in these early years included the touring virtuoso violinist Camilla Urso, who visited Boulogne in 1863/1864. Apparently Urso was most impressed with Caron’s ability, and gave him lessons gratis when in Boulogne. Interestingly, Urso would later work with Caron when she visited Australia. Caron completed his studies at L’Ecole in a relatively short time, and he was kept on at the institution, having himself graduated to the rank of a teacher whilst still in his early teens.

---

20 “He soon became so proficient on that instrument that he was called the ‘Little Paganini’” - Greenwood-Adams 1.

21 Table Talk 18 April 1889.

22 Table Talk 18 April 1889.


24 Hince ADB.

25 Table Talk 18 April 1889 states: “This lady heard Caron play and was so charmed with such a rare exhibition of genius that she gave him lessons, not only on her first concert tour – but on each subsequent visit to the town, and in her noble generosity never charged a sou.”

26 Table Talk 18 April 1889.
Caron finally arrived at the Paris Conservatoire as a nineteen-year-old. This was partly made possible through his receipt of a pension (totalling 100 francs per month) awarded by the Boulogne municipal council. In Paris Caron studied counterpoint and fugue with Victor Massé, and violin with Lambert Massart. Sources repeatedly state that Caron was short listed for the 1870 Prix de Rome (which his teacher Massé had won in 1844). Table Talk reads: “in 1870 the Franco-Prussian war was declared [19 July] just one month before the competition. Consequently everything was thrown into disorder, and Caron fled to England, catching the last train but one to Dieppe, before the line was captured, and fell in the hands of the Prussians.” The later Table Talk article claims the Prix de Rome was cancelled, stating that “In 1870, Leon [sic] Caron and three others were alone eligible to compete... but unfortunately the outbreak of the war prevented the competition taking place during that year.” The 1870 prize was indeed awarded (but probably after Caron had left the country).

27 Greenwood-Adams claims that Caron entered the Conservatoire around the age of thirteen; however, Table Talk’s April 1889 article gives more information, asserting that Caron taught in Boulogne until the age of nineteen, at which stage the municipal council provided the necessary financial support for him to go to Paris.


29 Table Talk 18 April 1889.

30 Table Talk. 13 February 1902.

31 Henri Maréchal and Charles LeFèbvre were the winners in 1870 (Denis Havard de la Montagne, ed., “Prix de Rome 1870 – 1879,” Musica et Memoria 19 February 2003, http://musicamentor.org/prix-rome-1870-1879.htm). It seems probable that Caron did not even complete a full year studying in Paris; he is not listed among the laureates in Constant Pierre.
Caron was one of many French artists to seek refuge from the horrors of the Paris communes on the other side of the Channel. It is possible that this time in England marks Caron’s first professional associations with the theatre - he was engaged at thirty-five shillings a week to play for the ballet at the Alhambra Theatre with Rivière’s (1819 – 1900) orchestra. A native Frenchman like Caron, Rivière’s strength as a composer lay in writing ballets and incidental music for the stage.

Roughly twelve months after his arrival in London, Caron left for the United States to play in the New Orleans French Opera Company. It is likely that he may have spent as short a period as late 1871 to early 1872 working for this group, as their 1872 – 73 opera season was cancelled due to financial problems. Other engagements around this time included playing violin in the orchestra for the Boston Peace Jubilee in the summer of 1872 (for which he was hired by the bandmaster Patrick Gilmore). The performance was a great extravaganza. The numbers involved in this production were astronomical, with the performers alone in the thousands – unfortunately the audience attendance was not always

---


33 Table Talk, 13 February 1902.


35 An exact date for Caron’s moving between continents has not been found as yet.

36 It is unclear whether he was playing viola or violin for this orchestra; Greenwood-Adams believes viola, Table Talk, April 1889 says first violin. Either, or perhaps even both, could have been possible – Caron often played the viola when required for chamber music performances in Australia. Similarly, both the Table Talk articles disagree over Caron’s earlier engagement in the Alhambra, one claiming that he played the violin and the other claiming the viola.


38 Table Talk, 13 February 1902.
all that could be hoped for.\textsuperscript{39} One work performed at this event (and also at Gilmore’s 1869 Boston Jubilee) was the Anvil chorus from \textit{Il Trovatore} with one hundred firemen pounding on real anvils.\textsuperscript{40}

Caron spent the greater part of his American career in the orchestra of Theodore Thomas.\textsuperscript{41} During this time Caron was active as a composer also.\textsuperscript{42} Details of which works he composed, and where they were premiered, have not been found, save one reference in a later Melbourne programme which refers to a euphonium solo, \textit{Souvenir de Richmond} – “Composed in the City of Richmond (Virginia), and played by the Theo. Thomas Orchestra in '74.”\textsuperscript{43} Until 1875 this orchestra performed an average of 130 concerts each year at the Central Park Gardens in New York alone.\textsuperscript{44} They were also a touring group, and typical destinations included Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Syracuse, Pittsburgh and St. Louis.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{39} Ronald L. Davis, \textit{A History of Music in American Life} Vol. 2 (Huntington, NY: R.E.Krieger Pub. Co., 1980 – 1982) 3 - 4. According to this source the ’69 jubilee was a phenomenal success – however at the ’72 Jubilee there was “one occasion [where] there were an estimated 22,000 performers on stage and a bare 7000 people in the audience” (Davis 4). The festival was “simply too much repetition and ended in financial disaster,” (Davis 4). \textit{Table Talk} articles concentrate on some of the more happy moments of the festival where “a choir of 25,000 . . . and an orchestra of 1200, performed before an audience of 75,000 people. The final Test Match will not draw such a crowd” (13 February 1902).

\textsuperscript{40} Davis 3 - 4.

\textsuperscript{41} Greenwood-Adams 2, and \textit{Table Talk} 18 April 1889. Thomas was an important conductor of his time. His work led to the formation of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

\textsuperscript{42} Greenwood-Adams 2.

\textsuperscript{43} Melbourne Orchestra Grand Promenade Concert Programme, 10 January 1891 from Robert A. Cane scrapbooks. Note also: The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association, \textit{The Rosenthal Archives of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra} (2003). 19 February 2003. \url{http://www.cso.org/archives_librarian.tar} These archives contain programmes for some of the concerts Caron may have played in; they could hold further information.


\textsuperscript{45} Russell 79.
Beginning in May 1876, the Thomas Orchestra participated in a series of concerts in the Forrest Mansion Hotel Gardens, as part of the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition celebrations. Due to a number of circumstances these concerts were a total failure, and had to be abandoned prematurely. As a result, the orchestra disbanded.

Undecided on where the next phase of his career would unfold, Caron listened to the advice of the then New York based composer Charles Horsley. Horsley, who was at this time the organist for St. John’s Chapel, and the director for the Church Music Association, was certainly in a position to make a qualified judgement, having spent 1861 – 1871 working in Australia as an organist, composer and critic. During this Australian sojourn he also set up the Musical Association of Victoria (later to become the Musical Society of Victoria).

Caron arrived in Melbourne towards the end of 1876. He initially began work as the concertmaster and virtuoso violinist with Lyster’s Royal Italian Opera Company.

---

46 Russell suggests that problems arose because of competition from other attractions, the somewhat unscrupulous management of the Forrest Hotel Company and the inhospitality of the venue (no refreshments, no room to move and the general distance of the Exposition from the city) 102 – 03, 107 – 12.

47 Table Talk 18 April 1889.

48 Table Talk 18 April 1889.

49 Table Talk 13 February 1902.


51 These are the dates Maidment gives for Horsley’s time in Australia. I have taken these, as Maidment gives more detailed information of Horsley’s movements than Nicholas Temperley gives in Grove Online (the dates Temperley gives are 1866 – 1872) - Temperley, Nicholas: “Horsley, Charles Edward,” The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online, ed. L. Macy, 4 August 2002, http://buffy.lib.unimelb.edu.au:2488.

52 Hince writes that Caron “made his first appearance as a conductor in the Melbourne Opera House in 1876.” However, both Table Talk and Greenwood-Adams explain that Caron made his initial performances in Melbourne on the violin – the 1889 Table Talk article reads: “on December 4, 1876, Leon [sic] Caron gave his first performance in Melbourne at a matinee[sic] before the critics and leading musicians. The result was his engagement with the late W.S. Lyster at a large salary, and on his appearance before the public his playing created a furore. After this he became the conductor of the New Zealand tour of Lyster’s last Italian opera company. . . .”
Alberto Zelman senior (1832-1907) was the conductor at this time. Caron’s official debut as a soloist took place mid-1877 between the acts of La belle Hélène at the Melbourne Opera House. He included his own repertoire among the showpieces he presented (see Appendix A). One critic described Caron as “a player of the highest order of merit,” proclaiming his debut a “distinguished and brilliant success.”

Caron’s first experience of conducting in Melbourne was also with Lyster’s Royal Italian Opera Company, where he replaced an ill Alberto Zelman at the last moment and successfully conducted the entire Carmen score by memory—a feat which undoubtedly contributed to his popularity. Further work quickly followed this initial sensation, and Caron’s career trajectory as a opera conductor was set firmly in place.

In November 1877 Caron was musical director for a Royal Italian Opera Company tour of New Zealand. This Royal Italian Opera Company was made up of singers who had participated in Lyster’s Lohengrin production in the preceding August, and who were now without work, due to Lyster’s ill-health. This opera troupe performed until 5 March 1878, travelling between Dunedin, Christchurch, Timaru, Wellington and Auckland. While Zelman had conducted the Melbourne premieres of Aida and Lohengrin with the same group of singers in the preceding months, it was Caron who conducted these works for the first time in New Zealand. After the troupe had disbanded, Caron, along with some of the original cast, stayed behind to give operatic items in concert, at least until May of 1878, if not longer.

---

53 Advertised to take place on 28 June 1877 (The Argus 27 June 1877).

54 The Argus 29 June 1877.

55 Table Talk 13 February 1902.

56 The Herald 21 May 1949.

57 All information pertaining to Caron’s New Zealand performances is drawn from Adrienne Simpson, Opera’s Farthest Frontier (Auckland: Reed Books, 1996) 49 - 54.
By 1881 Caron was conducting for the American Montague - Turner Opera Company. This group travelled between Melbourne, Sydney, Queensland and New Zealand. Caron continued to conduct this company at least until mid-1882 (at some stage during this year he also fulfilled the roles of conductor and choirmaster at St. Mary’s Cathedral). However, after a while he was back directing the company for its Sydney season in December 1883, when a new recruit appeared with the company; Eliza Sherwin. Caron married this singer, some six years his junior. Eliza would later use the name ‘Tasma’ in her performing. Through the course of her career, she was to make appearances with her husband in Caron’s English Opera Company, the Melbourne Orchestra Concerts, and at least once in the Orpheus Club series. Together they had one surviving child, Leonia Irma, born in 1891. Referred to as Irma in the press, she would later take up the musical profession, as had her parents. She even had her own operatic concert company which toured to Java and ‘the Celebes’ [Sulawesi].

From early May, 1879, Caron’s name appears in a newspaper advertisement for a Melbourne Music School (see fig. 1). This school was based in Alma Road, St. Kilda, and offered courses in violin, cello, piano and harmony. Caron’s colleagues at this school were Elsasser, Russell and Hart. Not much information is given about the professors. Elsasser, who taught harmony, was already well known for his work as a conductor of the

---

58 This group had quite a long period of tenure in Australia; run by a husband and wife team, they were active on the colonial stage from 1881 – 1885, returning again in 1891 (Gyger 5 – 21).

59 The Australian Star 30 May 1905.

60 Hince mentions that Caron had married earlier in America, in about 1870 (I believe the date of Caron’s first marriage, if indeed it did take place in America, would have had to have taken place later than 1870, as he spent this year between London and Paris). Leonora was the name of Caron’s first bride, who, according to Hince, predeceased him.

61 The first example I have found of the name change is given in the Melbourne Orchestra Concert, where she is billed as ‘Tasma’ Sherwin (see Appendix C). Other press sources sometimes print her name as Elsa – as does Gyger 17.

62 The Footlight Star March 1919.

63 The Argus 6 May 1879.
Melbourne Philharmonic Society, among other things. It was advertised that Russell, the piano teacher, had been trained at the Stuttgart Conservatory. Hart, who most likely had no overseas qualifications, taught the cello.

Fig. 1. Melbourne Music School, *The Argus* 6 May 1879.

A significant event in Caron’s career was the performance of his prize-winning *Victoria* cantata at the Melbourne International Exhibition, 1 October 1880. He was made the director of music for the Exhibition, conducting the performance of his own work — no small achievement for a relative newcomer to the Australian scene. Caron was also prominent on a number of other significant official occasions; he conducted music for the opening of Federal Parliament in May 1901 (see fig. 2) and for the Coronation celebrations in May 1902.

---


65 It would be interesting to find out more about Caron as a teacher — H. Morin Humphreys in *Men of the Time in Australia: Victorian Series* 2nd ed. (Melbourne, 1882) noted that "Caron is beloved by his pupils. . . ." xxvi – xxvii.

66 Programmes, Léon Caron boxes, Grainger Museum.
Fig. 2. "At the Opening of Federal Parliament," The Bulletin 18 May 1901.
During his time in Melbourne, Caron was a resident of Fitzroy and Emerald Hill. In 1884 The Sands & McDougall's Melbourne Suburban Directory no longer lists an address for Caron; it is likely that by this time he had made Sydney his home.67 He returned to Europe at least once during his lifetime in 1899 - partly to visit his ailing mother.68 It is possible also that Caron may have had siblings with whom he corresponded regularly in France.69 His daughter Irma would later travel to Boulogne-sur-Mer, on her way to study in Dresden.70

Caron continued working in the field of light opera throughout the eighties. He was associated with the Emilie Melville, Signor Verdi and Farley companies.71 In addition, he tried his own hand at theatre management with the Caron English Opera Company in 1886. This short-lived enterprise purportedly lost Caron five hundred pounds.72

While his attempt at management brought unhappy results, Caron's notable skill in the field of opera conducting was recognised when he was offered the conductorship of the J.C. Williamson Royal Comic Opera Company, beginning with the production of The Yeomen of the Guard in April, 1889.73 In Caron's time with 'The Firm' he conducted a large amount of Gilbert and Sullivan, wrote many highly acclaimed ballets and interpolated songs for the operettas. Caron also composed the music for a number of wildly popular


68 Australian Town and Country Journal 6 May 1899, and Table Talk 13 February 1902.

69 A photo-card held in the Grainger Museum reads: A ma petite Irma / Souvenirs d'amitié de son petit frère / Léon Caron / 30 Mars 78 / Larunaki / NZ.

70 The Footlight Star March 1919.

71 Table Talk 18 April 1889.

72 Table Talk 18 April 1889. There is a strong probability that Caron instigated a similar project in Melbourne (referred to in Murphy 11).

73 Table Talk 13 February 1902.
pantomimes, which were to be an important source of revenue during the depression of the nineties.\textsuperscript{74}

Concurrently with his operatic work, Caron maintained an active presence on the concert platform. He brought together and conducted the orchestra for Camilla Urso's Australian tour, beginning in Sydney, January 1880 at the Masonic Hall.\textsuperscript{75} Caron also conducted a series of Sunday concerts at the Sydney Opera House in 1887, later moving to the Criterion Theatre. The professionalism of his orchestra on such occasions was a great source of satisfaction for Caron.\textsuperscript{76} Caron was one of the founding members of the Orpheus Club, a society that gave several years' worth of concerts for the promotion of chamber music performance in Sydney.\textsuperscript{77} He was one of the founders of the Professional Musicians' Association in Sydney, and provided musical entertainment on Sunday Evenings at the Club Rooms (see fig. 3).\textsuperscript{78}

Throughout all of his time in Australia, Caron performed and conducted his own compositions. His work embraced many genres, from chamber music, light songs and pantomimes, to the cantatas for official occasions.

Caron died in 1905, in Sydney, having returned home early from his touring activities in New Zealand due to ill health. His funeral was marked by a 'spectacular procession through the city.'\textsuperscript{79} Eliza lived until the age of 76, dying in Surrey Hills in 1932.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{74} Jan Dicker, \textit{A Short Biography of James Cassius Williamson} (Rose Bay: Elizabeth Tudor Press, 1974).

\textsuperscript{75} Brewer, F. C. \textit{The Drama and Music in NSW} (Sydney: 1892) 19.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{The Australian Star} 30 May 1905.

\textsuperscript{77} For a description of the aims and achievements of this club, see Peggy Jane Lais, "The Changing Repertoire of Horace Pousard," Dissertation, University of Melbourne, 2002, 31-33.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{The Australian Star} 30 May 1905.

\textsuperscript{79} Hince, ADB.

\textsuperscript{80} Victorian Death Index 1921 – 1985, SLV.
PROFESSIONAL MUSICIANS' ASSOCIATION

TELEPHONE 844

23 ROWE STREET
SYDNEY

Capable musicians supplied for all Classes of Entertainment.

String and Brass Bands provided on the Shortest Notice

ALFREDO O'BRIEN

NOTE—Whoso loves the beauty in Nature, will be aware that they can become ASSOCIATE MEMBERS by subscribing to the use of the Club Rooms and Library, monthly. Membership must be for a subscription of one guinea.

Fig. 3. Professional Musicians' Association of Sydney, The Theatre 1 April 1905.
Chapter Two: On the Podium

Caron was assured a dazzling entrée into the Melbourne musical scene with his virtuosic violin playing. While he never gave up the violin (or the viola) completely, within a few years of his arrival in Melbourne, his focus clearly shifted to conducting. It is through this avenue that Caron contributed most to improving the music profession of Australia. He became a useful conductor for occasions of state, and a well-known public figure in the opera pit, where “(he) was as popular with the ‘gods’ as with the dress circle and the front stalls.”

The work Caron undertook before coming to Australia would have given him a great sensitivity to the requirements of commanding both an orchestra and an opera chorus. In addition, when playing under Thomas, Caron would have become familiar with a broad variety of operatic and symphonic repertoire.

Caron had the opportunity to involve himself in both operatic and symphonic performance during his Australian career – however it was the opera which provided him with regular, salaried work. Oscar Commetant, in his 1888 travelogue In the Land of Kangaroos and Goldmines notes the necessity for performing musicians to seek theatrical employment, announcing that

few instrumentalists in Melbourne are capable of playing their part in the orchestra as it should be done, with real expression and proper technique. The best of them are engaged by the year in little theatres running an orchestra of fifteen to eighteen members. Thus it is always difficult and sometimes impossible to gather together for particular occasions the elements necessary to make up a good, complete orchestra.\(^{82}\)

---

\(^81\) The Theatre 15 June 1905.

\(^82\) Oscar Commetant, In the Land of Kangaroos and Goldmines (Au pays des kangourous et des mines d’or), trans. Judith Armstrong (Australia: Rigby Limited, 1980) 143. This work makes some claims in other areas that can only be described as outrageous; however Commetant’s description of the orchestral scene fits in with what other sources suggest it may have been like.
In Sydney alone, the Royal, Gaiety, Standard, Criterion, Opera House and Alhambra all had their own theatre orchestras.\textsuperscript{83} However, symphonic repertoire did not feature largely on the colonial stage, either in Sydney or Melbourne. During the 1888 Melbourne International Centennial Exhibition, the Centennial Exhbititon Orchestra under Sir Frederick Hymen Cowen was a huge success, and it was decided that Victoria should have its own symphony orchestra – the result being the short-lived Victorian Orchestra (which didn’t continue beyond 1891)\textsuperscript{84} The next symphony orchestra to come onto the Melbourne scene was the Marshall-Hall orchestra. Led by G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, and counting both students and professionals amongst its players, this orchestra gave subscription concerts on and off for approximately twenty years.\textsuperscript{85} Even this orchestra had difficulty recruiting the best performers. The theatre was still the preferred option for musicians who wanted to earn a regular living from their playing, which meant that “A satisfactory orchestra was unobtainable except on Saturday afternoons, as the competent players were mostly employed in the theatres.”\textsuperscript{86}

Caron was not the only musician to find stable employment in the theatre. Indeed, the majority of conductors who came out to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century were brought out by opera companies. Zelman was brought out to Australia by the Cagli and Pompei Opera Company to conduct their Sydney season in September 1871.\textsuperscript{87} Two other conductors working at the time, Roberto Hazon (1854 - 1920) and Paolo Giorza

\textsuperscript{83} An advertisement for an Opera House “Fourth Annual Imps’ Matinees” seems to include all of the theatrical profession of Sydney in its programme, with a combined orchestra from all the above theatres under Caron’s baton (SMH 6 August 1887).


\textsuperscript{86} Sir James Barrett, \textit{Eighty Eventful Years} (Melbourne: n.p., 1945) 36.

(1832 – 1914), came over with the Simonsen's New Royal Italian Opera Company and Madame Agatha States Italian Opera Company respectively. Both Zelman and Caron made Australia their permanent home upon arrival. Hazon remained in Australia, conducting various organisations for over twenty years. Giorza, arriving at the end of 1871, spent slightly more than ten years working in the colonies not only as a conductor, but also as an organist and choir master. All four conductors were, in addition, composers of some note.

The orchestra which Caron conducted for Lyster would have been quite a large one for the time. When Caron was himself a player in the orchestra, there were supposedly four other first violins besides himself, three seconds, two violas, two cellos, three basses, one oboe, two flutes, two clarinets, two cornets, two horns, two trombones, one bassoon and drums. However, this line up did not occur at every performance. An early review of Caron’s debut performance with Lyster’s Royal Italian Opera Company orchestra, under Zelman, gives evidence of the typically incomplete opera orchestras, and also how they were dealt with: “We had not the grand orchestra last night, but barring bassoons, oboes, and horns, we had the next best thing to it, and the parts were so arranged and distributed amongst the players under Mr. Zelman, that a thoroughly good support was given to the solo player.”

With the Montague - Turner Opera Company, Caron found himself in the position of marshalling together a further reduced collection of instrumentalists and choristers. This

---


89 Greenwood-Adams remarks that, “Caron’s orchestra, under the banner of Mr. J.C. Williamson, comprised about 16 instrumentalists ... This orchestra was often augmented with additional players for special occasions.” (4) This is a slightly smaller force than that of Lyster.


91 *The Argus* 29 July 1877.
was not an uncommon experience for such musicians of the time, and, as seen above, conductors made the best of what they had by re-orchestrating works and substituting one instrument for another. The following quote outlines this predicament: “The opera [Mignon] had been re-scored by Caron to suit his limited orchestral forces, and he was praised for doing his best with the piano in place of the harp.”\footnote{Gyger, \textit{Opera for the Antipodes} 11.} The Montague-Turner production of Lucrezia Borgia in October 1881, saw Caron “conducting with one hand, while playing the piano (and giving it plenty to do) with the other, in an attempt to make up for the deficiencies of the orchestra...”\footnote{Gyger, \textit{Opera for the Antipodes} 12.} While this was a concession in itself, the situation for Giorza, performing in Sydney almost ten years earlier with the Madame Agatha States Opera Company, was much more dire:

The States Opera Company... did not get an opera season together until June, and then it was only the principals plus the piano of Giorza at the Masonic Hall, provoking cries of ‘opera without chorus and orchestra? Absurd!’ In answer \textit{The Sydney Mail} pointed out that there were not enough instrumentalists and singers in Sydney to form a suitable orchestra and chorus, since previous impresarios had had to import extra performers...\footnote{Gyger, \textit{Civilising the Colonies} 175.}

Whether Caron imported other performers or not, or whether the standards of playing had risen drastically in Sydney over the intervening years, he certainly managed to attract some of the better talent for the Montague-Turner season in October 1881. He also displayed a commitment to refining the orchestra’s performance - Caron was praised in the press for the “continued improvement of the orchestra, which now contained some of the best players in Sydney.”\footnote{Gyger, \textit{Opera for the Antipodes} 12.}

With the Montague-Turner Company, Caron was building up a repertoire of English, French and Italian opera (all presented in English however). The works presented included \textit{Mignon} (Thomas), \textit{Paul et Virginie} (Massé), \textit{Fra Diavolo} (Auber), \textit{Lucia di
Lammermoor (Donizetti), Lucrezia Borgia (Donizetti), The Rose of Castille (Balfe), Maritana (Wallace), Faust (Gounod), The Bohemian Girl (Balfe). Many of these works had already achieved quite a popular status in the colonies through performances by other companies. Both Mignon and Paul et Virginie were new to Australian opera audiences.96

The above works are but a sample of Caron’s extensive repertoire. As time wore on, Caron concentrated his efforts specifically on conducting light opera and operetta. His choice to specialise in this genre contrasts him with Hazon, who, Italian by birth, displayed a penchant for performing works from their native country.97

Caron maintained a close working relationship with ‘The Firm’ of J.C.Williamson from his first employment in 1889 until his death. He still approached his conducting with the same rigour which he had brought to bear on the early tours with the Montague - Turner orchestra. The following extract from an obituary summarises Caron’s work ethic:

For Leon [sic] Caron, without being in the least a bully, kept the whip on the shoulders of his men. Deeply earnest and conscientious beneath his good humour and habitual courtesy, Mr. Caron called for the best, and he was not satisfied until he got it. His tastes and his talents fitted him for something better than the conductor’s chair in a Comic Opera Company. Yet when he accepted the position he brought the same enthusiasm to bear as if he were in his glory as the director of Grand Opera, or the baton holder at a Symphony Concert.98

Caron’s role as conductor with the Royal Comic Opera Company required a good deal more than just rehearsing and performing. As usual, he orchestrated the music for the available forces, “taught the chorus and principals and wrote interpolated ballets and songs.”99 Caron’s ballets, in particular, were highly successful, and it was claimed that “as a writer for the ballet Mr. Williamson’s operatic conductor did more work and better work

96 Gyger, Opera for the Antipodes 5 – 21.
97 Gyger refers to “a recruiting expedition” Hazon undertook in Italy, returning with Giordano’s Fedora (Opera for the Antipodes 119).
98 The Australian Star 30 May 1905.
99 Greenwood-Adams 3.
than any other musician in this part of the world.” In later years, a composer employed to orchestrate for J.C. Williamson, J.T. Gresty, recalled that Caron was “the quickest composer and orchestrator he ever knew.”

Many press reviews confirm the impression of Caron being a conductor whose rehearsal techniques brought out the best playing from his orchestral forces: “M. Caron’s conducting is marked by artistic completeness, there is not a moment’s uncertainty either in orchestra or chorus, the work showing diligent rehearsal from first to last.” More evidence can be found in a description of Caron’s work in connection with his Sunday concerts: “Here Caron gained extra brilliancy to his reputation by his skilful musical direction and training of his orchestra.” Indeed, orchestral refinement in these early days was largely dependent upon the efforts of the conductor. Barrett describes how Marshall Hall “usually had three rehearsals for a concert, but he cut these up into sectional rehearsals, and for one concert conducted seventeen such rehearsals, taking small groups of players and drilling them thoroughly.” He expounds the requisite patience of the conductor, citing the following incident: “It fell to my lot to scour the city to find woodwind and brass players who were competent, and to take them to the professor for audition . . . Even I would know, after the player had given out a dozen notes, that he would not do, but Marshall Hall would frequently spend an hour showing him what was wrong, and how he could rectify his errors in musicianship.” Indeed, this episode also illustrates the difficulty of obtaining good wind and brass players for concert performances.

100 The Australian Star 30 May 1905.
102 The Sun 7 April 1893.
103 Table Talk 18 April 1889.
104 Barrett 37.
105 Barrett 38.
106 A review of Caron’s English Opera Company reads: “The string part of the band was good, and, with that and the piano, filled in by M. Caron, many portions of this delightful music were agreeably given. The wind and brass will probably be better on future evenings.” SMH 1 February 1886. In 1895 the Melbourne
The worst reviews the orchestra received under Caron’s direction were usually concerned with the balance between the vocalists and the instrumentalists, or the ensemble:

The choruses are generally satisfactory, but the ragged and uneven time of that to Shadbolt’s narration, Like a Ghost his Vigil Keeping, cannot be passed over in silence. The orchestra is fairly efficient, but needs restraining in Mr. Elton’s song, the words of which are drowned by the accompaniment. If Mr. Leon [sic] Caron, the conductor, can amend these points . . . the present will be taken as an all round performance, about the most satisfactory of any that have been given under his direction.  

Interestingly, similar criticisms were, on several occasions, levelled at Hazon, in the form of such complaints as: “Signor Hazon can, and does, get a piano when he wants to but he does not want to often enough.”

Caron’s brief attempt at his own Caron English Opera Company occurred through January and February of 1886 (it is possible that an earlier season may have been attempted in Melbourne). His stated aims, advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald, were:

- to bring forward, as far as practicable, Australians who are gifted with natural talent for the Lyric Stage, but are lost to the public for want of practical training. Every production will be under his immediate control. His well-known experience as a musical director is a guarantee of success. Every care will be given in order to make the series as complete as possible. The orchestra will be the best quality in Sydney, whilst the chorus will be of the first quality. He will give every attention in order to make the operas produced a success.


108 Gyger. Opera for the Antipodes 112.

109 SMH 16 January 1886.
This advertisement displays Caron’s concern for raising performance standards and creating opportunities for musicians in Australia – including, it must not be forgotten, his wife!

While his fine conducting brought success to many other ensembles, Caron’s own mixing of musical and entrepreneurial skill was, in the case of his own opera company, not a success. The Sydney season alone of Caron’s English Opera Company faltered before all the intended works had been performed. The result was a season beginning on 23 January, based largely around the old favourites- *Maritana*, *Carmen* and *The Bohemian Girl* - which drew to a close with a benefit performance of *Maritana* on 13 February.\(^{110}\) It is unknown whether the team toured any further than metropolitan Sydney. *The Bulletin* may have been a trifle sarcastic when remarking that, “although the result is not up to a metropolitan standard of excellence, it should create the utmost enthusiasm in Bungaree.”\(^{111}\)

Some elements of the opera performances given by this troupe were compared to the efforts of the Montague - Turner company. Indeed, Caron had been their conductor, and two of his principals, his wife Eliza, and Warwick Gainor, had been participants in Montague - Turner productions. Press notices on consecutive days contained conflicting information about which operas were to be played, suggesting that - like the Montague - Turner company - Caron’s position as both conductor and sub-lessee of the theatre meant he had, “the unique advantages enjoyed by a performer/manager team, who could run an opera for as long as it proved popular. . . .”\(^{112}\) Caron also used, in his production of *Carmen*, a translation which he had prepared himself with Annis Montague\(^\text{113}\). *Sydney Morning Herald* is not too flattering of the ‘doctoring’ which the opera had undergone.

\(^{110}\) All of this repertoire information is drawn from SMH advertisements in January and February of 1886, and also from *The Australian Star* 30 May 1905.

\(^{111}\) *The Bulletin* 30 January 1886.

\(^{112}\) Gyger, *Opera for the Antipodes* 8.

\(^{113}\) SMH 28 January 1886.
along the way – “the music for Don Jose . . . and Michaela . . . was considerably abridged, and dialogue substituted; the parts of Morales and Zuinga, though separate on the bill, were musically entrusted to one person. . . .”\textsuperscript{114}

The \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, having given a generous evaluation of the \textbf{Bohemian Girl} production one week earlier, lamented that,

Between the \textbf{Bohemian Girl} and \textit{Carmen} there is an immense difference. The music of the latter is exceedingly difficult, and so characteristic that it requires accomplished singers to do it justice. With the very limited means available, it is astonishing that so much could be done; . . . certainly in so small a place [the box office] cannot recoup the management for the heavy expense attendant thereon. . . . while warmly sympathising with Mr. Caron in his enterprise and lamenting that the circumstances which combine to place one of the most accomplished musicians now in Australia in such a difficult position, it is not possible to encourage his continuance of the production of operas demanding such surroundings as \textit{Carmen} undoubtedly requires.\textsuperscript{115}

The \textit{Bulletin} paints a similar picture - referring to the work of the younger singers in a slightly sardonic manner, comparing Caron’s home-grown \textit{Maritana} cast with Lyster’s international attractions:

Indeed, with all the singers – barring Maritana – this peculiarity was noticeable – some of their notes were as good as gold, while others were veritable greenbacks. . . . We believe that the Olympic Company is to be broken up shortly, as M. Caron has begun to find, what many have found before him, that opera doesn’t pay. . . . We doubt whether anyone except Lyster ever made it pay in Australia – but then look at the people he secured. Why, Squires, Escott, and Beaumont were, in their best days, good enough to pack houses from Cooktown to Hobart.\textsuperscript{116}

The size of the Olympic Theatre was not conducive to the dazzling sets the public craved for. The youthful inaccuracies of Caron’s protégés, combined with the shortcomings of the chosen theatre, resulted in a large deficit at the close of the abridged

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{SMH} 1 February 1886.

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{SMH} 1 February 1886.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{The Bulletin} 13 February 1886.
season. In addition to the final benefit production of *Maritana*, Caron's colleagues banded together to produce a fundraising concert for the impecunious conductor. This concert, which was held in the New Masonic Hall, Friday 19 March 1886, included such names as Frances Saville and Signora Fabris (Eliza Sherwin's teacher). While these singers may not have had the drawing power to pack houses from Cooktown to Hobart, their popularity was such as to "bring bushies from the blazing Barcoo or meandering Murrumbidgee for the pleasure of one night only."  

Caron ran a series of two Sunday concerts at the same time as this operatic venture, drawing upon the same orchestra and chorus for these performances. The first concert on 24 January 1886 was also at the Olympic. It was advertised as a 'Concert Spirituel,' the *Bulletin* advertisement reading: "Mons. Caron will present on Sunday evening a grand vocal and instrumental sacred concert, and each Sunday during the season will be devoted to the works of some great composer. The innovation will be welcome." The *Sydney Morning Herald* also ran advertisements, asking for instrumentalists for the orchestra (see fig. 4).

Fig. 4. "Wanted, an Orchestra," SMH 15 January 1886.

Perhaps Caron instigated these two concerts during the opera season to make use of the theatre he had subleased on Sundays in addition to weeknights, in an attempt to try and

---

117 Gyger, *Opera for the Antipodes* 17.

118 *The Bulletin* 13 March 1886.

119 *The Bulletin* 23 January 1886 – this original aim of devoting a concert to the "works of some great composer" is not really evidenced in the two following programmes (see Appendix B).
recoup some lost money from the opera. Perhaps also by presenting Concerts Spirituels, the 'religious' content would make performance on a Sunday acceptable. Like the Paris Concerts Spirituels, Caron's concerts presented a mix of vocal and symphonic repertoire (including a movement from the Pastoral Symphony), and he included one or two of his own compositions, alongside numbers by such popular composers as Pinsuti and Sullivan (see Appendix B).

Some time after these two Concerts Spirituels at the Olympic, Caron conducted another Sunday concert series, this time at the Opera House in Sydney, with Herr Draeger as the concertmaster. This concert season ran from June 1887, and offered several months worth of concerts under Caron's direction. By August however, Caron had moved over to conduct a rival series of Sacred and Classical Concerts at the Criterion Theatre, where the violinist De Willimoff had been conducting up until that time. These concerts presented "a programme of unexampled excellence, with numbers specially selected to suit the popular taste." The programming certainly made more concessions to public taste than Caron's two Concerts Spirituels. Most concerts began with an overture, and were composed largely of short popular songs, with some orchestral transcriptions also. Concerts either ended with a march or a vocal ensemble with orchestra. One concert features the Caron string quartet, led by Mons. De Willimoff (who had, by this stage, returned to the Criterion to be the concertmaster) with Caron on the viola. Two other concerts featured vocal and instrumental selections from Maritana and Faust. It would seem that Caron had found a profitable venue for operatic performance after all! These concerts continued for some time, and were highly successful -

The conductor gathered about him a fine orchestra and a good chorus. . . .The best singers were engaged — among them Frances Saville and Colbourne Baber.

---

120 The original Concerts Spirituels in Paris took place on days the Opera was not open. - James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (California: UCLA Press, 1995) 71.

121 *SMH* 17 September 1887.

122 *SMH* 29 October 1887.

123 *SMH* 27 August 1887 / 3 September 1887.
Kowalski, the pianist, played more than once. The baritones included Warwick Gainor, Denis Clancy, and Tom Fitzgerald. But what Caron most prided himself on was his professional orchestra... Those Caron-conducted, 'musical Sunday evenings,' with the orchestra as the principal feature, prepared the way for the local development of orchestral music under Signor Hazon's direction. Until this energetic Frenchman shook it into life orchestral music had become 'a dead thing' in Sydney. No one seemed to be ready or willing to step into Paolo Giorza's shoes. Leon [sic] Caron, however, soon showed the public that Giorza had not left the city without a live conductor... 124

Eventually these concerts were cut short at the instigation of the churches, who took up issue with holding concerts on a Sunday. Indeed, one advertisement for the Opera House concerts alludes to this issue, reproducing the following statement from the then incumbent of St. James, Rev. Jackson:

I am not one of those who denounce everything in the shape of Sunday evening entertainments. It seems to me that people might gain a great deal of good from listening to a selection of well-chosen and high-class music. The sound of music often reaches the heart; it is to some even as a voice of God. I see no reason why a really good concert should be regarded as a violation of the day of rest. 125

Certainly the concerts filled a gap in the concert scene at the time, and led to other things. It was decided in October 1889 that an orchestra should be formed under the baton of Roberto Hazon. The concert master was to be George Rivers Allpress, 126 who had been the concertmaster for the ill-fated Caron English Opera Company, and who was probably, in all likelihood, a player in Caron's earlier Sunday concerts at the Olympic also. In addition, Allpress participated in the Orpheus Club, and conducted the Montague-Turner company briefly in 1891. 127

124 The Australian Star 30 May 1905.
125 SMH 2 July 1887. This issue was not peculiar to Australia – Thomas also had to withdraw Sunday concerts to appease religious zealots (Russell 102).
127 Gyger, Opera for the Antipodes 21.
In late 1890 – 1891, Caron instituted a very different series of orchestral concerts in Melbourne. The ensemble which Caron drew together for this purpose was called the ‘Melbourne Orchestra.’ The leader of this orchestra was Mr. Max Klein, who had been brought out expressly by Cowen to lead the Centennial Exhibition Orchestra. Although Klein did play with Cowen’s orchestra for six months, player rivalries prevented him from continuing with this orchestra.128

The first series of nine concerts for the Melbourne Orchestra ran from 13 December 1890 to 7 February 1891 (see Appendix C). These concerts were billed as ‘Grand Promenade Concerts à la Jullien,’ and were of a distinctly popular nature. It is likely that rehearsals for the orchestra took place on Wednesday and or Friday afternoons — newspaper entries advertise rehearsals on both days.129 An advertisement for the first concert proudly announces, “The Melbourne Orchestra, Consisting of 100 Professional Musicians.”130 It is interesting, considering the Victorian Orchestra was performing on exactly the same afternoon as the Melbourne Orchestra during this season, to contemplate where these one hundred players came from. For the Centennial Exhibition Orchestra of 1888, Cowen brought out with him sixteen English orchestral players, and was greeted with an ensemble of 73 players selected by George L. Allan to play alongside the imported musicians.131 By the close of 1890, this orchestra (which was now the Victorian Orchestra under the direction of Hamilton Clarke) numbered only 42, leaving more musicians available to play in Caron’s events.132 Also, Caron’s ensemble featured a regimental band, from which the


129 The Argus 4 December: “All members are requested to attend and bring instruments”(!) and 24 December 1890.

130 The Argus 12 December 1890.

131 All information about the Victorian Orchestra is drawn from Radic, “Historical Aspects,” and “The Victorian Orchestra.” Servadei, in his article “Orchestras” in Oxford Companion to Australian Music gives slightly different figures for the orchestral forces of the Centennial Exhibition Orchestra.

132 Radic, “The Victorian Orchestra” 35.
majority of his brass players could be drawn. The first two of these Saturday afternoon extravaganzas were held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the remainder taking place in the Exhibition Building. In one review it is noted that

The orchestra did not perform in the concert hall [of the Exhibition Building] but in the freer and purer atmosphere under the dome, which proved a much more pleasant place for the audience. Many of these gathered in little parties round tables after the Continental fashion, and, sitting back in a lazy mood, allowed 'the sweet sounds of music to creep in their ears'.

These performances were based on the popular style of concert established in Britain by the conductor Louis Jullien, the man who was largely responsible for creating the 'Prom Concert'. Both Caron and Jullien orchestrated works to create excitement for the audience. Jullien, for instance, used "four ophicleides, saxophone, and side drums [in] Beethoven's Fifth Symphony." Examples of Caron's excesses include "William Tell - the solo to be played in unison by all cellists, flautists and oboists," and "Meditation, Bach-Gounod - Played in Unison by the whole of the 1st and 2nd violins, numbering 35, with Harps accompaniment by Miss Demiling and Miss Duvalie." Caron also borrowed Gilmore's Anvil Chorus with "With Anvils Accompaniment" from the Boston Jubilees.

---

133 Radic mentions that "brass bands proliferated from one end of the country to the other, regardless of city, suburb or class." (The Victorian Orchestra: 63).


135 The Melbourne Bicycle Club was holding its meeting concurrently with the first concert in the MCG (Argus 12 December 1890). Reasons for the later venue change are not given; however, a first review of the opening concert published in the Argus refers to the inadequacy of the makeshift orchestral dais, citing its acoustic deficiencies (Argus 12 December 1890).

136 The Argus 5 January 1891.


138 Programme, 27 December 1890, Robert A. Cane scrapbooks.

139 Programme, 17 January 1891, Robert A. Cane scrapbooks.

140 Programme, 7 February 1891, Robert A. Cane scrapbooks.
The format of Caron’s concerts also bore some similarities to the way Theodore Thomas presented his popular concerts in America.

Russell presented the following pattern:

Part I
1. March
2. Overture
3. Waltz
4. Operatic selection

Part II
5. Overture
6. Symphonic movement
7. Symphonic movement
8. Fantasia or solo

Part III
9. Overture
10. Waltz (or Landler) [sic]
11. Polka or solo
12. Quadrille, galop, or operatic selection[^141]

Caron, however, largely avoided the more ‘serious’ symphonic genre in his concerts, favouring operatic selections, songs, short pieces such as gavottes and elegies, and original compositions. Caron not only promoted his own compositions, some of which had appeared at the Criterion concerts in Sydney in 1887, but included works by Zelman and D. Cope junior, for which the composers conducted the orchestra themselves. The *Argus* praised the work of Cope[^142], which was well received by the audience also. The only blights recorded in these reviews are several criticisms of soloists, one of a zither player, and the other of a slightly inexperienced singer. The audience, on most occasions was reported as being from moderate to large, and the impression given (even by a critic whose

[^141]: Russell 68.

[^142]: *The Argus* 2 February 1891.
sympathies obviously lay rather with the more high-brow objectives of the Victorian Orchestra) was that a good time was had by all.\(^{143}\)

Caron’s work with the Melbourne Orchestra shows the influence of Jullien and Gilmore, and has elements in common with the popular concerts of Thomas. Caron also had an early predecessor in the realm of promenade style orchestral concerts in Australia. Years earlier, in 1853, Charles Winterbottom established a series of ‘Promenade Concerts.’ The *Oxford Companion to Australian Music* describes these concerts as being modelled on Jullien’s promenade concerts in London. Supported by a regimental band and amateur musicians numbering almost 100, he was able to provide a variety of concert fare, including excerpts from contemporary opera such as Bellini’s *Norma*. Tickets were deliberately priced to sell, and not surprisingly the concerts often attracted audiences in excess of 2000.\(^{144}\)

Caron’s Grand Popular Promenade Concerts occurred at a time when orchestral concerts had been running for several years in Melbourne. His Promenade Concerts are interesting for the insight they give into audience tastes. In fact, as already mentioned, Caron’s Melbourne Orchestra was actually competing with Clarke’s Victorian Orchestra for audience members. Radic suggests that the Victorian Orchestra (who were playing in the Town Hall) eventually decided to move their Saturday afternoon series to Monday afternoons, possibly to avoid losing numbers to the accessible Promenade Concerts.\(^{145}\)

Whilst a dedicated and serious musician, Caron was well liked by all. No doubt his easy-going and genial nature contributed to the success, not only of these concerts, but also of his overall conducting career. He was respected by the orchestra members, an obituary noted: “I have worked under him, off and on, for five-and-twenty years,” said an

---

\(^{143}\) These observations are drawn from the following reviews in the *Argus*: 15 December 1890, 5 January 1891, 12 January 1891, 19 January 1891, 26 January 1891, and 2 February 1891.


\(^{145}\) Radic, “Historical Aspects” 121. *Argus* reviews of the Victorian Orchestra at this time describe “a fairly numerous audience” and “a satisfactory attendance” at their concerts.
orchestral player this morning, 'and I say with sorrow and regret that we have lost the cleverest conductor in Australia.'  

Caron was not only 'clever' as a conductor; he was also clever in the repertoire choices that he made. He brought with him influences from his overseas experiences, and combined these with his own visions of what the Australian music scene could be - yet he was flexible enough to adapt these ideas to any given situation. Caron experimented as he went, presenting different kinds of repertoire with each new venture. One might argue that Caron was playing whatever the public would pay to hear, and to a certain extent this would be correct. Certainly, with the Melbourne concerts, there was no obvious push to educate the public's taste for music of the highest merit.

What is obvious is Caron's desire and skill for educating his orchestra, and his drive to draw from it the very best performance it could give. Given the haphazard nature of the 'scratch' orchestras with which Caron worked, this was no small challenge. It seems only logical that, for someone interested in improving playing standards, the repertoire choices would reflect the ability of the players. Perhaps by presenting more popular fare Caron met a number of needs: he was choosing music which, given its simplicity, would ensure a good performance and please the audience - and perhaps he was also sidestepping the need to arrange more complex music for incomplete ensembles!

Certainly the majority of Caron's activities centered around light music. However, the implications of his work extend far beyond. He gave the orchestra a new level of professionalism to strive for. In New South Wales in particular, Caron's Sunday concerts gave many musicians a new platform on which to perform. More importantly, these concerts engendered in both the players and the public a desire to keep orchestral concerts a feature of the Sydney musical scene.

146 The Australian Star 30 May 1905.
Chapter Three: Composing for the Populace

Caron's usefulness to the Royal Comic Opera Company extended far beyond his role as a conductor. Caron’s skill as a composer, his ability to work in a team, and his understanding of public tastes were all to be important in turning around the fortunes of J.C. Williamson’s company during the nineties.

The 1890s were a bleak time for many Australians. After years of development and prosperity, Melbourne and Sydney plunged headlong into a depression. British investors were pulling their capital out of what were uncovered to be fraudulent financial enterprises, and many banks collapsed completely. In addition, the price of wool plunged, and, of course, unemployment rose.\(^{147}\) Drought in the late nineties also added to the widespread hardship.\(^{148}\)

‘The Firm’ of J.C. Williamson was in dire straits, along with most other theatrical enterprises. To recoup the losses incurred by poor audience attendances at previous productions, Williamson set his sights on running a highly spectacular Christmas pantomime from Boxing Night in 1895.\(^{149}\) The production was put on without any financial support from outside, and so Williamson was absolutely dependent on a successful season.\(^{150}\) When addressing the cast at the final dress rehearsal, Williamson


\(^{148}\) Dicker 131.


\(^{150}\) Dicker 131.
apparently put it to the players that “if the show doesn’t make good tomorrow night, I’m
down and out and you’ve all lost your jobs.”

This pantomime, upon which so much depended, was *Djin-Djin* (or ‘The Japanese
Bogie Man, A Fairy Tale from old Japan’). The libretto was written by Bert Royle and
Williamson, the inspiration coming from “Williamson’s idea of introducing a Japanese
ballet into the *Mikado.*” Caron wrote most of the music, with items also by G. Packer
and other interpolated songs. The scenery was designed by G. Gordon, P. Goatcher and
W.B. Spong. Greenwood Adams, in his *Herald* article, states that “they did an amazing job
in three weeks.”

The first Melbourne season turned out to be an outrageous success. The season
opened on Boxing Night, 1895, and had over fifty performances in Melbourne alone,
finishing on 14 February, 1896. The show played each night, in addition to two matinees
for “family parties, suburban visitors and ladies without escort.” The season could have
continued longer, but had to be terminated due to other bookings made with the Princess
Theatre. The production then toured to Sydney and New Zealand. There was even the
idea that *Djin Djin* might have been taken further afield. On the final night of the
Melbourne season, Williamson addressed the audience, stating that:

> His partner had gone to England to look for a Christmas attraction, but had failed to
find anything good enough for the Australian public. That had put him (Mr.

151 Dicker 131.

152 Dicker 131.

153 Wood identifies all the pantomimes in which Caron was involved: *Matsa, Queen of Fire, The Babes in the

154 The *Herald* 21 May 1949.

155 The *Argus* 15 February 1896.

156 The *Argus* 4 January 1896.

157 The *Argus* 6 February 1896.

158 Dicker 132.
Williamson) in a dilemma, out of which *Djin Djin* had grown. The result, owing to the splendid loyalty of everyone concerned in the production, was a pantomime which had easily distanced, as a financial success, every pantomime that had preceded it. Australians would be glad to learn, doubtless, that it was probable that *Djin Djin* would be taken home as a specimen of an Australian Christmas production.159

The actual work itself was most notable for the scenic effects, and its combination of comedy, light opera, acrobatics and so forth. Instead of having a transformation scene as most pantomimes did, *Djin Djin* had ten.160 The advertisements describe the attractions in detail:

A FEW LEADING FEATURES
1. THE DAIMIO'S GARDENS,
   With
   The Charming Juvenile National Dances
   The Wonderful Electric Bicycle
   The Quaint Japanese Fan and Umbrella Ballet
   The Brilliant Illumination of Nagasaki
2. THE FROZEN FOREST
   The Transformation From Winter to Summer
   The Ballet of the Snow Elves
   The Chrysanthemum Ballet
   The Ruined Temple
   AND
   THE THRILLING EARTHQUAKE SCENE
3. THE SHOGUN'S PALACE
   The Hall of a Thousand Storks
   The Acrobatic and Specialty Entertainment
   The Scarecrow Dance
   The Golden City
   The Gorgeous Ballet D'Or
   And
   THE DAZZLING ELECTRIC CURTAIN161

159 The Argus, 15 February 1896.
160 Dicker 131.
161 The Argus, 18 January 1896.
To give a sense of what these effects were like, the scenery of ‘The Hall of a Thousand Storks’ provides a very good example – it included “a double row of gigantic birds poised upon the shells of living tortoises supporting the lofty roof of the building on their extended necks, and appearing to stretch away for an immense distance.”\textsuperscript{162}

Caron’s combination of professionalism and his experience in popular genres would have fitted him perfectly for the task of organising music for such an extravaganza. One review notes: “The musical numbers composed by M. Caron, with the assistance of Mr. Pack, are full of briskness, local colour, and variety; sometimes operatic, as in the scenes in which Mr. Farley is the principal; at others sentimental and piquant, as in those which are rendered so sympathetically by Miss Florence Young, Miss Graupner, and Miss O’Relli; and sometimes humorous, as in those written or adapted for Mr. John Coleman and Mr. Elton. . . .”\textsuperscript{163}

Interpolation was rife in the pantomime, and the list of obviously very popular songs was even advertised in the newspaper:

She’s a Fairy
Sammy, My Old Friend Sam
Oyucha San
It’s a Way we have in Japan
Don’t be Cross
Saucy Kate, the Flower Girl
John McGee (and Scarecrow Dance)
King of Crime
Sweet Pretty Maiden
Poor Little Mary
I Don’t Want to Play in Your Yard
My Sweet Face
They Call Me Cheekee
So and So, and Such and Such\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{162} The Argus 27 December 1895.

\textsuperscript{163} The Argus 27 December 1895.

\textsuperscript{164} The Argus 30 December 1895.
To give a sense of what these effects were like, the scenery of 'The Hall of a Thousand Storks' provides a very good example – it included "a double row of gigantic birds poised upon the shells of living tortoises supporting the lofty roof of the building on their extended necks, and appearing to stretch away for an immense distance."

Caron's combination of professionalism and his experience in popular genres would have fitted him perfectly for the task of organising music for such an extravaganza. One review notes: "The musical numbers composed by M. Caron, with the assistance of Mr. Pack, are full of briskness, local colour, and variety; sometimes operatic, as in the scenes in which Mr. Farley is the principal; at others sentimental and piquant, as in those which are rendered so sympathetically by Miss Florence Young, Miss Graupner, and Miss O'Relli; and sometimes humorous, as in those written or adapted for Mr. John Coleman and Mr. Elton. . . ."

Interpolation was rife in the pantomime, and the list of obviously very popular songs was even advertised in the newspaper:

She's a Fairy
Sammy, My Old Friend Sam
Oyucha San
It's a Way we have in Japan
Don't be Cross
Saucy Kate, the Flower Girl
John McGee (and Scarecrow Dance)
King of Crime
Sweet Pretty Maiden
Poor Little Mary
I Don't Want to Play in Your Yard
My Sweet Face
They Call Me Cheekee
So and So, and Such and Such".

---

162 The Argus, 27 December 1895.
163 The Argus, 27 December 1895.
164 The Argus, 30 December 1895.
As the season wore on, another 'second musical edition' of *Djin Djin* was presented with a new host of tuneful melodies. An advertisement appearing for this 'second edition' indicates the liberal attitude towards tailoring works to meet public tastes:

**DJIN DJIN – SECOND EDITION**  
**SATURDAY (NEXT) FEBRUARY 1ST**  
When the Greatest of all Pantomimes will be  
Equipped with  
NEW SONGS  
NEW BUSINESS, NEW COMICALITIES

These new songs are advertised in the next day’s paper:

- Our Bonnie Slip of Blue  
- When they Go to Bye-Bye  
- The Sweetest Story Ever Told  
- Love’s Guardian  
- A Japanese Sing-Song  
- A Cottage by the Sea  
- Buy a Bicycle

This is followed by an announcement of a new  
TRIPLE TRAPEZE ACT  
By THE BANVARDS  
And  
NEW COMIC TRICKS  
By THE RIDGWAYS

In several of the press notices the music was advertised in conjunction with the name of who was to sing it in the production. The song “The King of Crime” was

---

165 *The Argus* 30 January 1896.

166 Several of these songs can be found in the National Library of Australia’s collection: interestingly many of them are printed in Melbourne and Sydney.

167 *The Argus* 31 January 1896.

Caron's own; and other songs were available through sheet music places in Melbourne and Sydney.  

Caron's original music was obviously an element in the success of the play, and popular songs, spectacular scenery and special effects were major drawcards for the *Djin Djin* phenomenon:

With three such scenic artists as Messrs. Gordon, Goatcher and Spong; with a composer like M. Caron to write the music; with an operatic company, which includes Miss Florence Young, Miss Graupner, Miss L. O'Relli, Miss M. Nash and Messrs. Farley and Lissant to interpret it; and with Messrs. Elton and Coleman in the leading characters, success was almost a foregone conclusion.  

The exoticism of the plot no doubt appealed to the public, who had just as avidly welcomed the *Mikado*. Wood comments on the popularity of such settings for pantomimes: “The Savoy operettas, particularly *The Mikado*, set another precedent for including exotic Oriental features, which, grafted on to the Australian pantomime tradition, influenced the comic but decidedly racist Oriental caricatures in John Dunn’s *The Mandarin* (1896), Luscombe Searelle’s *Bobadil* (1884), David Cope’s *Our Village* (1880), and W.A. Orchard’s *The Coquette* (1905).”

The choruses of *Djin Djin* to which Caron would have set the music were not free from such caricature – one such example is the following excerpt from a scene in the Court of the Shogun – the preceding line to the chorus is also given:

Yondi: So nice to see them boil and fry

Chorus:

For if there’s a sight
That is full of delight
To a Japanese nobleman high,
It’s the writhing and squirming

---

169 Wood 425.

170 The Argus 27 December 1895.

171 Wood 101.
And wriggling and worming
Of victims who squeak,
With an agonised shriek,
As they pleasantly simmer or fry.\(^{172}\)

This chorus refers to the imminent execution of the hero Prince Eucalyptus and his valet Tom Wallaby. There are certainly overtones of *The Mikado* here. While the real foe in the play is the demon ‘Djin Djin,’ through these lines the Shogun and his noblemen surpass the ‘grand high executioner’ in their thirst for cruelty, and are relegated to the level of the barbaric cannibal.

An earlier chorus from Scene Two also has dubious lyrics:

Jap songs, as you all agree,
Are not strong in melody,
Though the tune’s a trifle tame,
Shout it gaily all the same.\(^{173}\)

Most of the audience members had probably never heard anything but a westernised imitation of a Japanese ‘song,’ and these lyrics would have fulfilled their expectations.

Aline-Scott Maxwell, in *Perfect Beat*, describes *Djin Djin* as a pantomime which “brought together Australian nationalism and the ‘Orient’, with Prince Eucalyptus and his henchman, Tom Wallaby, rescuing the Japanese Princess Iris from the evil demon Djin Djin. . . .” these ‘oriental’ elements providing evidence of Australians developing and “enthusiasm . . . for Japan and things Japanese, picking up on a similar fashion in Europe.”\(^{174}\) One newspaper gives a reason for the exoticism of the plot: “In planting a burlesque on good old traditional lines in Japan Mr. Williamson hit upon a happy idea, because he brought into the piece the element of freshness which is so important to success,


\(^{173}\) *Djin Djin* 17.

and moreover it enabled him to frame his work more richly than is generally possible.\textsuperscript{175}

Certainly the plot would have given the artists plenty of scope to play with extravagant effects, and make a few jokes about cultural differences on the side.

The main aim of this pantomime, as stated above, was to lift the J.C. Williamson Firm out of the financial mire into which it had fallen. Hence it was necessary to create something which would draw huge crowds and appeal to popular sentiment. Caron’s own compositional style was very closely allied to tastes of the day, as evinced in reports in the press, hence he would have been the best man for the job. And, unfortunately in this instance, writing for the general public meant appealing to the general public’s racial prejudices also.

Another good example of Caron’s ability to write the right music for the right occasion can be found in a totally different work - the \textit{Victoria Cantata}, composed for the 1880 Melbourne Exhibition. While this work has almost fallen into obscurity, \textit{Table Talk} reveals that it was hugely popular in its day, “and many people knew it off by ‘heart.’”\textsuperscript{176} Murphy considers it “very reminiscent of Sullivan (whom Caron considered the best modern English composer) and Verdi. It is stirring music and although not wildly original it . . . has a vigour and momentum to it – certainly very appropriate for the occasion for which it was written.”\textsuperscript{177}

Not only did Caron write in a popular style, but he also patched well received old pieces into new garments. In his Melbourne Orchestra Series, the fifth concert contains a work called \textit{Hosannah March}. Underneath this work in brackets is written: “From \textit{Victoria Cantata} written for the Exhibition, 1880.” This performance took place on 10 January

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{The Argus} 30 December 1895.

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Table Talk} 13 February 1902.

\textsuperscript{177} Murphy 11.
1891. This Hosannah March was given also at the second Concert Spirituel in January
1886. Caron knew what the public wanted to hear, and he delivered it to them.

Jennifer Hill, in her article, “From Drawing Room to Diva: The Australian Popular
Song ‘I was Dreaming’ by Augustus W. Juncker,” which examines the phenomenal success
of the song in the title, relates how “In 1894 Léon Caron himself arranged and published a
‘Grande valse de concert’ for piano based on ‘I was Dreaming’ which ran to a number of
editions and was still being promoted for sale five years later in ‘Amusements’
columns.” Hill 71. This was surely a canny move on Caron’s part: arranging a hugely popular
song for performance on the most popular instrument of the colonies: the piano. Other
references can be found for works (in particular songs) of Caron which achieved a degree
of popular renown. It would seem that his strongest suit as a composer lay in the field of
small scale works of popular appeal. The Theatre’s obituary to Caron includes an estimation of
his merits: “He was an extremely clever musician, but far too retiring and modest to ever
fully develop his talent. Had he been possessed of more self confidence, we might have
known him as a composer of something very original and clever, but he was content to do
merely what was required of him. . . .” Theatre 15 June 1905. Although this report may contain a certain
amount of truth, it does seem a somewhat unfair judgement to make, considering that “The
bulk of the compositions of Leon [sic] Caron have not seen the light of day. . . he has left
among his ‘unpublished papers’ a symphony of uncommon merit.” Australian Star 30 May 1905.

The overall impression all sources give of Caron as a composer is that he knew his
craft well – a certain compositional ‘facility’ is assumed of one who can toss off music for
a production in under a month! His style was closely aligned with the tuneful writing of
Arthur Sullivan – and this was, to some extent, an assurance of success in a Gilbert and
Sullivan obsessed Australia. An interesting element of Caron’s attitude as a composer is

---

178 Hill 71.
179 Theatre 15 June 1905.
180 Australian Star 30 May 1905.
his readiness to write (and then sometimes rearrange) what was required for whatever event — be it an Exhibition, a pantomime, or a reworking of a popular song. Indeed, this aspect of Caron’s approach ensured him success within his own day. The music he wrote was often a part of something bigger than itself, and it would express the relevant sentiments of the occasion. In this sense, it was almost as if Caron was ‘riding on the coattails’ of a larger phenomenon than his own songs. Nevertheless, the promise of Caron’s string and symphonic works remains unexplored, and these works could present yet another facet of a fascinating artist.
Conclusion

While the theatre had been a place of ongoing employment to many during the nineteenth century, Caron managed to make it something more than just a job. Through hard work and dedication, Caron took his humble pit orchestra, wherever he was, and got from it the very best playing which his musicians could muster. Not only that, but it would have been from these groups that Caron created his Classical and Sacred Concerts, Criterion Sunday Concerts and Melbourne Orchestra Concerts. My research expands what is known about late nineteenth-century orchestral life in Melbourne and Sydney, and shows the importance and versatility of the theatre orchestras of the time. The workings of such orchestras can give insight into operatic endeavours of the time, and provide a backdrop for later developments in the performance of symphonic music in Australia.

Caron actively created a sense of a musical profession in Australia through bringing musicians together in his many different ventures and through the creation of the Professional Musicians' Society. This was at a time when many concerts outside the opera theatre were given by amateurs.

Nevertheless, Caron was always sensitive to his surrounds, as is evinced by his choice of music. He presented music which the public could enjoy, and which was, for the greater part, well within the abilities of his performers. One exception to this occurred with the ill-fated Caron English Opera Company season, and Caron did not repeat the same mistake again (although operatic selections were rarely absent from Caron's later concerts - confirming that opera rather than symphonic repertoire was Caron's real passion). A more indepth study of Caron's performances and their reception could provide some interesting information on popular tastes of the time (a comparison between the Victorian Orchestra and the Melbourne Orchestra concerts could be fruitful).

Many of Caron's own compositions which were given a public airing won great acceptance, and he seemed content to arrange and edit both compositions of his own and of
others to fit audience desires. Were Caron’s string compositions to be found, they could provide some very interesting insights into string playing of the time in Australia. Both as a composer and as an entrepreneur, Caron used his experience in Europe and America, tailoring ideas and repertoire to suit a public that saw itself as essentially ‘British.’ To use modern terminology, it almost seems as though Caron was catering for the market needs of the time.

With his predilection for things operatic always evident, Caron moved easily between many areas of the music profession, displaying an ability to work productively with people of all experience levels, from the young singers of his English Opera Company, to the band of the Melbourne Orchestra Concerts, and the cast of the J.C. Williamson Royal Comic Opera Company. He was ready to follow new ventures as they arose, and to leave old ideas when they were no longer financially viable.

Caron’s talent and pragmatism made him an ideal candidate for the development of the musical profession in Australia. He brought musicians together and forged networks between what had previously been a disparate band of instrumentalists. He encouraged people to play at their best, and provided a greatly improved level of entertainment for the concert going public. Programmes and biographical articles attest to Caron’s prolific output as a composer, and the Victoria Cantata shows evidence of his considerable compositional skill – the search for his music must not be abandoned, as there still remains much work to be done on this fascinating figure.
Appendix A: Caron’s 1877 Debut Repertoire

Operas performed: La belle Hélène, Trial by Jury, Maritana, La Fille de Madame Angot, La Périchole

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>REPERTOIRE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 June</td>
<td>Ballade et Polonaise - Vieuxtemps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variations on a popular melody – Vieuxtemps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 June</td>
<td>As Above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 June</td>
<td>Grand Fanfare on Lucie – Harman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Récitation no. 1 – An Encore Caron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Souvenir d’Amerique - Vieuxtemps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 July</td>
<td>Elégie in E flat – Caron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gavotte in E flat – J.S Bach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grand Fantasie on Lucie - Harman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 July</td>
<td>“Ave Maria” – ‘Played on One String and with Octaves’ – Bach - Gounod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Récitation no. 10 - Autrefois – Caron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Souvenir de Haydn - Leonard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 July</td>
<td>Souvenir de Haydn - Leonard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Ave Maria” – Bach - Gounod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barrytown – Vieuxtemps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 July</td>
<td>Grand Concerto in D minor – Caron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australian Tarantella - Caron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 July</td>
<td>Seventh Concerto - de Beriot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Souvenir de Haydn - Leonard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B: Sunday ‘Concerts Spirituels’

Held at the Olympic Theatre, York Street, 1886.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Repertoire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 January</td>
<td>Mr. T.H. Rainford</td>
<td>Weber – Jubilee Overture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss E. Sherwin</td>
<td>Clifton – “Ecce Deus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Warwick Gainor</td>
<td>Salvator Meus” -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. G. Rivers Allpress</td>
<td>David before Saul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miss Acton Blair</td>
<td>Beethoven – Pastoral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Symphony 1st mvt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mozart – “Ave Verum”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rossini – “Inflammatius”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Stabat Mater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bach - Gounod – “Ave Maria”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>G. Braga – La Serenata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C. de Beriot – 1st Concerto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rossini – “Qui est Homo” – Stabat Mater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sullivan – “The Lost Chord”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Handel – The “Hallelujah Chorus” – Messiah (Full Orchestra and Chorus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 January</td>
<td>Mr. T.H. Rainford</td>
<td>Caron – Hosannah March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8pm</td>
<td>Miss E. Sherwin</td>
<td>- Overture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Warwick Gainor</td>
<td>Fauré – “The First Palm”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. G. Rivers Allpress</td>
<td>Sunday”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Acton Blair</td>
<td>Pinsuti – “The Raft”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steveniers – “Prayer”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beethoven – Moonlight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sonata arr. Grand Orchestra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verdi – “Preghiera” – Sicilian Vespers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rossini – “Prayer” - Mosè in Egitto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mozart – Jupiter Symphony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tosti – “Goodbye”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Callcott – “The Last Man”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rossini - “Qui est Homo” - Stabat Mater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caron – Selection of National Hymns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix C: Melbourne Orchestra Concerts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>REPETTOIRE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 December 1890 MCG</td>
<td>Sullivan – “March of the Peers” - <em>Iolanthe</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wagner – Overture - <em>Rienzi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rossini – Overture - <em>William Tell</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verdi – Selection - <em>Rigoletto</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strauss – Waltz – <em>The Blue Danube</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecoq – Selection - <em>Manola</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sullivan – Waltz - <em>The Gondoliers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caron – <em>Air Varié</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barlow – Polka <em>The Anvils</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coote – <em>Promenade Quadrille</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 December 1890 MCG</td>
<td>Planquette – March - <em>Paul Jones</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecoq – Selection - <em>Manola</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hérold – Overture - <em>Zampa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strauss – Waltz - <em>Wiener Blut</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wagner – Overture - <em>Rienzi</em> (by special request)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sullivan - Waltz - <em>The Mikado</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mendelssohn – Song without words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oppenheim - <em>Arbucklenian</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wagner – Introduction to 3rd Act <em>Lohengrin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verdi – “Anvil Chorus” - <em>Il Trovatore</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Arranged by Léon Caron)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caron – International Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 December</td>
<td>Exhibition Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rossini – Overture - <em>William Tell</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strauss – <em>Sang Viennois</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verdi – Selection - <em>Rigoletto</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sullivan – “March of the Peers” - <em>Iolanthe</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suppé – Overture - <em>Summer Night’s Dream</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bach – Gounod - <em>Meditation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caron – <em>Air Varié</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gounod – <em>Funeral March of a Marionette</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sullivan – Waltz - <em>The Gondoliers</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verdi – “Anvil Chorus” - <em>II Trovatore</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gounod – Soldiers’ Chorus – <em>Faust</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 January 1892</td>
<td>With Tasma Sherwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kreutzer – Overture - <em>A Night in Granada</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J.Strauss – Waltz – <em>Morgenblätter</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michaelis – <em>The Forge in the Forest</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rossini – “Bel Raggio”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meyerbeer – Paraphrase - <em>Robert le Diable</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louis XIII – Gavotte - <em>Amaryllis</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caron – Fantasia – <em>Souvenir Patriotique</em> based on “La Marseillaise”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Venzano – “Air de Bravoure”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michaelis – <em>Turkish Patrol</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lumbye – <em>Champagne</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 January 1891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suppé – Overture - <em>Poet and Peasant</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caron – <em>Souvenir de Richmond</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verdi – Grand Scena - <em>Ernani</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Millocker – Paraphrase of <em>The Beggar Student</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zelman – <em>Elégie</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Claribel – “Come Back to Erin”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gounod – Selections from <em>Faust</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Performer/MM 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 January 1891</td>
<td>Auber, Strauss, Verdi, Meyerbeer, Le Thiére, Sir H.R. Bishop, Caron, Bach, Gounod, Michaelis, Oppenheim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 January 1891</td>
<td>Rossini, Strauss, Meyerbeer, Lecoq</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7 February 1891                     | Suppé – **Light Cavalry Overture**  
|                                   | Strauss – **La Légende de la Fôret**  
|                                   | Balfe – **Selection - Satanella**  
|                                   | Meyerbeer – March - **La Prophète**  
|                                   | W.N.Steil – **Scotch Air with Variations**  
|                                   | Weber – “Softly Sighs” – **Der Freischütz**  
|                                   | Caron – “Oceana Ballet” - **Mati Miti**  
|                                   | D.Cope junior - **MAYPOLE**  
|                                   | Verdi – “Anvil Chorus” - **Il Trovatore**  
|                                   | Lumbye - **Champagne**  

Leonard – **Souvenir de Bade**  
Caron – **Rise Australia**  
Henri Herz – **Fantasie Militaire**  
Delibes – “Valse Lente” from the Ballet **Sylvia**  
Bach – Gounod – **Meditation**  
German Air – **Merry Tyrolese**  
March – “Chinese” with appropriate effects
Select Bibliography

Archival Material

Cane, Robert A. Scrapbook and programmes 1890 – 1933. MS 10856 MSB 536. Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Caron boxes, Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne.


Newspapers

Australian Town and Country Journal 1902

The Age 1890 - 93
The Argus 1877-96
Australian Star 1905
The Bulletin 1886 - 1901
Footlight Star 1919
The Herald 1949
Sydney Morning Herald 1886 - 1905
Table Talk 1889 - 1902

Books


**Articles**


Quinn, D.J. “Music and Musicians in Australia.” *The Sydney Mail* 30 September 1908.


**Dissertations**


Internet Sites

“A Short History of the Melbourne Cricket Ground.” Melbourne Cricket Ground:


www.mcg.org.au/history/mcg_short_history.htm


http://www.oldimprints.com/magazines/mnatgeo_1.htm


http://www.eso.org/archives_librarian.taf


www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~leonid/violinist_composers.htm#MASSART


Waverley Cemetery: A Walk through History No. 2. 5 February 2002.

www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/about/historical/cm_wlk_2.htm