

# Music at the Spa

*by Neil Richmond (2001)*

For the period when Harrogate was renowned as one of the major watering places of Europe, along with Baden, Karlsbad and their likes, the provision of music was considered of vital importance. No profit was made from providing this amenity; the town's officers believed that it was reasonable to spend money on orchestras and bands to draw in the visitors as it was to spend money on ornamental gardens, promenades and other amenities. This belief persisted until 1930 when the balance sheet became a deciding factor. The Municipal Orchestra, for so long the mainstay of music Harrogate, was disbanded.

During the first half of the 19th Century, music was provided by itinerant musicians, foreign or local, often self-taught, playing as early as 7.30am for the visitors' first visit to the springs. One such group, the High Harrogate Band (comprised of Violin, Clarinet, Flageolet, Cello and Harp) played each day near the Granby Hotel. When more wealthy patrons arrived after the 1840's musicians of a higher calibre were needed and these were often brought from London or the continent to entertain visitors; in 1839 and 1849 the great pianist Thalberg performed at the Spa Rooms.

By 1875 there were Spa Promenade Concerts, conducted by Mr Cohen and in 1880 the Harrogate Promenade Orchestra, with 16 players, performed the 'Sylvan Concerts' twice daily in the Spa Rooms. In 1887 J. Sidney Jones, Bandmaster of Leeds Rifles, was appointed conductor. Jones turned what was essentially a military-style band into an orchestra capable of playing symphonies and also persuaded a hesitant council to pay the musicians' salaries. His son, also Sydney Jones, played Eb Clarinet in the Orchestra; he later achieved national fame as the composer of operettas, such as 'The Geisha'.

When the Royal Spa Concert Rooms were opened in 1898 the orchestra was expanded to 42 players. A series of symphony concerts on Wednesday mornings was introduced and 'composers' nights' were initiated, with the appearance of such contemporary figures as Edward German, Hamish McCunn and Coleridge-Taylor attending. Jones retired in 1902 with a massive farewell concert presented by The Municipal Orchestra, The Harrogate Borough Band, Leeds Rifles Band, The Ladies' Orchestra and the Coldstream Guards Band. His farewell ended the first period of real municipal music in Harrogate.

In May 1903 the Kursaal was officially opened by Sir Hubert Parry, who also conducted the opening work at the first concert. That year the season ran from Easter to October and the musicians worked extremely hard. This was a typical day:

Military Band	7.30am	8 pieces
Municipal Orchestra	11.30am - 1pm	8 pieces
Military Band	3.30pm	8 pieces
Municipal Orchestra	8pm to 10pm	10 pieces, including songs

Under Musical Director C.L. Naylor, the woodwind and brass players played with both groups and Ackrills printed daily a fully illustrated 8-page programme detailing the

works to be played and the names of the players. Naylor left in 1906 to make way for 'the phenomenon' Julian Clifford, one of the early showman conductors and an accomplished pianist and composer. He built the orchestra into a fine ensemble, inviting the world's greatest artists such as Fritz Kreisler, Dame Nellie Melba, Busoni, Paderewski and Anna Pavlova to perform in Harrogate. Clifford occupied a key position in the spa's development, as he was also the General Entertainment manager, with a budget of £3500 to spend on the orchestra. This fully professional orchestra moved to Hastings for the winter season, a dovetailing that lasted until 1930.

Julian Clifford's death in 1921 at the age of 44 marked the end of the great epoch of music in Harrogate. Of particular interest are two symphony concerts. On 9th August 1911 Elgar's 2nd Symphony was given its first provincial performance (with better reviews than the London premiere) and Vaughan Williams conducted the 2nd performance of his 'A London Symphony' on 12th August 1914. Despite Clifford's death music still played an important role for visitors to the spa. Howard Carr became director for three seasons, then in 1924 Basil Cameron took over. With 33 permanent members the orchestra continued to fulfil its usual role of daily concerts and weekly symphony concert, though Wednesday evening was now preferred.

Cameron presented all kinds of new music, both English and European and in 1929 he presented an all-British Festival when composers came to conduct their new works, including Bax, Warlock, Balfour-Gardiner, Holbrooke and Hurlstone. He also commissioned a new work from Eric Coates which received its first performance in Harrogate: 'Four Ways', a suite in four movements (North, South, East and West) has recently been revived and recorded.

During the 1920's financial problems began to intervene. The season was shortened and over a period of seven years there was a loss of £29,000. Certain councillors were objecting to the type of music being performed, too highbrow, and in 1930 accounts showed a loss of £1,100 for the orchestral concerts. After considerable debate, the orchestra was disbanded before the 1931 season.

At the end of the 1930's Louis Cohen conducted a much smaller municipal orchestra for Royal Hall concerts. Later, Walter Garratt performed regular Sunday evening concerts in the Sun Pavilion with vocalist Barbara Simpson. After WWII a regular programme of light music emerged: Clay Wilson's Serenade on a Summer Evening in the Sun Pavilion, Doris Nixon on the organ every Sunday afternoon, Barbara Simpson and Ernest Clough on a Wednesday evening, Family Night - Thursdays, Friday Night is Music Night, Old Tyme Music Hall on Saturdays, Band Concerts on Sunday afternoon...

Orchestra and Bands still give us an enormous amount of pleasure. The Harrogate Band, Harrogate Symphony Orchestra, Harrogate Philharmonic Orchestra and others perform in this and other local halls with great distinction, maintaining this musical tradition. Yet gone forever is the professional Municipal Orchestra and Band, as seen and heard 90 years ago, when Harrogate could rightly claim to be the leading Spa in Europe.