

Ray Steadman-Allen

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In the world of Salvation Army music and in the context of this particular publication, the world of Salvation Army brass banding and beyond there can be very few who have not heard the name and performed the music of Lieut. Colonel Ray Steadman Allen at some point in their lives.

His prolific output of music encompasses everything from simple song melodies and children's voice songs, through every level of instrumental and vocal repertoire to the most complex and ground-breaking of major works. Now aged 85 and living in retirement in Kent, R S-A (as he is affectionately known) is still writing, still creating and still enjoying a popularity of appeal in his music that is quite remarkable.

Born in 1922, the son of Salvation Army officers, when an energetic young office boy working for The Salvation Army, he was observed as being 'the one who's always fiddling about with bits of music paper'. Early attempts at composition date back to his 15th year, but it was still some years before he made serious efforts at writing and it was not until 1946 that his first published work - a march entitled *Gladsome Morn* - appeared in print. He entered The Salvation Army's officer training college as an officer cadet in 1948 and it was there that he met and fell in love with Joy - a fellow cadet - whom he subsequently married in 1951.



Dr Ray Steadman-Allen.

After a brief spell as corps officers (ministers at a local Salvation Army centre), Ray was appointed to what was then The Salvation Army's International Music Editorial Department (now part of The UK Territory's Music Ministries Unit). He was a part of that department (with just two short breaks) until 1980, serving as its head from 1967! Throughout those years, his own personal creativity contributed a huge volume of music to The Salvation Army. He was also instrumental (pardon the pun) in promoting the music of a new generation of young composers including now familiar names like Edward Gregson, William Himes, Kenneth Downie, Bruce Broughton and Brian Bowen at a time when the music of established composers such as Eric Ball, Erik Leidzén, Wilfred Heaton, Dean Goffin, Leslie Condon and Ray Bowes (and of course R S-A himself) was still rightly demanding a place within the publishing schedule. In that respect, R S-A's impact on both Salvation Army and secular brass band music is broadened even further!

Aside from the published journals, he was also called upon to produce arrangements for special events such as Royal Albert Hall concerts and congresses, as well as special projects including recordings where big-band and contemporary style music was required. The resulting compositions and arrangements all bear the hallmark of excellence that we associate with the Steadman-Allen name!

It is quite remarkable to review his published output of band music. From the most basic Unity Series (small band) works through Triumph and General Series (mid-range) into Festival (advanced) series, there is an undeniable level of skill and craftsmanship present in the construction of the music that is

coupled with a genuine originality and flair that is hard to match.

As a young cornet player in the Young People's Band at Edmonton (conducted by Aubrey Bishop), I still remember enjoying playing some of his pieces - particularly marches like *Nicely Saved*, *Southdown* and *Exultation*, and even his Festival March *Youth's Adventure* with its slightly quirky originality!

My own appreciation of R S-A's music deepened and grew as I got older. Membership of the senior band at Edmonton, which was conducted by my father, Don Ashman, brought the opportunity to play some of Ray Steadman-Allen's wonderful

devotional selections like *By Love Compelled* and *In Quiet Pastures* as well as pieces like *His Guardian Care*, *Wells of Gladness* and *'Neath Italian Skies* - and of course, some of his stirring marches...*Hadleigh Camp*, *Silver Star* and *The Scarlet Jersey*. I also have vivid memories from those years of hearing recordings of solos like *The Eternal Quest* and Derek Smith's remarkable recording of *Rhapsody on Negro Spirituals*, and of being spellbound not only by the playing, but by the music. Such was the impact of the rhapsody that I virtually learnt the piece without ever seeing a note of the music!

Throughout his life, R S-A has been an innovator - and maybe even a bit of a maverick too! Dr Stephen Cobb recalls a long-standing family friendship with the Steadman-Allens from his childhood and clearly remembers hearing music that would, in those days, have been considered less than appropriate for Salvationist ears being frequently played in their household. His interest in popular and classical music certainly influenced his writing in many ways.

Landmark works including pieces such as *Lord Of The Sea*, *The Eternal Quest* (trombone solo), *The Holy War*, *Immortal Theme* (another trombone solo) and *Victorian Snapshots - On Ratcliff Highway* found their way into Salvation Army repertoire during his time in Music Editorial. Some were received with less than positive acclaim, as R S-A's creative gifts generated music that some felt to be unacceptable in Salvation Army circles, pushing the boundaries just a little too far. *The Lord is King* and *At The Edge Of Time* also found their way into general use but, despite their undoubted quality and their deeply spiritual origins and inspiration, their initial impact received a mixed reaction.

I had the privilege of visiting New Zealand and Australia on tour with the Enfield Citadel (under the leadership of Bandmaster James Williams) back in 1980. Ray Steadman-Allen had been Bandmaster of the band some years earlier in the days when it was based at the old Tottenham Citadel. The Steadman-Allens had recently been appointed to the Australia Eastern Territory, where Ray was Secretary for Music (bands & songster brigades) and Evangelism. There was an understandable sense of excitement and anticipation from both the Band and from Ray and Joy at the prospect of meeting up during the tour, particularly as the band was featuring *The Lord Is King* on the tour repertoire. Jim's interpretation of R S-A's masterpiece was

outstanding, as was the band's playing, and the music made a huge impact on the band and on the audiences who heard it played.

Ray Steadman-Allen was a member of staff at the very first Salvation Army Music Camp in 1947. He has continued to take an interest and be involved in these fantastic events throughout his life. Attending what had then become the National School of Music at Cobham Hall as a student, I remember several occasions when R S-A visited as a special guest in order to share some insights into one of his pieces that was being featured. *The Lord Is King* was one such piece, as was *Romans 8 - A Brass Celebration*, which was written specifically for the school as a musical commentary on the chosen Scripture for the week's Bible study programme.

I would venture to suggest that every member of that year's school - and particularly those in the 'A' Band - were deeply moved and impacted by the music and by the remarkable way in which it reinforced the powerful Scripture on which it was based. The silence that greeted the band's first presentation of the music to the school in one of the Bible study sessions was almost tangible - and the brave pianissimo final chord that concluded the piece was like a final 'Amen'.

Reflecting on the National Music School, another mark of the quality and volume of his output can be measured by the fact that *Daystar*, *The Lord Is King*, *At The Edge Of Time*, *On Ratcliff Highway* and *Romans 8* were consistently featured as 'major works' alongside numerous other R S-A compositions at these schools in the 80's and 90's in a way that no other composer's music was featured. Earlier works such as *The King's Minstrel* and *On Active Service* had also served their term as music school favourites over the years.

The decision to open the availability of Salvation Army music to the broader world of secular brass banding has widened the circle of appreciation for R S-A's music, with bands such as YBS (under the direction of Professor David King) featuring his music in concerts and on recordings. The interpretation given to some of these works by non-SA bands has in some cases inspired a fresh look from Salvation Army bands as well.

Following his retirement, R S-A continued to maintain his connections with the Salvation Army's music publishing activities by working part time in the Music Ministries Unit at The Salvation Army's UK Headquarters in London. His skills as a reviewer and editor have been an invaluable asset to the present team - as well as the continued output of music for the department's instrumental and vocal journals. As part of that team, I can also say that his regular visits to the office were usually eventful occasions - his boyish enthusiasm seems to be undiminished from the 'office boy' days of his youth as he breezed into the office like a whirlwind with a cheerful greeting and a genuine inquiry into everyone's well-being! His perceptive review and insightful assessment of new music was generally entirely accurate and hugely valued. Although Ray has now fully retired from working in the Unit, he is still regarded by us all as an important reference point, a mine of useful information and knowledge and valued contributor.

I have alluded to the spiritual dimension of Ray Steadman-Allen's music, but the spiritual dimension of the person cannot be overlooked or understated in an article such as this. His calling to Salvation Army officership was a real call to Christian ministry - a ministry that has largely been observed by the public as a musical one - and he has lived out that ministry in many ways over the years. While in Australia, he and Joy linked up with an inner city corps where they gave pastoral



Ray and Joy Steadman-Allen.

and practical support both to the officers and the members of the congregation. They also involved themselves very fully in the life of the Kettering Corps when they first settled there on retirement from active officership, and latterly at Chatham.

As a mark of recognition for his outstanding, indeed his unique contribution to Salvation Army music, Ray Steadman-Allen was admitted to The Order of The Founder, which was established to recognise Salvationists who have made a special and significant contribution to the life of The Salvation Army. There can be no more deserving Salvationist musician than he to receive this honour.

To sum up the life and work of a musician like Lieut. Colonel Ray Steadman-Allen is a hard task. It is virtually impossible to truly quantify his impact on the musical life of The Salvation Army. Well in excess of 400 published works, plus a plethora of special arrangements and commissioned works, some of which were written for performance by such large and often unconventional musical forces that they have only graced the concert programme on one or two special occasions: a truly prolific output with a unique originality and true diversity that is remarkable by any standards.

His stature as a musician justifies the use of superlatives such as musical giant, innovator, unique talent and genius. However, his humility, sense of humour and 'down-to-earthness' almost belie the greatness of his music. He is still the possessor of a mind that is working on the next project before the current one is finished and, even at the age of 85, he can still surprise us all with his next piece! In the meantime, we have plenty of music from his pen to be going on with!

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