

MUSIC IN NOVA SCOTIA

1605-1867

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PART II

IN the Golden Age of Nova Scotia competent musicians from Europe were attracted to the province, particularly to the capital, and remained to train and stimulate native Nova Scotians. Nova Scotians travelled widely on their sailing ships and thus were able to compare musical efforts at home with those abroad. The coming of the St. Luke family to Halifax was one of the most important musical events of the century because this talented family was to remain in the province and continued to influence musical circles until the end of Victoria's reign.

John St. Luke had left the position of ballet master and director of music at the Theatre Royal in Bristol, England, for a similar post at the Opera House in New York. After seven years he embarked on a successful tour of the eastern and southern states with his young son and daughter—known as the "Youthful Paganini" and "the Bird of Song." This tour ended in Saint John, N. B. from whence the St. Lukes removed to Halifax in the spring of 1842, probably because they hoped for more patronage from the larger garrison and among the officials and merchants. Undoubtedly they were the best vocalist and violinist yet heard in Halifax. *The Halifax Morning Post* related that although Miss St. Luke's concert on June 2, 1842 was thinly attended it "was rapturously received." The reporter's comment that "the *Italian* melodies we would not give a button for" shows that the taste for Italian opera was still lacking. "Master St. Luke's performance on the violin was, beyond all compare, the most *masterly* display of the evening. The touches were exquisitely fine, and enrapt the audience with astonishment, and delight. His *one string* will, we predict, draw crowded audiences . . . The ravishing sounds are still thrilling in our ears."

But it was for sacred music rather than operatic selections that the St. Lukes received the greatest encouragement from Halifax audiences. Their first sacred Concert was greeted by the "gratified countenances and repeated applause of the audience" and the combination of melodious voices was a "perfect

triumph". To indulge this taste for Sacred Music the Halifax Harmonic Society was formed on October 26, 1842 with John St. Luke as musical director. The Harmonic Society was organized by thirty-eight gentlemen living in Halifax, and it was the first of those singing societies like the Halifax Philharmonic Society and the Orpheus Club which were to have such a wide influence in Halifax during the nineteenth century.

John Slayter was President of this choral society which was devoted to "the improvement of its Members in the higher departments of Sacred Music", and under the direction of John St. Luke the members began practising "The Creation". The rules emphasized that there would be no time to waste on elementary instruction at the weekly meetings. The committee could invite ladies to assist at the concerts, but could not admit them to full membership. The various concerts afforded much pleasure to the audiences. For fifty years people in Halifax were to recall how Miss St. Luke sang "Lo! the bright Seraphim" and made everyone cry when she sang "How Can I Leave Thee, Paradise"? After thriving for six or seven years, and securing its own auditorium called the Harmonic Hall, the Society suffered an eclipse. It was revived in 1857 by thirty-one gentlemen, the President William Ackhurst, Vice-President William R. Cogswell, and Secretary-Treasurer H. M. Creighton and four others having been charter members of the Harmonic Society. Absentees were fined 2s. 6d. Those persons distinguished for their love of music but unable to sing could join as Patrons which entitled them to attend practices and public performances without further charge. In the winter of 1858 three public concerts were presented at the Temperance Hall in Poplar Grove, which from 1848 to 1877 was the best auditorium in the city.

The interest in singing aroused in Barrington by the various singing masters led to the formation of "The Harmonic Society" of sixty members in 1861 "to promote the knowledge of music by rehearsals, public concerts and lectures." The first concert was held on the anniversary of Handel's death that summer, and the proceeds of five pounds were sent to the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb at Halifax. The society flourished until 1870, when death or removal of many of the most active members and the lack of accommodation for public concerts dissolved the group. A young man from Barrington, Arnold Doane, stayed in London for post graduate studies in music on his return voyage from the Australian gold fields, and then

settled in Halifax where he has been given credit for laying the foundation of the musical taste of his day in the capital of Nova Scotia.

In 1844 Jacob Cunnabell returned to his native city of Halifax from the United States where he had been teaching and studying vocal and instrumental music for eight years. At first he assisted Mr. Owen in his Singing School at the Harmonic Hall, teaching singing classes in Sacred Harmony, "with a view to the improvement of Congregational Singing, and to the promotion of devotional harmony in the family circle." Owen used Hullah Wilhem's method which had been astonishingly successful in England. On the anniversary of Queen Victoria's Coronation, June 28th, 1847, J. S. Cunnabell gave a Social Concert at the Masonic Hall under the patronage of the Nova Scotia Philanthropic Society. This was advertised as the first entertainment by a native of the province. The ladies and gentlemen who assisted in the chorus, duets and glees were all Nova Scotians who had been instructed by Cunnabell. The glee "Swift as a Flash" by Rossini was heard in Halifax for the first time, and the song "The Silver Lake" with vocal accompaniment in Tyrolian style had been arranged by Cunnabell himself.

Outstanding among the European music teachers in Halifax in the middle of the nineteenth century were Senor Louis G. Casseres, an excellent pianist and voice teacher who was appointed pianist to Lieutenant-Governor the Earl of Mulgrave; Prof. E. Jeans, violincellist from London, who augmented his income by repairing and tuning organs and pianos; and Mr. E. C. Saffery, prominent in the Harmonic Society, who attempted to raise the level of musical knowledge by occasional lectures at the Temperance Hall. A series of brilliant recitals was presented in Halifax under the patronage of Lieutenant-Governor Sir Gaspard LeMarchant in 1857 and his successor the Earl of Mulgrave in 1858. From the crowded attendance at these concerts one might suppose that the people of Halifax knew how to appreciate good music whether they possessed much musical talent or not.

For the first time concerts were being reviewed by a competent musical critic whose comments were published in the *Acadian Recorder*. Senor Casseres gave his first benefit concert before a Halifax audience on March 5th, 1857 at the Temperance Hall, and "a more respectable and crowded assemblage never gathered in that Hall on behalf of a resident Professor."

He was assisted by Prof. Jeans who played "admirably on the violincello", and by Miss Jeans and various amateur singers of both sexes. But Senor Casseres' performance on the piano was the most outstanding portion of the programme because "he showed in his Scotch airs with variations, and especially in his last Solo in 'Belisario' that years of practise and assiduity can give any amount of execution, skill and dexterity, and that the innate gift of expression, which musicians term "Soul" grows in proportion as a man idolizes and makes himself a slave to his profession." Besides his duties as organist at St. Paul's and pianist to the Earl and Countess of Mulgrave, Senor Casseres must have had a number of pupils for he advertised in 1858 that he had four hours a week free and would accept a pupil for piano, flute, guitar, organ or singing in the Italian, French, Spanish and English languages.

Until the mid-nineteenth century pianos were a rarity in Nova Scotia, available only to the comparatively wealthy and to be lovingly cherished by their owners. Col. Norman Bond introduced the first piano or spinet into Yarmouth about 1799. In the settlement of New Ross when Lord Dalhousie was Governor, sometime between 1816 and 1820, the first piano in the district was brought by sea from Halifax and then carried on the backs of soldier-settlers fifteen or twenty miles through the woods into the interior of Lunenburg County. All the inhabitants for miles around came to see this exquisite little piano and to admire the beautiful rosewood case. Every district has similar traditions of its first piano. Most of the early pianos were imported from England.

By 1858 the pianoforte was cultivated more than any other branch of music in Halifax. Although pianos were rare in other parts of Canada, the popularity of these instruments in Nova Scotia was due to their manufacture in Halifax by the Philips family. H. Philips had come from Hamburg, Germany, to sell pianos in Nova Scotia, and finding it a fertile field for his salesmanship, induced J. B. Philips to join him. Together they formed the firm of H. & J. Philips for the manufacture of pianos, and they sold the first piano made in the province to Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Harvey about 1846. In 1849 H. J. Philips announced he would continue the Piano Forte Manufactory of H. & J. Philips at 65 Barrington Street, Halifax, and he declared that he had sixteen years' experience manufacturing Piano Fortes which "have been very generally used by the gentry of Hamburg, and also by many of the leading families of this city."

The next year he was exhorting people to "ENCOURAGE HOME MANUFACTURE" by buying one of his 6½ octave Piccolo piano fortes with double action, "warranted to stand the climate." John B. Philips was regarded as the pioneer of piano manufacture in Nova Scotia, and in 1857 he was advertising himself as the "Inventor and Manufacturer of the Iron Piano Forte". The next year he was being praised for the splendid Concert Grand Piano he had built for the use of the Temperance Society. A large audience assembled at the Mason's Hall to hear Senor Casseres perform on J. B. Philips' new "oblique piano"—first one of its kind ever made in Nova Scotia—which combined the "power of the *grand* with the neatness and compactness of the *cabinet* piano" to produce a sweet toned and handsome instrument according to the *Acadian Recorder* of February 13, 1858.

One of the workmen trained by the Philips was William Leverman, who later joined the woodworking firm of Williams and Leverman, about 1871. In 1876 this firm was manufacturing upright or cottage style pianos, using native woods and imported keys and action and providing employment for twenty men. Thomas and Alfred Brockley had been trained in the London establishment of Messrs. Broadwood. After thirty years as foreman for Broadwood and Stodard, Thomas Brockley came to Halifax in 1856 to work for Mr. J. B. Philips. The next year Alfred joined his father, and Brockley and Company began the manufacture of pianos on a small scale. By 1876 their business had prospered and they were making instruments in all styles and prices ranging from \$200 to \$1000, importing the keys and action from Chickering's and Steinway's. The firm had won Honorable Mention and £25 for a Cottage Piano made of Nova Scotia wood at the London International Exhibition of 1862 and had displayed one of their piano-fortes at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876. Brockley's pianos were sold not only in Nova Scotia, but also in Manitoba, United States, West Indies and England.

Nova Scotia has not yet produced a famous composer or a popular musical composition. Songs and instrumental pieces have been composed at almost every period, but they have been lightly regarded, and often copies cannot be found today. The first music to be published in Nova Scotia was *The Nova-Scotia Songster* in February, 1836. This selection of Scotch, English, Irish, Love, Naval and Comic Songs had been published at Pictou by James Dawson, an enterprising merchant there,

and father of Sir William Dawson, famous as the Principal of McGill University. In 1831 James Dawson had decided to publish a new selection of Church Music of about 350 pages called *The Harmonicon* whenever he could obtain enough subscribers. As a novel way of securing enough purchasers he promised to give every person who sold twelve subscriptions a free copy. The prospective buyers thought the price of 7s. 6d. was too high. Dawson also had difficulty getting his book printed. To overcome these obstacles he imported a fount of music type into Nova Scotia in 1835 and prepared to publish a volume of 250 pages for 6 shillings. "*The Harmonicon: A Collection of Sacred Music adapted for the use of churches in British North America*" appeared in 1836 or 1837 and proved sufficiently popular for a new enlarged third edition to be published in 1849 by James Dawson & Sons.

Songs were written for special events, such as Joseph Howe's "The Bluenose" sung to the air "Bumper of Burgundy" at the festival of the Nova Scotia Philanthropic Society in 1836 when the intellectual awakening of Nova Scotia was in full flower. For the 90th Anniversary of the landing of Governor Edward Cornwallis, Howe composed "Song for the 8th June" beginning:

Hail to the day when the Briton came o'er
And planted his flag where the Mayflower blows,

Copies of Howe's *Song for the Centenary* of the 100th Anniversary of Halifax were printed on the first printing press of the *Novascotian* while it was being pulled through the streets by four grey horses in the Natal Day Parade and sheets were tossed to the crowd. This *Song for the Centenary* shows a marked resemblance to the earlier *Song for the 8th June*, but it had been revised and expanded. Set to music by R. G. Halls it enjoyed a popular vogue and it was sung by a Massed Choir at the unveiling of the Cornwallis Statue in Halifax in 1931 and revived again for the Bicentenary of Halifax.

The Imperial bandmasters always did a certain amount of arranging, and occasionally the more gifted composed a piece of their own. Geatano Francisco Farrugia, a native of the island of Malta and bandmaster of the 38th Regiment at Halifax from 1848 to 1851, composed the *Agnes Waltzes*, which he dedicated to Lady Campbell, the wife of his commanding officer. While he dedicated his musical compositions to his Colonel's lady he named them for the 19 year old Halifax girl

who eloped with him—Agnes Ann Stayner, daughter of Ebenezer Stayner, a leather merchant. Their daughter Agnes Vincenza married John W. Stairs of Halifax. H. Matthias, bandmaster of H.M.S. *Comus*, composed a polka entitled “The Torpedo” which was sold in the Halifax music stores. The bandmaster of the 60th Royal Rifles, Signor G. Raineri, was a gifted composer as well as a fine musician and conductor. When Lord and Lady Dufferin were visiting Halifax in 1873 the band of the 60th Rifles played Raineri’s “Dufferin Galop” at the Spring Garden Theatre. A copy, published by J. Hagarty of Halifax, was presented to the Countess of Dufferin, who sent the composer a picture of herself. In a volume of music collected by Miss Elizabeth Page, who taught music in Halifax from 1884 to 1917 and was a member of the staff of the Halifax Conservatory of Music, is a “Funeral March” Op. 54 composed by G. Raineri published at Halifax by J. Hagarty at his Musical Warehouse.

A number of Nova Scotian clergymen and organists composed hymns. Rev. Dr. Blair composed the tune “Bradalbane” for the metrical version of the 23rd Psalm while he was clergyman at Barney’s River, Pictou County, in May, 1850. Dr. Blair, a Scot, was renowned as an authority on New Testament Greek and as the best Gaelic scholar of his time in North America, and as a writer of excellent Gaelic verse. He ministered to the people of Barney’s River and Blue Mountain—no light charge in winter when he tramped fourteen miles on snowshoes to preach at Blue Mountain! “His tune ‘Bradalbane’ is not in current hymnals, but it is a sweetly solemn and dignified air that is not without musical merit”, observes Mr. R. M. Hattie of Halifax. Rev. Canon Francis Partridge rector of St. George’s Round Church at Halifax from 1882 to 1895, was a gifted composer and a fine instrumentalist and choir director. Another Anglican clergyman who was also renowned as a composer was Dean E. P. Crawford of St. Luke’s Cathedral. Three of his hymns appear in “The Book of Common Praise” used today by the Anglican Church.

Much credit should be given to Mr. E. G. Fuller, for many years proprietor of the American Book Store opposite Province House in Halifax, for his attempts to give Nova Scotians a music of their own. In the year 1849 alone he published and sold at least half a dozen compositions by gentlemen residing in Halifax—Hon. J. Howe’s “Centenary Song” composed and arranged by R. G. Halls: “Nova Scotia Waltzes” by H. Winter-

botham; "Mayflower Polka" and "Sleigh Ride Gallop" by J. P. Hagarty, for many years organist at St. Mary's Cathedral in Halifax; and the "Centenary or Fancy Fair Polka and Gallop" recommended to the ladies reading the *British Colonist* as "a composition that is not surpassed by any of the fine pieces in that style, which of late years has become so popular." For the opening of the first provincial exhibition in Nova Scotia, Mr. Fuller published in 1854 a "very beautiful piece of music entitled the 'Exhibition Quadrilles' with an appropriate engraving of the Exhibition Building and tents." It was composed by a London artist, Henry West, R.A., and dedicated to Lady LeMarchant. Other parts of the province had their local composers. At a concert on May 10, 1854 at the Milton Temperance Hall there was sung "I'll Think of Thee" with music by John L. Miles and words by a "Lady of Milton." The advertisements declared that this was "the first piece ever composed and set to music by a native of Queen's County."

From this sketch it may be seen that by the 1860's circumstances seemed propitious for musical development. Here examples of fine music and accomplished artists were not lacking and audiences were ready to support and enjoy concerts. Hitherto musical taste in Nova Scotia had been imposed from the outside—from Great Britain, Europe or the United States. By the middle of the nineteenth century native Nova Scotians thoroughly trained in music abroad were returning to their homeland to teach others, to entertain their fellow countrymen, and to make some attempts at original composition. From these small beginnings Nova Scotians might eventually have worked out a musical culture based on their European heritage, and yet expressing themselves as Nova Scotians, as Canadians are trying to do today. It would be interesting to enquire why this musical flowering failed to take place; how far this failure was due to the depression following the American Civil War and to Confederation for upsetting the economic and political basis of this experiment, or how far it was due to defects in the character of Nova Scotians themselves.