

Introduction

Beginnings and Contexts, the Themes of a History

The RCM's building was designed to impress. Its two massive flanking towers and intense red brick facing give it enough substance to square up to the celebrated bulk of its opposite neighbour, the Royal Albert Hall. Happily though, its monolithic appearance is relieved by architectural eccentricity, such as quirky 'medieval' turrets, the ornate gabling of the central porch tower and roofline windows, and the decorative cream Weldon stone that breaks up the forceful brick colour. The building's Flemish-style façade echoes the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum, and holds its own against the other distinctive museum buildings inhabiting the 'Albertopolis' site (Figure I.1).¹ Altogether, the College looks a place of significance and serious endeavour that looms over its students as they scurry along Prince Consort Road and climb the front steps – in symbolic ascent towards artistic goals – to enter the elaborately marbled vestibule.

But the building we now see was not the RCM's original home. Between 1883 and 1894 the College was crammed into the insufficient physical space of the curious, sgraffito-covered building to the west of the Royal Albert Hall, whose eccentric façade (which, as Figure I.2 shows, was decorated by a cutesy frieze of mythological pied pipers and assorted others) looked the antithesis of any sort of serious professional purpose. The contrast between the College's original public face and the imposing building on Prince Consort Road symbolizes at a glance the transformation of the RCM from its slightly tentative beginnings to an established institution that looked worthy of nation and Empire. The fact that the RCM had now come to look the part, as it were, in its new, purpose-built, accommodation boosted its standing and so helped secure its long-term future. The College had forged an individual path out of London's nineteenth-century musical environment – truly a world where things

¹ Tim Blanning uses an illustration of the Rijksmuseum, built between 1877 and 1885, to make the point that grand museums were being constructed in the nineteenth century as 'Witnesses to the sacralization of art' (T. C. W. Blanning, 'The Commercialization and Sacralization of European Culture in the Nineteenth Century', in Blanning (ed.), *Oxford Illustrated History of Modern Europe* [Oxford University Press, 1996], 130).



Figure I.1 Façade of the RCM building, designed by Sir Arthur Blomfield. In the left foreground is the Memorial to the Great Exhibition of 1851 topped by the figure of the Prince Consort. It was Queen Victoria's agreement for the repositioning of this statue immediately to the south of the RAH that cleared the way for the College to be built on this site (see p. 113).

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were done very differently – and now offered quality musical training in facilities that could hold their own with anything then available elsewhere in Europe or the United States. With its innovative curriculum and dedicated working accommodation, the RCM represented a breakthrough in British musical life.

The RCM had emerged from the economic success and the liberal-minded philosophy underpinning the 1851 Great Exhibition, perhaps best symbolized in the striking image of the original Crystal Palace which housed it.² The College is built on land bought out of the profits of the Exhibition in an area sometimes referred to as 'Albertopolis'. It houses a nexus of museums and colleges of learning founded to make a reality of Prince Albert's twin ambitions to modernize Britain technologically and to stimulate greater

² Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 228–9.

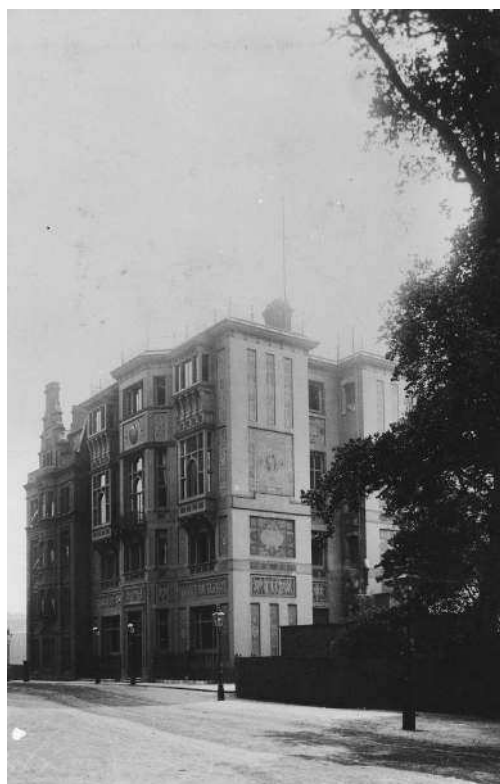


Figure I.2 The RCM's first home was in the building occupied by the former National Training School for Music. Its front door faces the west of the RAH, while behind it Queen Alexandra's House can just be seen.

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British accomplishment in the arts and in design.³ The purpose of the Royal College of Music – as with its College of Art counterpart (originally the School of Design) – was to train up British talent, regardless of class or position in society.⁴ In the RCM's case, this would be done through a public appeal for a large capital sum to endow scholarships, with maintenance

³ For a discussion of the significance of Albertopolis in transforming scientific and technical education, see Martin Daunt, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851–1951* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 510–15.

⁴ The Prince of Wales made specific reference to the College's progressive social attitude in his inaugural speech, drawing attention to music's capacity of bridging 'the gulf between different classes' to speak 'with equal force to the cultivated and the ignorant, to the peer and the peasant'. As *The Musical Times* (*MT*) commented, in the Prince's speech, 'a far higher view was taken of the mission of the College than might have been suggested even by national musical requirements' ('The Royal College of Music', *MT* (June 1883), 309–10).

support, that would enable the pick of gifted musicians to study at the RCM whom poverty would otherwise have excluded.

The Great Exhibition had successfully showcased British manufacturing, but it had also focussed attention on the nation's weakness in the arts. Prince Albert was especially conscious of underachievement in music, a disappointment he shared with Henry Cole, an enthusiastic amateur musician and the civil servant who was the Great Exhibition's administrative force. Trenchantly critical of the RAM's work, Cole wanted the government to establish a new national music school. To push this agenda, Cole harnessed the support of the influential Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (now the Royal Society of Arts), a socially progressive policy institute whose Council he had chaired in 1852 and 1854. In 1864 the Society established a Music Education Committee, chaired by Cole, whose remit was to investigate the present condition of British music education and to recommend what improvements were required to produce 'results at least equal to those of the Academies which flourish on the Continent of Europe'.⁵ The Committee's Report was excoriating about the condition of the RAM, and the Society now turned its attention towards lobbying government to establish and fund a 'National Academy of Music' (based on the Paris Conservatoire) to provide free education to scholars, with access to gifted fee-paying students. Meanwhile, the Report also suggested that if the RAM could secure public confidence by reforming and reorganizing itself, then the 1851 Commissioners should now consider offering it a place on the Albertopolis.⁶ The RAM, however, under its new Principal, Sterndale Bennett, was resolved to maintain itself on its own terms, not Cole's. This rebuff made Cole all the more determined, and with the idea of putting additional pressure on the government, he pushed the Society of Arts to establish the National Training School for Music.⁷ The NTSM (which ran from 1876 to 1882) was conceived to operate for five years under the Society's control, after which time it was confidently anticipated that a grateful government would

⁵ Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, *First Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into and Report on the State of Musical Education, at Home and Abroad* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1866), 1. A pithy summary of this report is given in Cyril Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 88–99. The Committee saw the leading European conservatoires of Paris, Vienna, Leipzig and Brussels as models for a new approach to training British professional musicians.

⁶ *First Report*, 2; the RAM had applied for an Albertopolis site in 1854.

⁷ Elizabeth Bonython and Anthony Burton, *The Great Exhibitor: The Life and Work of Henry Cole* (London: V&A, 2003), 272.

take it over and assume full financial and educational responsibility. But the Society was deluding itself about the government's willingness to fund a national music school, and it was soon evident that the Society had seriously overplayed its hand.

Not only was the NTSM insufficiently funded, but neither had its objective nor educational nature been plainly enough defined.⁸ It wasn't clear whether the NTSM's purpose was to train musicians for the profession or, like several other private music schools of the day, to prepare music teachers and drawing-room society players in piano and singing. Another issue was the inadequate leadership provided by Arthur Sullivan, the School's Principal. Sullivan had been pressured into accepting the role by his friend, Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh (Queen Victoria's second son), despite his own misgivings and Cole's strongly expressed opposition. Already overcommitted as a composer, and unable or unwilling to think in any innovative way about musical training, Sullivan essentially replicated the situation he had himself experienced as an RAM student. It had simply been assumed that with Sullivan as the NTSM's Principal, his name and celebrity would be enough to guarantee the School's success. It proved otherwise, as is clear from the annual Examiners' Reports of 1880 (which commented, '[W]e failed to observe an executive cohesion in general'), and 1881 (which remarked on Sullivan's failure 'to regard the School as his paramount duty').⁹ Arguably, however, Sullivan's perceived inadequacy for the role, despite his musical prestige, helped make it possible for Grove – highly regarded as a scholar, administrator and as a motivating force in bringing about complex projects, but nevertheless a musical amateur – to be appointed the RCM's first Director.

The NTSM's continuing viability was soon called into question. As early as the summer of 1877, the School was obliged to seek financial support from the 1851 Commissioners.¹⁰ It was at this stage that the Prince of

⁸ I discuss the Society of Arts's 1866 Report, the NTSM and the NTSM/RAM relationship in 'Grove's Role in the Founding of the RCM', in *GGM&VC*, 219–44, and in the 'South Kensington Music Schools', *JRMA* 130/2 (2005), 236–82.

⁹ The examiners in 1880 included the two noted conductors, Charles Hallé and Sir Michael Costa. For a detailed discussion of the founding, operation and shortcomings of the NTSM under Sullivan, see Wright, 'The South Kensington Music Schools'.

¹⁰ Its request was unsuccessful. The Chairman of the 1851 Exhibitioners, Earl Spencer, considered that 'The Treasury are not likely to undertake the charge of providing for Musical Education if they find two Institutions existing who do this work with small Government assistance' (a reference to the annual Treasury grant of only £500 each to the NTSM and the RAM); unless the state accepted financial responsibility for the NTSM, its future was uncertain. (NTSM/CM: 26 July 1877).

Wales (who was President of the 1851 Commissioners) took up the cause of British musical training. In July 1878 he called a meeting (attended by Grove) at his official residence, Marlborough House, to announce his proposal for a new Royal National College of Music, with himself as its President. This new College would be established ‘on a more permanent and extended basis than any existing institution’ to give students a ‘complete course of professional training extending over several years’.¹¹

In making his announcement, the Prince had unfortunately jumped the gun. He had clearly acted under the impression that a new merger agreement being brokered between the RAM and the NTSM was virtually in place. This plan, led by Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein (a brother-in-law of the Prince of Wales), would have assimilated the NTSM and the RAM within the new Royal National College. The idea was that the new college would have two branches: foundation-level study (based on the NTSM’s work) and professional training (the RAM).¹² Had things gone smoothly, the emergence of this new college coming soon after the Prince’s proposal would have created the impression that the two institutions were responding to his leadership. Unfortunately for the Prince and his advisers, the merger proposal collapsed at the last minute, and the RAM reasserted its wish to remain independent – and located in the West End (London’s traditional musical centre) – rather than to move to the remoter outskirts of South Kensington.¹³ This unexpected development left the Prince uncomfortably exposed; having declared his intention to be President of a new Royal College created to serve the nation’s musical interest, he was now virtually obliged to bring it into being. The next year, in 1879, yet another attempt (this time accompanied by a sweetener of £3,000) was made to persuade the RAM to surrender its Royal Charter and to merge with the NTSM: again the RAM refused.¹⁴

¹¹ *The Times*, 24 February 1882; interim Prospectus (13 January 1883), outlining the origin, objectives and the speeches made in support of the RCM’s foundation. The terms of the Prince’s speech make it likely that Grove had been involved in drafting it.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The physical location was an important aspect: many musical retailers and instrument makers were located around the concert-giving area of London’s Regent Street; the RCM would later find it very difficult to attract music critics to Kensington, and for years it was obliged to present its showcase public concerts and opera productions in the West End in order to secure press reviews and a larger audience.

¹⁴ RAM, *Minutes of the Board of Directors*, Vol. 1, Extraordinary Meeting, 13 December 1879; the rationale for this merger is set out by Charles Sumner Maine, ‘A Conservatoire of Music for England’, *Macmillan’s Magazine* (November 1879), 145–53. Grove was the editor of this journal.

The RAM's continued refusal to be part of a new national music training college and instead to maintain its independence brought matters to a head. Clearly, it would be embarrassing to the Prince if his public initiative simply collapsed, which meant there was no alternative but to set up the new institution from scratch. All this explains the very determined interest that was now shown by the Prince and his circle in making a success of the RCM project.¹⁵ A second Marlborough House meeting was held on 28 February 1882, attended by national figures such as William Gladstone, the Prime Minister, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, at which the Prince formally launched his RCM scheme. Everything now hinged on the success of an ambitious public appeal raising the capital required to endow sufficient RCM scholarships. It was something of a herculean undertaking, not least because the cause of professional-level music education had little inherent national appeal, while the reasons for its significance were not necessarily easy ones to appreciate. The success that was achieved came on the back of George Grove's philosophical and educational vision for the College. Grove secured many of the donations because he was able to explain that the College would be a place of serious educational purpose and vital for the future of the nation's musical life.¹⁶

The NTSM had failed because its conception was essentially flawed. Yet, only a year later, Grove's fundraising had achieved sufficient backing for the RCM scheme to enable the College to open. Therefore, what had made Grove's vision so persuasive? To answer that, we need to be clearer about what had shaped Grove's ideas about musical education. Undoubtedly, the most formative influence on Grove had been his experiencing the practicalities of musical life at the Crystal Palace, in its new situation at Sydenham, south-east London.¹⁷ The insights Grove drew from this stimulated his conceiving of a British music college that, while based on European conservatoire practices, was also adapted to national circumstances. It was this idea that he was able to present so persuasively to audiences in his fundraising speeches. But we should also remember Grove's other commitment to music education in a wider sense, as editor of his eponymous *Dictionary* (its outline prospectus was issued in 1874). In his preface to its

¹⁵ The Duke of Edinburgh had announced the decision to pursue a new, independent Royal College of Music 'with greater influence and a greater power of expansion' to the NTSM Committee of Management at its meeting on 16 February 1880.

¹⁶ As Grove expressed it, 'a place of work . . . learning music in the best possible way, and treating it as a serious matter of life' ('Royal College of Music', *The Musical World* [15 July 1882], 428).

¹⁷ After housing the 1851 Great Exhibition, in 1854 the Crystal Palace building was relocated from Hyde Park to Sydenham, one of London's south-eastern suburbs.

first volume, Grove stated: 'Music is now performed, studied, and listened to by a much larger number of persons, and in a more serious spirit, than was the case at any previous period of our history'.¹⁸ Although it is not certain whether Grove had been involved in formulating any of the Prince's original 1878 speech, his outline for the RCM had served as a guiding principle well ahead of the intensive appeal campaign of 1882. (In 1881 Grove had written speeches for Prince Christian and the Dukes of Edinburgh and Albany to deliver at a Manchester meeting held to test the ground for launching the RCM appeal.) Grove delivered some forty-four fundraising speeches across the country. He underscored the need for a national college by developing the point his preface had made about the expansion of British musical life. This gave him the justification to argue that 'there was such a period of development coming upon music in the next fifty years as had never been seen in England, and that it would be one of the most characteristic things of that period of our history'.¹⁹ The case Grove made for the RCM was persuasive in elevating the practice and study of music into an issue of national significance.²⁰

From the outset, Grove was clear that the RCM should present a full complement of instrumental staff, and that, when it opened, there should be in place a coherent, systematic, curriculum of practical and theoretical instruction based on the principle of a three-year period of study. Scholarships would be awarded on a competitive basis, and the most accomplished scholars would be able to continue their studies at the College until they were mature artistically. Grove also felt that the College should also be open to talented paying students prepared and able to complete their course of instruction. It is unclear when, during 1882, Grove was offered the role of the RCM's Director; certainly, the post was not advertised. It seems that on the evidence of his effectiveness in making the case for the College (and with the Sullivan debacle in mind), it gradually became accepted that Grove would be more likely to turn strategy into successful practice than would an eminent musical figurehead. This evolving situation would explain the hesitant tone Grove used in writing to the publisher, John Murray: 'it seems I am to be Director in the event of its being

¹⁸ George Grove (ed.), *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1879–89), vol. 1; reprinted in *New Grove II*, vol. 1, xxxv.

¹⁹ *The Musical World* (15 July 1882), 428.

²⁰ I discuss Grove's fundraising themes in 'Grove's Role in the Founding of the RCM', 237–40; Phyllis Weliver indicates the support given by members of the Gladstone circle, and that Mary Gladstone herself secured a £1,000 donation from Andrew Carnegie (see *Mary Gladstone and the Victorian Salon: Music, Literature, Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 183–4).

established'.²¹ Inevitably, the fundraising process for the College generated tension with the RAM's supporters, and the antagonism was further fuelled by the interest the royal family were taking in the new institution. This rivalry was enthusiastically fanned by the press, who portrayed the RAM as the professional musicians' institution and the RCM as a plaything of the aristocracy: 'South Kensington is a great social power... But [it] has scarcely any following among the professionals and amateurs who constitute our great musical public'.²² Provocatively, the *Musical World* printed side-by-side one of Grove's fundraising speeches and a speech refuting the need for the RCM made by the RAM's Principal, George Macfarren. But by May 1883, enough had been achieved for the RCM to open, although not everyone saw the fundraising as the huge success that was claimed for it. *The Musical Times*, for example, remarked that the £110,000 which it said had been subscribed 'is by no means munificent or encouraging'.²³

This contentious process gave rise to two face-saving, but erroneous, myths about the RCM's origins. One is that the College was modelled on the RAM, the other is that the College emerged out of the NTSM. This latter was Sir Arthur Sullivan's defence of his inglorious period as Principal, and as it was in no one's interest to draw attention to that School's deficiencies (not least because it would have damaged Grove's chances of raising RCM donations from former NTSM subscribers), this explanation was allowed to stand in the first edition of Grove's *Dictionary*.²⁴ But the reality is that the RCM, with its established curriculum and scholarship education, owed nothing to either precedent. Instead, it was London's new musical force-field, the Crystal Palace, that provided the stimulus for the RCM's innovative musical and educational ethos.

The reason why the Crystal Palace had become such a vital and transformative agent in London's musical life is the happy coincidence of two forceful men: George Grove, the Secretary (Chief Executive) of the Crystal Palace Company which managed the building, and August Manns, the

²¹ Quoted in Janet Ritterman, 'Grove as First Director of the RCM', in *GGM&VC*, 251.

²² An observation made in an exchange of letters (originally published in the *Daily Telegraph*) between 'An Amateur', critical of the NTSM and the proposed RCM, and John Stainer, then Principal of the NTSM, that was reproduced in *The Musical World* (21 January 1882), 41–5.

²³ 'Royal College of Music', *MT* (1 June 1883), 309–10.

²⁴ For Sullivan's assertion that the RCM was, to all intents and purposes, the same institution and run on the same precepts that he, Sullivan, had established, see Arthur Lawrence, *Sir Arthur Sullivan: Life Story, Letters and Reminiscences* (London, 1899), 111. The tight linkage of friendships and professional networks was another reason to gloss over any NTSM difficulties; Grove and Sullivan enjoyed a close personal friendship and Sullivan was a member of the RCM's Council, or governing body.

Palace's Director of Music. Between them they brought a completely fresh approach to standards of concert giving in the capital. The Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts, featuring London's first 'permanent' concert orchestra trained by Manns, drew people in huge numbers from central London, and indeed from across Britain. Swiftly transported by special railway links, large audiences came to hear the modern orchestral repertoire then being created by continental and British composers.²⁵ Elgar made the journey to Crystal Palace several times, and thanks to the railway system was able to complete the return trip from Worcester within the day.

Grove's administrative involvement with Manns gave him direct experience of all aspects of the Crystal Palace's musical operation, and gave him an entrée into the professional musical world and its networks. The quality of the performances Manns drew from his Crystal Palace orchestra made Grove acutely aware of the musical benefits of a 'permanent' orchestra trained by a professional conductor. The standards of the weekly Saturday Concerts were in striking contrast with those of the slovenly, pick-up-band performances of the occasional concerts of the (Royal) Philharmonic Society.²⁶ Operating on an ad hoc basis, with insufficient rehearsal and often poor musical leadership, contemporary reports made it clear that the Society's orchestra was unable to cope convincingly, even on a basic level, with the demands of the new, more virtuosic, orchestral writing of composers such as Wagner and Berlioz; certainly, it did not possess the more

²⁵ '[A] considerable slice of what was soon to be regarded as the standard orchestral repertory had first been heard in Britain at the Crystal Palace... the literature concerning the musicians of the later nineteenth century revealed that, for them, the Crystal Palace was one of the central venues: they all knew its musical life intimately and looked to it for a musical lead' (Michael Musgrave, *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), xiii). My discussion of the Crystal Palace's influence on the RCM is greatly indebted to Michael Musgrave's work in reconstructing and setting out the Crystal Palace's musical achievements after its neglect by historical accounts. Discussing the significance that the School of Music (one element of the Crystal Palace School of Art, Science and Literature) played in the Palace's wider musical life, Musgrave also calls attention to the significant presence of RCM teaching staff there (*ibid.*, 172–3). For an illuminating account of changing musical circumstances and musical practices at this time, see Musgrave, 'Changing Values in Nineteenth-Century Performance: The Work of Michael Costa and August Manns', in Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley (eds.), *Music and British Culture, 1785–1914: Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 169–91.

²⁶ 'By the summer of 1880 the Philharmonic Society was known to be a wreck' is Cyril Ehrlich's trenchant comment on the Society's situation then (Cyril Ehrlich, *First Philharmonic: A History of the Royal Philharmonic Society* [Oxford University Press, 1995], 132). Ehrlich's history presents an invaluable analysis of nineteenth-century performance economics and standards in Britain. The Society, 'artistically and financially moribund, impervious to a new world of public concerts', was subsequently helped to recovery by Francesco Berger, its Secretary from 1884 to 1911; see also Cyril Ehrlich, 'Berger, Francesco (1834–1933)', *ODNB*.