

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

AUGUST MANNS.

CHAPTER I.

Early life in Stolzenberg and Elbing—Enlists in army band at Danzig—Becomes conductor of Kroll's Orchestra at Berlin—Kroll's Winter Gardens destroyed by fire—Manns loses his first wife—Becomes bandmaster of von Roon's regiment at Königsberg and Cologne—Resigns the army and comes to England—Joins the Palace band under Schallehn—Dispute with Schallehn—Is discharged from the band—Becomes violinist in an Edinburgh orchestra—Goes to Amsterdam—The *Musical World* comments on the Schallehn episode—Manns reinstated at the Palace as Musical Director—Letter of appointment from George Grove.

It is a difficult task to measure and set forth in cold print the oceans of enthusiasm that have flowed round the head of August Friedrich Manns. What associations does not the mere recollection of that venerable and beloved face bring with it! How many thunderous shouts of welcome from the Titanic audiences at the Crystal Palace, at Glasgow, Sheffield, Leeds, and elsewhere have rung around the splendid and dignified form of the great conductor. What addresses of welcome, what banquets,

I

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

August Manns

what showers of speeches, what columns of praise in the newspapers! The friendly caricatures alone would fill a small volume. And through it all he remained unspoiled. He was still the typically simple, kindly, humorous Teutonic gentleman that some of us are happy to think yet exists in great numbers across the German Ocean.

Here was not merely a great personality,—and that in itself counts enormously in a man's career, for it means magic, it casts a spell round the commonplaces of his existence, the coat he wears, the stick he carries,—but even more than all which is conveyed by the indefinable mystery of personality, the name of August Manns was nothing less than an epitome of music in England for the last fifty years. It is as good an instance of the occasional fitness of real affairs as you may chance to find. It was right that a son of the foremost musical nation should come and teach us the value of our own too often despised native song-birds. It has become platitudinous to complain of a lack of musical genius in England, but for half a century or so August Manns set himself the task of finding it, and how well he

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Sir Michael Costa

succeeded is an oft-told tale. It is of the man who actually and literally “discovered” and tapped not only Arthur Sullivan’s sparkling fount of melody, but to some extent those that flowed from the pens and brains of Villiers Stanford, Hubert Parry, Alexander Mackenzie, Frederic Cowen, Edward German, and a dozen others of whom mention shall be made later in this work, that we here set forth the life-story.

All are agreed that it is impossible to exaggerate the influence that the subject of this memoir had upon English music. According to musical experts, Sir Michael Costa was the first professional conductor—*i.e.*, one who devoted himself entirely to the art; but Costa’s experience as a purely orchestral conductor was inferior to that gained in his operatic career.¹ The

¹ In a paper contributed by Sir George Grove to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in May 1884, entitled “The Secret of Sir Michael Costa’s Success,” he maintains that Costa’s great plan was “Make yourself safe.” Surround yourself with the best possible agents, the best assistants that you can obtain, quite regardless of expense, and success is certain. In the zenith of his career Sir Michael never moved without such men as Bowley to prepare the whole scheme of the transaction for him; Sainton, Blagrove Hill, Lucas, Howell Pratten, Lazarus, the Harpers, Chipp, and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

August Manns

Musical Times of March 1st, 1898, says that in a period of eight years (1846-54) it only extended over seventy-three Philharmonic concerts and an occasional symphony at a provincial festival; whereas that of Manns covered a space of fifty years and heaven knows how many concerts. The spacious days of August Manns began far away in the time when Wagner was a boy of scarce thirteen years and *Lohengrin* was yet unthought of. When Manns was born in 1825, Beethoven had still two years to live; Schubert had still to write his greatest symphony (the immortal No. 9), his greatest and longest mass, his finest piece of chamber music, and an infinite number of noble works, including the pianoforte

others of equal eminence at the principal desks; Peck and Henry Wright to distribute the parts. With the perfect organization and efficient execution of such lieutenants failure was impossible; but the method was horribly expensive, and crippled the Sacred Harmonic. Costa was quite unable to train and develop second-rate materials—to educate an orchestra like Richter, Manns, or Rosa. His interpolations were “shameful”; his additions vulgar, unnecessary, and brutal; and his ignorance astounding. Grove very justly adds that in spite of all drawbacks we owe Costa a debt.—Graves' *Life of Sir George Grove*, pp. 124-125.

Celebrity in Embryo

sonata in G major, which is pronounced by Schumann to be its author's most perfect work. Mendelssohn had preceded Manns in the world but sixteen years, Schumann but fifteen; Meyerbeer was in the prime of his manhood. The production of *Oberon* at Covent Garden almost coincided with the second birthday of Manns, the death of its gifted composer occurring a few weeks later. If we may believe the biographer of Schumann, at the period of August Manns' childhood, about the year 1830, the general characteristic of music, even in Germany, was either superficiality or else vulgar mediocrity. Johannes Brahms was not born until 1833. Chopin, it is true, was living a comparatively secluded existence near Paris, but Gounod had not yet entered the Conservatoire. How impossible was it to foretell that in a little village in Pomerania these great gods of music would find their prophet, at that time a small urchin in daily attendance at the village school of Stolzenburg, near Stettin; but so it was, and happily we are enabled to give the history of those early years in the actual words of the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

August Manns

great conductor himself, who retained a vivid recollection of his youthful days to the end of his long and strenuous life. The following account was found among his papers, and was, it is believed, written by him for one of the numerous accounts given of his career in the newspapers during the last few years. Here we have it word for word as it was written, and our only feeling of regret is the inevitable one that there is not more of it:—

“I was born on the 12th of March 1825, at Stolzenburg,¹ in Pomerania, Prussia, the fifth child of a family of ten, of which the tenth, my brother Otto, was born before I was thirteen years old. My father, a thoroughly good, God-fearing man, was foreman at the glass factory of that little village, earning about 20s. a week. He played the violin a little, and it was his playing which no doubt laid the foundation of love of music for me and my seven brothers. At the time when I, at the age of about nine years, began to take part

¹ Stolzenburg is a village near Stettin, a large town situate on the banks of the River Oder close to its outfall to the Baltic.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Aged Eleven Years

in our home music as a flautist, our home-band consisted already of two violins, a 'cello, and a horn. None of us knew the notes: we were all self-taught, and played dances, marches, and natural tunes with our own improved harmonies and orchestration.

“I, in accordance with the compulsory laws of education in Prussia, went to the village school after the completion of my sixth year. The teaching at these schools was at that time rather primitive, consisting chiefly of ‘reading, writing, and arithmetic.’ The school-hours were daily from 8 till 12 and from 1 till 4, and began always with the singing of a couple of chorales from figure-notation—that is, a system by which the notes of the major scale are indicated by 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, a primitive sort of ‘movable “Do”’ of the tonic sol-fa notation.

“When about eleven years of age I had occasionally to take the place of my elder brother and assist my father in his work in the factory. He, dear good man, discovering one day that I lacked the necessary talent for a glass-blower, decided that I should be a musician. I was sent to the neighbouring village, Torgelow, where an uncle on

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

August Manns

my mother's side was schoolmaster, and where my studies of the violin, clarinet, flute, and horn began seriously under the guidance of the village musician, 'Tramp,' a middle-aged man, who had fought and been wounded in 1813 at the Battle of Leipzig. He had received a French bullet in his left hip, which the surgeons had failed to extract, and which in course of the years from 1813 to 1837 had sunk down from the hip towards the knee, wherefrom, after having caused the poor man a great deal of pain, it dropped during one of my violin lessons to the floor, smashed to the size of a thin two-shilling piece. Tramp was no ordinary village-musician. He taught me the violin and elementary matter of music from the at that time celebrated violin instruction-book by Rode, Kreutzer, and Baillot, a large book which I in my youthful ambition copied stealthily almost in its entirety. My progress as a pupil of Herr Tramp seems to have been very marked, for after about six months' studies under his guidance he asked my uncle to permit me to join his little village-band at the music he provided for weddings, christenings, and village-inn dances, as a second violin, saying that 'it would be good practice for

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Apprenticed to Music

my bow arm.' Poor old fellow! his chief object was probably to pocket my share of the proceeds, an arrangement with which my uncle did not interfere. Thus, occupied with my musical studies and attendance at the Upper School (Torgelow is a large village, and has two schools), I reached the end of my fourteenth year; and after having been confirmed at the village church, joined my parents in their *new home* in the East of Prussia, a village called Gelguhnen, near Allenstein.

“The proprietors of the glass-factory at Gelguhnen were merchants at Elbing, a thrifty little town in West Prussia, and it was through the influence of these gentlemen, the masters of my father, that I became apprenticed there at the institution of the Stadt-Musikus (Town Musical-director), Urban; and it was their liberality which enabled me to obtain special lessons on the violin from Herr Franz Gross, a pupil of Ferdinand David, of the Conservatoire of Leipzig. These institutions (the Stadt-Musikus) were at that time, and indeed up to the gradual establishment of conservatoires of music, the musical nurseries of Germany. Poor parents apprenticed their boys to the Stadt-Musikus for three or four years as they apprenticed them to

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06888-8 - August Manns and the Saturday Concerts: A Memoir and a Retrospect

Henry Saxe Wyndham

Excerpt

[More information](#)

August Manns

tailors, bootmakers, and other tradesmen. There were generally a dozen or so of young boys, who were taught the various orchestral instruments by the master and his elder pupils, and who had daily from two to three hours' practice in *ensemble*-playing. Easy symphonies by Haydn, Mozart, and some less-known old masters, were constantly practised, besides those orchestral works which were required for the concerts, balls, etc., for which this town-orchestra was utilized. This little band was also utilized for the theatrical performances of operas, burlesques, ballets, etc., etc. During my first season (1839-40), I had to play the second oboe part on the flute, and during the second season (no oboe-players being to be had) I was entrusted with the arduous task of playing the first oboe part on a C clarinet. At a subsequent season I was placed for principal viola, and lastly as one of the first violins at the operas which were produced in Elbing by the companies from Danzig and Königsberg. All in all I got on so hopefully that before the end of my apprenticeship I had secured a place as first violin in the string-band, and as first clarinet in the wind-band, and had even appeared at some smaller concerts as a solo-violinist and solo-flautist. I had