

## **Bantock Meets the Press: celebrating the new music before the First World War**

The rôle of the press in creating an image of  
a modern composer before recording and broadcasting

*Lewis Foreman*

The composer Granville Bantock, the son of a well-known West End surgeon and gynaecologist, was born in 1868, and was thus for the first thirty-three years of his life a Victorian. He was forty-six when the First World War broke out. Bantock's rise as a notable figure in the musical world, between the late 1890s and the outbreak of war in 1914, coincides with the high-point of the rise of newspapers and periodicals. This was at much the same time as Elgar came to prominence, and their promotion on the musical scene was similarly facilitated through the press, which then reported even minor musical events on a national basis. Elgar's cuttings books, preserved at Broadheath, exactly parallel (but are even more extensive than) Bantock's which are in the Worcester Record Office. They allow us to follow their first appearances as composers and musicians of stature, both working from a provincial base, and to see how they were first viewed by the musical press of the day.

Bantock grew up in an atmosphere of privilege and comfort, Elgar did not. Elgar developed very much as a jobbing musician, gradually building his contacts and the admiration of a widening circle of well-off admirers, whereas Bantock presumably had an allowance, though he was still faced with Elgar's problem of finding a regular musical income before the days of the Performing Right Society. Bantock did it by finding a post, Elgar by resolutely writing music. Bantock developed as a conductor, and although Elgar was later celebrated as a conductor it did not contribute significantly to his income early on. Although both were good enough pianists to accompany their own songs from time to time, they did not rely on instrumental distinction for their livelihood as their contemporary Joseph Holbrooke — a musician from a really poor background — did.

As with many other young composers from nineteenth century middle class families, to satisfy his father Bantock started preparing for the Indian Civil Service examinations, later changing to chemical engineering. It soon became clear that he was obsessed by music; at the age of twenty-one he became a student at London's Royal Academy of Music, and he was soon awarded the Macfarren Scholarship for composition. Elgar, of course, was never able to undertake a formal musical education.

Bantock clearly understood the importance of publication from the first. Immediately on leaving the Academy he launched a musical journal, *The New Quarterly Musical Review* which started in May 1893. Bantock set the same high intellectual standard as he would later demand as Principal of the Midland Institute School of Music, but the journal made a financial loss and after some dozen issues it closed.

Bantock had huge energy and a vivid imagination, and his student output was enormous and overwhelmingly ambitious. His energy and persistence achieved student performances of his orchestral works from the first, his overture *The Fire Worshipers* being played at an Academy concert in December 1890, and later being given by August Manns at Crystal Palace in November 1893. Bantock also achieved publication from an early date, one suspects with parental financial support, as not only piano pieces and songs but extended works such as his Symphonic Overture *Saul* (published in piano score in 1894), *The Fire Worshipers* (1892), the operas *Caedmar* (1892) and *The Pearl of Iran* (1894), the ballet suite *Rameses II* (1894) were published by the likes of Breitkopf & Härtel of Leipzig. A search of the Copac<sup>[1]</sup> database on the internet produces 1,136 hits for Granville Bantock; restricting the date to 1880-1900 reduces this to 48, though one or two of these turn out to be medical treatises by his father. A quick scan of the short list shows his earliest publications to be (arranged by publishers):

#### London Music Publishing Company

*Album for pianoforte* (1892)

*Thorvenda'a Dream*: a poem for recitation with music accompaniment.

Pianoforte arrangement (1892)

*The Fire-Worshippers* adapted from Moore's "Lalla Rookh",

a Dramatic Cantata for Chorus, Soli and Orchestra in six scenes. Vocal Score (1892)

*Caedmar*, A Romantic Opera in one act. Vocal Score (1892)

*Rameses II*, A drama of ancient Egypt. In five acts. [In verse.] (1892)

*Rameses II*: a drama of ancient Egypt: pianoforte arrangement (1892)

#### Edwin Ashdown

*Barcarolle* in F minor for the pianoforte (1894)

*Reverie* in E flat for the pianoforte (1894)

#### Breitkopf & Härtel

*Egyptisches Balletsuite, aus Rameses II*, Drama in fünf Akten. Klavierauszug (1894)

*Kehamas Fluch* = *The Curse of Kehama*: eine Symphonie in 24 Abtheilung /

Text von Robert Southey; Musik von Granville Bantock. 1894

*Der Perle von Iran (The Pearl of Iran)*... Romantische Oper in einem Aufzuge ... Vollständiger

Klavierauszug mit text. Deutsche Übersetzung von John Fenton (1894)

*Saul: Eine symphonische Overture* ... Klavierauszug (1894)

For all his well-off family, Bantock faced an uphill task on leaving the Academy, when, not being equipped to make a living as an instrumentalist or a virtuoso, he faced establishing a musical career. In his case the solution lay in directing musical comedies, culminating in the offer of a conducting appointment with one of the celebrated George Edwardes companies on a world tour, with Sydney Jones's *A Gaiety Girl* as the star show. Not only did this provide paid work for a trip Bantock himself later calculated to have lasted 431 days, and a wealth of practical music-making and experience, it also allowed him to see the world at an impressionable age. But back in England on December 5th 1895, work was still hard to find, and Bantock continued conducting light music and theatre shows, including taking over a provincial tour of Stanford's Irish comic opera *Shamus O'Brien* in Blackpool and then taking it round Ireland, doubling as acting manager and conductor when the drunken manager was dismissed.<sup>[2]</sup>

Despairing of ever making an impact with his music, Bantock promoted an orchestral concert at Queen's Hall on December 15th 1896. This included music by five of his contemporaries at the RAM, William Wallace, Arthur Hinton, Stanley Hawley, Reginald Steggall and Erskine Allon. Of these only Wallace and Bantock himself are remembered at all today. The concert included three of Bantock's recent works, and he prefaced the programme with a strongly worded polemic. While he was not rewarded with a good house, he stimulated a wide critical coverage which went a long way towards putting him on the musical map. It is difficult to decide whether Bantock knew exactly what he was doing as far as the press were concerned, or whether it was an emotional (and expensive) gesture. In his preface to the programme he underlined the conditions in the mid-1890s, which were not favourable as far as young composers were concerned, writing:

*"The chances of obtaining a hearing at the now numerous orchestral concerts in London are so remote, owing to the prevailing taste for foreign music, that the present concert is ventured upon as an experiment by several members of the younger generation ... The programme consists of works representative of each composer ... the predominant desire has been to advance the cause of British Music."*

There was wide coverage and while some of it was hostile, *The Times* pointing out that earlier British composers had had to wait for their place in the sun<sup>[3]</sup>, Bantock himself had a good press, being found 'fluent and ingenious to a remarkable degree'.<sup>[4]</sup>

We do not know the budget or losses on this venture, presumably borne by Bantock père, but the following year Bantock repeated the exercise, this time a chamber concert, at the Steinway Hall. The press had thus established Bantock's name in the public's mind as a notable rising musician, and it was doubtless on this that he was able to build when he started conducting concerts more systematically at New Brighton.

Bantock not only needed a regular source of income but he also needed a platform from which to build a national reputation. This first came when he accepted an appointment as Musical Director of the Tower Orchestra, New Brighton, then a fashionable resort across the Mersey from Liverpool. Here Bantock started with a modest resort band but quickly expanded both orchestra and repertoire, and, like Dan Godfrey at Bournemouth, Bantock soon made New Brighton a noted centre for the new music and British music in particular. In the 1890s Liverpool was Britain's most active musical city after London and Bantock thus had a ready audience with which to work.

*The Musical Standard* reported in its issue of July 23rd 1898:

*"The New Brighton Tower Gardens Orchestra, conducted by Mr Granville Bantock, is an institution which has been wanted near Liverpool for a long while. Mr Bantock is known as a clever composer, and he most decidedly is a clever conductor; he gets effects from his orchestra, all the requisite light and shade, without any undue gesticulations. His beat is quiet; he does not sway his body about, and yet he produces marvellous results. He seems to be steeped in Wagnerism, for almost every (classical) programme given on Fridays and Sundays contains two or three works of Wagner's. The Friday and Sunday Concerts are a speciality and on these two days he gives programmes which no musician could cavil at. On Friday evenings the programmes have been entirely devoted to Wagner's works. I am sorry to say that these Friday Evening Concerts, for the sake of which many musicians have journeyed to New Brighton, are given up by the management who seem to ignore art in preference to dancing. This is deplorable, for though these classical programmes are continued on the Friday afternoons [the same programme played on the Friday afternoons was repeated in the evenings], they do not benefit the real music lover who cannot get over in the afternoon and the management in taking this step have, in my opinion, made a very great mistake. Mr Granville Bantock, there is not the slightest doubt, will be acknowledged in time as one of our finest English conductors. If there were only space to quote several of the programmes, which there is not, it would show at once the catholicity of his selection which embraces every school. The only fault to be found when he gives a Wagner concert is that his band is too small, but the effects he brings out of his forty-three performers shows what he could do if he had only a hundred instrumentalists.*

*"On Sunday afternoons Mr Bantock is giving the whole of Beethoven's Symphonies Sunday after Sunday. Even the programmes of the ordinary concerts every day contain a much better class of music than one would expect and it is this high standard even of the dance music which has made a name in Liverpool for the Tower Garden Orchestra."*

According to Trevor Bray's reconstruction of the concert programmes<sup>[5]</sup>, at first they took place daily from August 2nd to September 10th and 17th 1897 (41 concerts); from May 30th to September 30th 1898 (19 concerts); December 15th 1898 (*Messiah*); April 3rd to October 29th 1899 (27 concerts); June 3rd to August 26th 1900 (13 concerts). At first Bantock conducted a military band (his first appearance was providing the music for a dance); it only developed into a symphony orchestra for the 1898 summer season, and the strings were much expanded for 1899. In many ways Bantock was self-effacing in promoting these concerts. Few of his own works appeared, and he was much given to programmes

devoted to one composer, who if they were living were invited to conduct themselves. Composers thus represented included Mackenzie, Wagner, Rubinstein (two each), Tchaikovsky (three), Sullivan, German, Stanford, Berlioz, Parry, Elgar, Corder, Wallace and Liszt. The press were favourable in their reception. A good example to give the flavour of Bantock's achievement is the review which appeared in *The Musical News* for August 12th 1899.

*"At the Tower last Sunday afternoon the programme was exclusively devoted to Tschaiakowsky's music, and natives of the place, together with dwellers from the mighty seaport opposite, and visitors from the uttermost parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire, whose name at this time of year is legion, made up a mighty concourse of people in the concert-room. Old inhabitants of these parts have not yet done wondering at the improvements which have come about since the Tower reared its sky-scaling ironwork, and in particular as regards the music, since Mr Granville Bantock assumed the direction, and it must be a great satisfaction to him to see such an evident appreciation of his work. That he is heart and soul in it goes without saying, but immediate and material success is not in all cases so speedy. Considering the class which has hitherto made New Brighton their happy hunting-ground of brief if tumultuous joys, Mr Bantock's courageous policy as regards the music shows pretty plainly that the power of really great music is wider and deeper than the conventional intellectual area. As it is, the usual Sunday audience at New Brighton is an earnest one, and in the matter of appreciation a conductor could not wish for better. Mr Bantock himself conducted last Sunday, and the orchestra of 60 which he has gathered round him gave a very satisfactory performance of the wonderful 'Pathetic' Symphony, which, when the name of Tschaiakowsky is mentioned, comes uppermost in the popular mind. Mr Bantock's reading of this comes nearly to the best ideal, full of force and feeling, and devoid of the accents of exaggeration, whether bodily or mentally. The orchestra responded most loyally, and in the added weight of tone which an accession of string power could give is one's only reservation. The tone of the brass is rich and sonorous and the solo woodwind without reproach. The 5-4 movement went with a swing, and after the exciting third section there was quite a furor. Less familiar than the Symphony to many would be the Fantasia, 'Francesca da Rimini', which opened the concert, and occupied nearly half-an-hour. It is programme-music of an advanced and, one had nearly written, theatrical type. Dramatic is the word of the clever annotator, Mr Ernest Newman, who describes the story as the ancient (and modern) one of (a) the wife, (b) the husband, (c) the lover, and (d) retribution. The Fantasia, one may think, is chiefly given to depicting the latter reasonable result, and does it with a great deal of noise. In this particular Tschaiakowsky describes passion, both loud and deep. There are some brief moments of tender beauty, but the keynote is 'retribution' and terror, and of this Tschaiakowsky seems to have written feelingly and with evident insistence. Further features of a fine and notable concert were three songs sung by Mr Tom Barlow, our best local tenor, and the Concerto for Pianoforte in B flat minor, No. 1, played by Miss Margie Bennett, whose excellent powers and training have previously received due notice here. That we need not go out of Liverpool for an artist of her calibre is a happy state of things. For the Concerto and the Overture 1812 one unfortunately could not wait. Next Sunday Mr Bantock is to direct a programme of 'British' music, including two musical recitations by Mr Charles Fry and Dr J C Bridge's 'Chester' Symphony, of which one pleasurably remembers the initial performance at a recent Chester Festival. Mr Bantock is to be thanked for an opportunity of re-hearing this really clever work. On the Sunday following (20th instant), Mr Edward German is to make his bow to a New Brighton audience and is assured of a welcome."*

Bantock's good press came not only from the many musical journals of

the day, but also from the local press and, indeed, from the nationals. A good example may be found in the *Birkenhead News* for August 18th 1899 reporting the future concert mentioned in the previous extract:

*"In continuation of his praiseworthy efforts to popularise British music, Mr Granville Bantock submitted on Sunday afternoon a programme devoted solely to works of native composers. The introduction to 'The Tempest' and two songs were Mr Sullivan's contribution to the concert. The vocalist was Miss Mary Beynon, whose singing of 'Orpheus with his Lute' was specially admired. She also sang 'Let me dream again'. Mr Charles Fry gave two musical recitations in conjunction with the orchestra, his fine elocution being well displayed in 'The Faithful Soul' (Proctor), Hawley; and 'The Building of San Sofia' (Gould), Higgs. A dainty intermezzo entitled 'Les Sylphes' by Mr C W Black, a well-known local musician, was conducted by the composer, and the other items — Mr H M'Cunn's orchestral ballad 'The Ship O' the Fiend' and Mr J C Bridge's symphony in F, 'Chester' — were played in the fine style which one has grown to expect from the Tower orchestra. The attendance was good, and the various items were all well received, special commendation being accorded Mr Black's intermezzo and to Hamish M'Cunn's wildly weird music in 'The Ship O' the Fiend'. Mr Granville Bantock conducted with his accustomed ability."*

Thanks to his appearances at the Tower, after less than three years Bantock had acquired a national reputation as a champion of modern music in general and British music in particular. Although he did not establish himself as a conductor in London, as Elgar later did with the newly formed London Symphony Orchestra, once Bantock became a national name he attracted much press coverage for his appearances on the Continent conducting British music including his own. The *London Letter* is one of many to report Bantock's programme of British music at Antwerp in February 1900.

#### ***An English Concert in Antwerp***

*"Mr Granville Bantock is at once an enthusiastic musician: and a daring man. Our continental brethren do not at any time profess to hold a high opinion of the talents of British composers, and just now one would think that the time is not very opportune to go and sing 'Rule Britannia' to the Belgians, who are pro-Boer to a man. Mr Bantock has not precisely done this, but he has set himself to overcome continental prejudice against our composers by giving, under the auspices of the Société Royale de Zoologie, a symphony concert at Antwerp. The entertainment, which consisted entirely of instrumental music by British composers, was conducted by Mr Bantock himself, and among the pieces played were several of his own composition. The programme commenced with a nautical overture, entitled Britannia, by A C Mackenzie. Other items on the programme were 'The Passing of Beatrice (symphonic poem), by William Wallace, serenade for stringed instruments by Edward Elgar, Au Royaume des Fées (suite de ballet), by F H Cowen, and Mr Bantock's pieces were selections from Scènes Russes, depicting musically the fair at Nijni-Novgorod, &c; and a scene from Kehama, an orchestral drama. The concert was a marked success, and the Belgian papers have been loud in their expressions of approval of the compositions and the execution. It would be an excellent thing if other of our younger generation of composers would follow Mr Bantock's example and afford an opportunity to continental audiences to form a judgment on British musical methods. At present we are know only in France and Belgium by our music hall ditties, with the result that 'Ta-ra-ra : boom-de-ay', 'Wot O She Bumps' and 'A Little Bit off the Top'; and such like melodies are considered by the man in the street*

*in Paris and Brussels to represent the height to which we can soar in the way of classical music."*  
GP. *London Letter*, March 2 1900

*The Liverpool Mercury* (February 28th 1900) reported that Bantock "was warmly applauded, and recalled by the large audience that gathered in the superb hall of the Society." In fact this had been a response to Bantock's initiative in devoting one of the New Brighton concerts to modern Belgian music and inviting Emile Mathieu from the Ghent Conservatoire to conduct it. Bantock was thus able to programme music by Edgar Tinel, Peter Benoit and Jan Bloch, as well as Mathieu himself.<sup>[6]</sup>

Once Bantock commenced his duties at the Birmingham and Midland Institute School of Music later in 1900, he was launched on a career which would be centred in Birmingham for over thirty years. Also having established a base from which to operate he began to undertake a wide range of other activities, including the conductorship of the Amateur Orchestral Society, the Worcester Philharmonic and the Wolverhampton Festival Choral Society with whom he gave a notable early performance of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*.<sup>[7]</sup> All these activities generated much newsprint: Bantock was now a national name. He was also entering his maturity as a composer and his output at this time was enormous.

Bantock became known for his liking for the large scale and between 1900 and the completion of his epic setting of Fitzgerald's version of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* in 1909 he produced such wide-spanning scores as *Sappho* — setting nine verses with an extended orchestral prelude. The *Ghazels of Hafiz* are less well known because they are not yet recorded<sup>[8]</sup> and *Ferishtah's Fancies*, words by Browning, is now hardly known at all because the orchestral score was lost in Leipzig during the Second World War. The reaction of the press to these is interesting, particularly in the case of *Sappho*. Critical reactions to the superb modern recording made by Hyperion in 1997 were remarkable, the record company quoting from them in their publicity: 'Boy, do I like this disc. What a delight Bantock's music is' (*American Record Guide*) and 'Luscious washes of sensual colour ... ravishing harmonies' (*Strad*). The response of the press in the early 1900s was extensive and varied, but more guarded, Bantock being gradually acknowledged as a leading figure. Reaction to the early performances of the Prelude to *Sappho* tended to harp on its presumed Wagnerian character.

*"The Prelude to Mr Granville Bantock's Sappho, which proved to be a composition of sterling merit; it is incongruously conceived, but undoubtedly owes something to the influence of Wagner."*<sup>[9]</sup>

*The Standard* probably represents the general view in 1906:

*"Mr Granville Bantock's prelude Sappho, which was performed for the first time at the Promenade concert last night, fully justified the expectations which this gifted English composer's known works have already aroused. The work in question forms*

the opening section to a series of settings to the poems of Sappho, and, combining all the leading themes used in them, may be said to take the form of a symphonic poem. Such a title might suggest that Mr Bantock has been led astray by the influence of Strauss, which nowadays dominates the work of our younger school, but, being a mature musician and under no influence save that of conviction, he has given us a work in which harmonic strength and thematic beauty are combined with a masterly orchestral and general construction that is as simple as it is effective. The frequent use of the cor Anglais gives the various themes that plaintive character which marks the works of Wagner, whose methods of orchestration are largely employed, not in the sense of imitation, but from a recognition of the orchestral spirit of the age ... a pioneer of the modern school of British orchestral composers." <sup>[10]</sup>

When we consider the *Sappho Songs* most of the contemporary critics, while hailing the works as notable, were unable to see the originality of the achievement. Some were still worried about their presumed Wagnerian antecedents:

*"Throughout the work a very high level of excellence is maintained. But we are bound to feel to a very great extent the influence of Wagner. This is exceptionally noticeable in the frequent — almost too frequent — use of groups of triplet chords in the form of the waldweben in the first act of the Walkure. Some of the numbers are particularly beautiful, such as the 'Evening Song', which is a perfect gem of melody and pure music. The interlude too, in the next number is beautiful."* <sup>[11]</sup>



*Mr. Granville Bantock, the British "Wagner."*

Cartoon from Sydney Harley's 1906 article in *Ideas*  
(see page 38 & note 21)

The songs were not sung as a cycle, and they tended to appear in ones and twos.

*"The 'Evening Song' and the 'Hymn to Aphrodite' are settings of well-known fragments of Sappho, the sentiment of the poetry in each instance being reproduced with remarkable skill."* <sup>[12]</sup>



The 'Hymn to Aphrodite' was generally admired, though it is hard now to understand what one critic had against the delightful 'Evening Song':

*"An extremely fine 'Hymn to Aphrodite' and ... a curiously harmonised 'Evening Song'."* <sup>[13]</sup>

Already Bantock's reputation as someone fascinated by the east tended to influence the critical response, not necessarily to the disadvantage of the review:

*"But while Mr Bantock has gone to Greece for his subject matter, one cannot help feeling that he has gone farther east for his colours. He has, indeed, given us Sappho arrayed in richly-coloured robes of Persia. The opening chords of the Vorspiel translate us into the atmosphere of heavy, languorous scents, and drowsy senses, from which we are awakened from time to time through the course of the cycle by vivid flashes of passionate colour. Frequent glissando passages bespeak the voluptuous atmosphere of Persia rather than that of Greece which would, surely, be conveyed by themes more architecturally constructed."*

*"The 'Hymn to Aphrodite' is a powerful piece of writing, while about that and all the nine fragments there is a fine Pagan touch, which is essentially of Greece. In 'I loved thee once, At this, long ago', the deeper wells of emotion are drawn upon with a sure touch and fidelity to life that is not of Greece nor of Persia merely, but universal in its application. The elusive spirit of dreamland is around and about us in 'In a dream I spake', while the invocation to the 'Muse of the Golden Throne' forms a fitting conclusion to a noble work."* <sup>[14]</sup>

Very often the less technical the journal the more their critics felt the need to demonstrate their musical knowledge with a discussion of texture or orchestration:

*"A very dramatic song 'Hymn to Aphrodite', by Bantock, made great demands upon the singer's skill, but they were met with complete success. The composition is not scored in the best possible manner for the voice; neither is the accompaniment the most happily conceived when the voice is in its weakest range ... in this song Mr Bantock throws upon the singer the almost impossible task of singing through the accompaniment in places and with a less powerful voice than Miss Miller possesses her share would be entirely inaudible — if the accompaniment be played with the passion it is evidently designed to convey."* <sup>[15]</sup>

*"Bantock's 'Hymn to Aphrodite' sung ... pleasingly, but a little overweighted by the orchestra in the more florid passages."* <sup>[16]</sup>

Bantock cannot have been dissatisfied with this reception; it was one appropriate to a mature artist who had arrived. Bantock had met the press and been acknowledged.

*"Granville Bantock's Sappho (Breitkopf & Härtel) strikes one as the work of a mature artist. The music rises to a high level and is always alive and thoroughly convincing ... The same depth and intensity of feeling is here manifest as in all Granville Bantock's productions. Such music calls for something more on the part of the interpreter than merely musical ability — fire, enthusiasm, dramatic insight are necessary."* <sup>[17]</sup>

*"... the hymn to Aphrodite from his Sappho. Broadly phrased and designed to be elaborately impressive, this Hymn proved fairly effective..."* <sup>[18]</sup>

*"...It is well worked up, with, of course, a suggestion of the still prevailing influence*

in its orchestration and effects; but on the whole it rather suggests the confusion of 'wild and wandering cries', though possibly Sappho, under stress of circumstances, would be likely thus to express herself."<sup>[19]</sup>

"Mr Granville Bantock's dignified and striking 'Hymn to Aphrodite'."<sup>[20]</sup>

As with Elgar at this time, a variety of articles appeared ostensibly describing Bantock the man, and these tended to reinforce his status as a liberal intellectual, and by implication a leading modern composer. It also tended to emphasize his idiosyncrasy with his delight in oriental and exotic objects. By making Bantock approachable but special in this way the music also becomes more acceptable. Such press features also tended to produce (and later repeat) memorable anecdotes about Bantock:

"Mr Granville Bantock, Principal of the Birmingham School of Music, is an artistic revolutionary of the revolutionaries, a musical anarchist of the anarchists.

"Alone he marches in front of the phalanx of emancipated musicians, waving the red flag of absolute liberty, of perfect freedom from canonical restraint. His music grips hard.

"The Agnostic Omar Khayyám of the recent Birmingham Triennial Festival is generally accepted as the beginning of a new regime. That the thing should be admitted to any festival in conservative England was, and is, almost inexplicable.

"That 'Omar' should have been the conspicuous success of a festival held in Non-conformist Birmingham is a solid, undeniable fact which causes the critical intellect to reel.

"This Musical anarchist, of a supremely unmusical family, learned his notes at twenty, and, immediately turning his back on the Indian Civil Service to which he had been destined by the family conclave, he became a student at the Royal Academy, and, strange to relate, at once carried off the Macfarren Scholarship.

"And his violent, unconventional bent, his leaning to strong situations, was evident from the first. He composed an orchestral tone-poem, entitled Satan in Hell.

"One day, the genial Principal, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, hurried into the room where the Academy orchestra was engaged in rehearsing the piece under the baton of the composer. Sir Alexander, wishing to learn the exact progress of the afternoon's work, which comprised several pieces, addressing the youthful conductor, asked:-

'Well, Bantock, where are we now?'

'In Hell, sir', was the respectful reply.

"Then turning again to the orchestra, Bantock went on:-

'Kindly go back to bar so-and-so. And please remember that the mere playing of the notes is not sufficient. We want spirit. We want -a -a - local colour; yes - local colour; and -a -a - warmth, much more -a -a - warmth. In order to obtain the desired effect, we must endeavour to imagine - how we would play - if we were -a - actually -a - there.' "

Having set-up Bantock as an original the press then produced a personal portrait which once established by one commentator was embroidered by others:

### **An Absent-Minded Genius**

"And yet, GB - as his friends delight to call him, is far from being the ferocious arch-Bohemian the uninitiated might suppose. On the contrary, he is the very pattern of geniality when in harmonious environment. True, he is a strong man, a very strong man, and strong men make enemies. But like Sir Anthony Absolute, 'let him have his own way and a child can lead him'.

"By the winter fire of his own particular den, half-buried in a Sybaritic easy chair, the clearly-loved, well-worn pipe in his mouth, the treasured shrine and image of

*Buddha at his left elbow, his Chinese curios all around; quaint carvings, queer Mongol faces, Malay kreeses, all sorts of Far East bric-a-brac, GB is seen in perfection. When you drop in, he is reading the Rubāiyāt in the original, or deep in a brain-twisting mathematical book, full of maddening hieroglyphics perpetrated by some hyper-advanced student."* [21]

Bantock's amazing fluency allowed him to produce a succession of substantial scores between 1900 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, almost all of which were immediately played, published and widely reported in the press. Clearly knowing the importance of publication Bantock allied himself with what he regarded as the leading publisher of the day, Breitkopf & Härtel of Leipzig, and he had a close personal friendship with Otto Kling, Breitkopf's London manager. Many other composers of the day agreed with him — no British publisher could give the world-wide representation that Breitkopf could provide. What Bantock and his contemporaries had no hint of was the disaster that the outbreak of war would mean for their music with a German house, nor what a final disaster the bombing of Leipzig in the Second World War would represent for any works surviving there in manuscript. As we have seen, at least one Bantock score was destroyed.

For Bantock before the war, Breitkopf ensured the widest distribution. Probably the best example of a work to benefit from this was his orchestra score *The Pierrot of the Minute: a comedy overture to a dramatic phantasy of Ernest Dowson*. It was written for the Worcester Three Choirs of 1908, the short score being dated August 2nd 1908, and the full score only a week later. The first performance was on September 9th. It was soon published by Breitkopf & Härtel, Bantock dedicating it to Otto Kling. Breitkopf were a very efficient publisher and by the end of 1909 eleven foreign performances had been noted. It was said to be the most popular new British work at the time after Elgar's First Symphony.

For Bantock another key in promoting him and his music was the close friendship and advice about his music of a critic whose opinion he respected, and whose early career he encouraged. This was Ernest Newman whom he met in New Brighton. Bantock claimed he had persuaded Newman to give up his bank job for music, and Newman's musical advice informed Bantock's emergence in the decade that followed. It was Newman, also a champion of Elgar of course, who originated the concept that in 1907 Bantock and Elgar might well be considered as equals. After the first part of Bantock's enormous choral setting of Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyám* was heard at Birmingham in 1906 Newman wrote:

*"There is little in the music of our day to equal it for variety and intensity and sustained splendour of imagination. One is almost crushed under the magnificence of some of the choral passages, with their bold sweep and their enormous weight of expression."* [22]

Ultimately the cordial relationship between Bantock and Newman soured, but it is only very recently that the Bantock/Newman correspondence has come into the public domain allowing us to see quite how Bantock responded to the reception of his music, and particularly to Newman's opinion. The correspondence was sold at Sotheby's in 2001 and bought by Birmingham University. I hope to explore this archive in detail in a second article.

Press opinion gradually changed, but between the wars he was still treated as a significant figure. After the Second World War the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme, and the view that his music constituted an Edwardian aberration came to be widely held. It has only been with the appearance of the Hyperion series of CD recordings, conducted by Vernon Handley, more recently reinforced by the Dutton label's series of Bantock's instrumental music and songs, that a new generation of critics has been able to assess the music in fine performances. As a consequence opinion has swung again, and the press has treated Bantock's music as an *oeuvre* to be admired and explored, each new recording being greeted with expressions of admiration and discussion no longer relating back to the commentary of an earlier generation.

## Notes

- [1] Copac.ac.uk allows one simultaneously to search the catalogues of the leading UK university research and deposit libraries.
- [2] See Jeremy Dibble: *Charles Villiers Stanford Man and Musician* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002] pp.274-275, for an account of this episode.
- [3] *The Times*, December 17 1896.  
All cuttings are from the Bantock Collection at Worcester Record Office.
- [4] *Saturday Review*, December 19 1896
- [5] Trevor Bray: *Granville Bantock — his life and music* [doctoral thesis, St John's College, Cambridge, 3 volumes, February 1972]. The list of concerts is in Volume 2.
- [6] *Liverpool Mercury*, August 26 1899
- [7] On March 23 1903, with William Green, a well-known tenor of the day, as Gerontius.
- [8] An off-air recording of the orchestral version survives from 1937. The first two songs are sung by Peter Savidge (baritone) with David Owen Norris (piano) on Dutton Epoch CDLX 7121.
- [9] *The Sunday Referee*, September 29 1906
- [10] "A Symphonic Poem" - "Sappho" at Queen's Hall Concert: *The Standard*, September 26 1906
- [11] *Bradford Review*, June 1906
- [12] *The Daily Graphic*, June 8 1906
- [13] *The Musical Standard*, June 16 1906
- [14] *The Musical World*, June 1906
- [15] *The Musical World*, June 1906
- [16] *The Gentlewoman*, September 15 1906
- [17] *Musical Opinion*, July 1906
- [18] *The Stage*, September 12 1906

- [19] *The Court Journal*, September 15 1906
- [20] *Index*, September 12 1906
- [21] Sydney Harley: 'The Coming Musician: character study of Mr Granville Bantock', *Ideas*, December 8 1906
- [22] *The Birmingham Post*, quote by Myrrha Bantock in her book, *Granville Bantock: a personal portrait* [Dent, 1972], p.88



Cartoon of Bantock to illustrate the series, 'Familiar Figures',  
from *The Birmingham Evening Dispatch*, October 19 1904

The Sixth volume of Hyperion's Bantock edition is due to be issued in October 2003 and will include the *Overture to a Greek Tragedy*; the aria 'The Wilderness and the Solitary Place' (from *Christ in the Wilderness*); the comedy overture *Pierrot of the Minute*; and three extracts from *The Song of Songs* (Day 2, 'The Shulamite and her Shepherd love'; Day 3, 'The King and the Shulamite'; Day 5, 'An apple-tree among the vineyards: the Shulamite and her Shepherd reunited').