

"MUSICIANS IN ORDINARY"

By Liveryman Bram Gay

WITHIN THE WALLS OF WINDSOR CASTLE are corners unexplored even by those who have served the Crown there for a lifetime. Five years ago, and fortunately before the horrendous fire at the Castle in 1992, a small-store room was found, on inspection, to contain many dusty parcels of music bound in tape, the covers of each work proudly labelled "Her Majesty Queen Victoria the First." Treasure trove.

This was the library of Queen Victoria's Private Band. It had apparently been lying there for some ninety years, unknown to the Royal Library.

The store-room was situated above where used to be the celebrated 19th century Henry Willis organ which occupied the space between St. George's Hall and the Castle's Private Chapel. Had these papers not been found and removed they would certainly have been destroyed in the fire.

For a generous overview of the history of the Queen's Band I'm indebted to the Royal Archive at Windsor. My afternoons spent with the dedicated people who work there left me with an appetite for much more of this fascinating background and the hope that some day a better organised mind than mine will find time to piece together the mosaic of musical history the Archive contains. Queen Victoria's Private Band, with its influence on English orchestral music throughout the reign, deserves a book of its own.

In furnishing the Court with her own orchestra the Queen followed five hundred years of tradition. Edward III, of Crecy and the longbow, employed a band, and a State Band of some sort survived to the Civil War. Henry VIII employed fourteen trumpets, ten sackbuts, four drummers, two tambourines and a bagpipe with three lutes, three rebecs, a harp and two viols. Just the sort of band one would expect of him. Until 1903 the "Master of the Music" was constantly in attendance, composing, playing and directing the music at court. The first known Master of the Music, Nicholas Lanier, was appointed by King Charles I. Lanier followed the monarchy into exile and was duly rewarded at the Restoration when business perked up. The new King had admired the court music of Louis XIV, and determined to have a band of like quality. His band, popularly known as *the four and twenty fiddlers*, was surprisingly like a modern orchestra with violins, wind instruments, lutes, virginals, and trumpeters. Its annual budget ran to two thousand and eighty-eight pounds. The King's Sackbuts and Cornetts, who played those miraculous pieces by Matthew Locke in procession at the Restoration, must have been somewhere about, too.

The King introduced strings to the Chapel Royal, anthems being composed with symphonies and ritornelli between vocal pieces. James II went even further, adding wind to these services. William Boyce was appointed Master of the Music by George II in 1757. After him came John Stanley. These were Royal appointments indeed. Leaner times followed, but at Queen Victoria's accession the violinist Franz Cramer, of the famous Mannheim family, was Master of the Music, his band numbering thirty-five.

Its annual budget fell just short of two thousand pounds. The date of foundation of The *Private Band*, maintained by the Privy Purse, is uncertain, but it was already in existence at Victoria's accession, King George III and Queen Charlotte having had a band each, and George IV requiring the attendance of his band every day. The new Queen's Private Band numbered twenty-four performers besides the Master of the Music and the Leader, who were members of both State and Private Bands. The Private Band was said to be "in constant attendance", its salaries ranging from one hundred to one hundred and fifty pounds per annum, with extra payments for visits to Balmoral or Osborne.

The Queen's Journal shows that for Victoria and her Prince, musicians both, the band was a constant interest. An entry for February 8th 1841 tells of a visit first to the nursery to see her child of three months and then to the band, rehearsing for the Wedding Anniversary Concert of February 10th. "The band" she writes "played so beautifully."

Prince Albert, ever a practical man of business, wished to improve and expand the band in the most economical way. For advice he turned in 1844 to John Anderson, violinist and leader of the Band, a dedicated servant of the Crown for sixty years until his retirement through ill-health in 1870. Already at Victoria's accession he was the pivot around which Court music turned; one of those essential people on whom musical

organisations depend. Anderson's report encompassed both State and Private Bands. The State Band, it transpired, included twelve who were "inefficient through age" and four who were "not professional." Its members, appointed by the Lord Chamberlain, were not expected to play. The Band had become a sinecure; and since age, the bringer of inefficiency, could also be relied upon to bring vacancies, Anderson's solution was the appointment of members of the Private Band to the State Band whenever these occurred. The Privy Purse would thus be relieved of a salary and the Private Band would steadily grow. This ingenious scheme met with the approval of the Royal pair, and the report was accepted in 1848 when Anderson was appointed Master of the Band.

His masterly economics did not escape public notice, and some debate arose in the press. "Why" asked the *Musical World* in 1849 "is the whole Private Band of HM The Queen in a state of tremor and excitement?" It goes on to write of "creeping amalgamation," pointing out that "the principal violinist Sainton in consideration of his one hundred guineas annually must now play gratuitously in the Private Band, costing Her Majesty nothing." Anderson's dismissal of the principal cellist, one Edward Chipp, on the ground that the said Chipp had written anonymously to the press, fanned the flames. Chipp wrote to the paper asking for public exoneration, and this was willingly given but to no avail; poor Chipp was duly dismissed for having written the second letter. An interesting manager, Anderson.

In 1856 came a change of uniform. Nothing is known of the old except that it was "frogged." The new was very modern; a black tail-coat with the Royal button, trimmed with blue at the collar, with white tie. Knee-breeches with black silk stockings, shoes with a silver buckle, white gloves and black top hat completed the ensemble. The Queen's admiration is noted in her Journal.

Indicative of the musical trend of the time was the decision, taken in 1884, to adopt a lower pitch. The Royal Italian Opera had already adopted the French "diapason normal" and the artists who travelled thence to Buckingham Palace and Windsor found the old high pitch a severe trial. Anderson was dispatched to Europe in search of new instruments, and the band was re-equipped in 1885. The catalogue of his purchases makes interesting reading. Though his brief was presumably limited to the provision of new wind, this violinist could not resist an Amati viola, bought at today's cost of a few boxes of resin, nor celli by Gagliano and Forster, nor a Guarnerius violin. The woodwind were bought, all thirteen, for two hundred and thirty-two pounds. Remembering that a respectable brass instrument could then be purchased for fifty shillings it is evident that the Privy Purse took the Band very seriously. Some musicians, predictably, found the new pitch "dull", but it was here to stay.

What, then, did the Queen's Band play, and how well did they play it? The answers lie in its library, in the programmes with which the Archive abounds, and in the Court Circulars which told of family and State events celebrated at Buckingham Palace and Windsor in which the Band played a prominent part.

To the modern eye the scarcity of Mozart in these performances is surprising until we remember that even in the early days of the new century Bernard Shaw found it necessary to argue the merits of *Don Giovanni* against those of *Don Pasquale*, preferred by the London public. Manuscript copies of some of the late symphonies exist in the library. They are numbered one, two, three... and why in ms? Careful reading will one day show whether or not these pieces and others were specially arranged and rescored for an orchestra with sometimes limited resources, but I suspect that is the case.

There is Haydn and quite a lot of Beethoven, including music rarely played today, like the *King Stephen* and *Consecration of the House* overtures. Mendelssohn and Spohr are there in abundance. Extracts from Italian operatic repertoire appear in programmes but not in the library. Perhaps these came, with the artists, from Poor Street.

There was Weber, predictably, and among the programmes we find his *Jubilee* overture. This is not the best of Weber, but it ends with perhaps the finest orchestration of our National Anthem ever penned, and certainly the most exciting. One can imagine the consternation of the audience, and especially those who did not know the work, when the tune suddenly appeared. What hectic upstandings there would be! Perhaps after all Queen Victoria was sometimes amused!

"TO BE CONTINUED"