



**Anthology of
Australian Music
on Disc**

CSM:38

**THE BUSH
FRITZ HART**

CD 2351

The Bush, Op. 59 (1923)
Symphonic Suite in five movements
Fritz Bennicke Hart

The Bush is an evocation of the Australian landscape as seen through the eyes of an English-schooled musician, one who nevertheless possessed an uncanny understanding of the majestic tranquillity and vastness of the Australian outback. Some of the quieter movements convey the feeling of a muted veil being draped over the musical imagery, in a manner similar to the landscapes painted by Hart's friend, Arthur Streeton.

The work begins and ends softly, but between the first and the last bars lies a wealth of contrasts. At times poetic and softly elegiac, the music veers suddenly into violent tempests. The first movement is tranquil, and invokes a transparency of sound interspersed with approaching sounds of thunder. Ranging freely from 6/8 to 3/4, the second

movement draws upon leitmotifs that portray the florid, festive sounds of bird calls, together with what seems at first hearing to be the awkward perambulations of wombats. The movement concludes with a violent *giocoso* which brings together the principal thematic material. The sense of tranquillity returns in the third movement, which in its use of a rolling 4/4 – 3/4 time signature conveys a sense of timelessness in the manner of Vaughan-Williams. A Holstian majesty reminiscent of *The Planets* dominates the fourth movement, which sees agitation jostle with a rich, quasi-Elgarian melodic grandeur. A virtuosic passage for orchestra leads to a brilliant 'false finale', in which the Elgarian theme rings forth in an apparent affirmation of the now clichéd Englishman's view of the Australian outback. Perhaps fittingly, the final movement evokes the haunting quality of the bush by night. Debussy-esque writing for strings and woodwinds creates an eerie

stillness, until finally the work comes full circle through a reiteration of the opening thematic material.

Fra' Professor Richard Divall, OBE

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Conductor: Richard Divall

Recorded 17 March 1993
Melbourne Town Hall

***Idyll for Violin and Orchestra,*
Op. 169 (1949)
Fritz Benniscke Hart**

Idyll for Violin and Orchestra, one of Fritz Hart's last completed works, was composed in Honolulu in 1949, the year of his death. Hart's association with Hawaii, then a US territory, had begun in December 1931 when, through the agency of a former pupil of the Melba Conservatorium, he was invited to conduct the winter orchestral season of the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra (HSO). Five years later, Hart accepted the directorship of the HSO and left

Australia for good. An appointment to the foundation Chair of Music at the University of Hawaii followed soon thereafter.

For a while Hart found himself in a musical culture that, while largely amateur, was altogether more encouraging than that which he had left behind in Melbourne. There, his recent career had been curtailed by the ravages of the Great Depression, the impact of the 'talkies', and his rivalry with the conductor Bernard Heinze. Hart flourished midst the cosmopolitan environment of Honolulu, at least until the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, which brought all normal cultural activity to a close. At the war's end Hart found himself now out of touch with the mood on the islands, the orchestra in particular clamouring for more overt expressions of American nationalism in its programming. Reluctantly, he resigned from the HSO in April 1949.

Hart died of a heart attack some two months later.

Idyll and the earlier *Symphonic Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra* Op. 131 (1939), were composed for the concertmaster of the HSO, Konrad Liebrecht. Liebrecht, who was by all accounts a superlative musician, had fled Nazi Germany and subsequently became a close friend of Hart. It is not just the expansive use of rondo form and its soft, meditative conclusion that lends *Idyll* in particular its reflective tone. The modally-inflected harmonic palate and elegiac melodic style recalls both the music of Hart's contemporaries in England, especially Holst and Vaughan Williams, and the patterns of English folk-song more generally. Hart thought folksong could lend his music a 'directness of utterance, a certain large simplicity of structure, a deliberate avoidance of hysteria, and an emotional restraint'. But it is also difficult to resist the idea that his use of folksong here also reflects a mood

of nostalgic farewell, a closing hymn to both the land of his birth, and to the compositional style he had championed across the globe.

Dr Peter Tregear

Ronald Woodcock, violin
Adelaide Symphony Orchestra
Conductor: Graham Abbott

Recorded 22 February 1994
ABC Studio 520 (Collinswood)
South Australia

BIOGRAPHY

Fritz Hart (1874–1949), the son of a choirmaster, was born in London. Hart's musical career began in 1884, as a chorister at Westminster Abbey, under Frank Bridge. Hart studied at Eton and in 1893 entered the Royal College of Music, where he studied under George Groves, Charles Villiers Stanford and Hubert Parry. Hart counted among his lifetime friends the composers Granville Bantock, Ralph Vaughan-Williams, and Gustav Holst

— the latter with whom he maintained correspondence until Holst's death in 1934. *The Bush* confirms that Hart shared Holst's gift for colourful orchestration.

After a brief apprenticeship in conducting theatre orchestras for the D'Oyly- Carte Company, in 1909 Hart was brought by J.C. Williamson to Melbourne as a staff conductor for the latter's music and theatre enterprises. A bare three months after his arrival Hart was composing music to Australian texts, the first of a long series of settings of Australian literature.

Together with the composer Alfred Hill, Hart was instrumental in establishing the Australian Opera League. A friend of G.W. Marshall-Hall, Hart succeeded that fiery composer as Director of the Melba Conservatorium of Music in Melbourne in 1916. Hart held the post until 1937, when he left to become the inaugural Professor of

Music at the University of Hawaii. There he made a considerable contribution to the musical life of the islands, most notably during World War II, when he gave many concerts. Hart died in Honolulu in 1949. Marvel Hart, the composer's long-lived second wife, allowed Hart's papers and manuscripts to be returned to Australia, where they are held at the Latrobe Library of the State Library of Victoria.

During his time in Australia Fritz Hart made an extraordinary contribution to music performance and to the instruction of a whole school of young Australian composers, including Margaret Sutherland and Peggy Glanville-Hicks. Hart also gave the first of the Sidney Myer Concerts in Melbourne in 1929, not to mention numerous concerts with Australia's leading orchestras.

As a composer Hart ranks as one of the finest working in Australia during the period following the death of

Marshall-Hall in 1915 to the emergence of Arthur Benjamin and Hubert Clifford. Hart's compositional output numbers well over 500 works, ranging from large-scale symphonic works and concertos to a prodigious number of songs. While his songs enjoy a reputation of being among the finest written in the so-called 'English world' before 1940, recognition of Hart's orchestral music is perhaps long overdue.

Fra' Professor Richard Divall, OBE

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