

This is a longer version of an article published in the program books for the Sydney Symphony's performances of Isaac Nathan's *Don John of Austria* in October 2007.

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## Isaac Nathan, Byron and *Don John of Austria*

*Director Rodney Fisher writes about the fascinating life of Isaac Nathan...*

In 1840, Queen Victoria married Prince Albert, 283,000 Irish and English emigrants set out for the United States, and the well-known British composer, Isaac Nathan, his wife and eight children, boarded the full-rigged sailing ship, *York*, in early October, bound for Australia. They arrived in Sydney, six months later, on 7 April 1841, the year after the transportation of convicts officially ended in New South Wales and the year when John Fairfax and Charles Kemp bought the *Sydney Herald*. At the age of fifty, Nathan had published enough musical compositions to fill twelve pages in the British Library Catalogue. He had composed songs for comic operas and dramas, farces, pantomimes and masques; and his successful collaborations with the prolific dramatist, James Kenney – at the Haymarket and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane – included *Sweethearts and Wives*, *The Alcaid, or The Secrets of Office* and *The Illustrious Stranger, or Married and Buried*. He had written songs for celebrated artists such as John Braham and Madame Vestris, and his *Hebrew Melodies*, written in collaboration with Lord Byron, had brought him considerable fame. Among his popular ballads were 'Why are you wand'ring here, I pray?', 'I'll not be a maiden forsaken', 'Beauty's Bower', 'Come Kiss Me, Said Colin', 'Fair Haidée' and 'Lady-Bird.'

The popularity of ballads, and ballad operas, had become so intense in nineteenth century Britain as to constitute a sort of national art, just as popular song and the Broadway musical helped define the United States in the twentieth century. Harold Simpson observed that, in Victorian England, ballads were being "written and sung to an even greater extent than ever. Nor does there seem to have been any falling off in either their simplicity or their tunefulness, which ... however much they may be scoffed at by superior critics, are essential qualities in any song that is to reach the hearts of the people." (SIMPSON, Harold: *A CENTURY OF BALLADS 1801-1901 Mills & Boon 1912*) The ballad opera was basically a string of melodies, sometimes by different composers, inserted into a story with which these songs often had only a hazy connection. John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* – interpolated with popular English and Scottish tunes – was originally intended as a burlesque of Italian opera; but its immediate and overwhelming success made it a model for English entrepreneurs and set an example for a host of imitators that persisted, over the next 150 years, all the way to Gilbert and Sullivan.

Both drama and music frequently suffered because, as Desmond Shawe-Taylor points out, "they were continually getting in one another's way; audiences, far from being indifferent to music, were so crazy about it that (to the great annoyance of dramatists) they insisted on the constant interpolation of songs into plays; on the other hand...the public (or perhaps one should say the composers) would never take the decisive step towards full-blooded opera..." (SHAWE-TAYLOR, Desmond: *COVENT GARDEN Max Parrish 1948*); that is, opera in the fully-composed Italian style with arias and recitatives and music from beginning to end. Close on sixty of these dialogue operas were written by Sir Henry Bishop, the first English musician to be created a knight of the realm. By far his most successful was *Clari, or, The Maid of Milan*, written in 1823, which had as its central theme, Bishop's most famous song, the hugely popular *Home, Sweet Home*; "over 300,000 copies were said to have

been sold in the first year alone.” (SIMPSON, Harold: *A CENTURY OF BALLADS 1801-1901 Mills & Boon 1912*) Its haunting melody acts as a kind of *leitmotiv*, recurring regularly throughout the opera, and *Clari* is usually credited with being the first opera performed in Australia, at Barnett Levey’s New Theatre Royal in Sydney, on October 31, 1834.

The two operas that became indisputably the favourites of nineteenth-century Australia were both the work of Irish composers. When Michael Balfe’s *The Bohemian Girl* was first performed in Sydney, in 1846, it lasted a remarkable sixteen nights at the Royal Victoria in Pitt Street. A revival, in September, brought an Australian record run of twenty-six nights. “*It leaped into popularity at a bound*,” said George P. Upton in 1906. “*Its pretty melodies are still as fresh as when they were first sung.*” (UPTON, George P.: *THE STANDARD OPERAS – Their Plots, Their Music and Their Composers Hutchinson 1906*) *Maritana* by Vincent Wallace, first staged in 1849, proved – in the long run – to be even more popular. Both operas were subsequently presented by touring companies, in countless performances, throughout the land and, by 1908, *Maritana* had been seen in Sydney and Melbourne 236 times and *The Bohemian Girl* 224 times.

Isaac Nathan was dreaming of a similar success when he collaborated with Jacob Montefiore on *Don John of Austria* in 1847. But Casimir Delavigne’s *Don Juan d’Autriche* is a French Romantic drama from the school of Hugo and Dumas, perhaps more attuned to Verdi than to Nathan, whose past successes suggest he was at his best with texts of lighter weight: like the popular French play by Dumanois and Dennery, *Don Caesar de Bazan*, which Edward Fitzball had adapted for *Maritana*, Humphrey Hall, the early Australian theatre historian, recorded that, when Nathan’s *Don John* was first performed in Sydney, “*a liberal measure of praise was bestowed upon the music; but the critics evinced a disposition to censure the translator’s share of the work, the lyrics of which were entirely his own.*” (HALL, Humphrey & CRIPPS, Alfred J.: *THE ROMANCE OF THE SYDNEY STAGE Currency Press/National Library of Australia 1996*)

Not that plot and lyrics necessarily ensure an opera’s success. The hopelessly contrived plot of *The Bohemian Girl* – developed by Alfred Bunn from a French pantomime-ballet, based on a Cervantes romance – was always held up to ridicule. But Balfe’s much-acclaimed gift for lilting melodies – particularly ‘I dreamed I dwelt in Marble Halls’ – guaranteed the international success of *The Bohemian Girl*. In those days – without any electrical reproduction of sound – the ability to create memorable melody was a much sought after commodity. Unfortunately for Nathan, by 1847, his best songwriting days were behind him.

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Isaac Nathan was born in 1790, the eldest son of Polish-born Menahem Mona, the cantor at the King Street Synagogue in Canterbury, Kent. His father planned for his first born to become a rabbi and sent him to Cambridge to study Latin, Hebrew, and mathematics at the secular boarding school of the Prague-born scholar, Solomon Lyon: “*the first school in Anglo-Jewry, which was based upon Moses Mendelssohn’s enlightenment movement in Berlin.*” (BARON, Jeremy Hugh: *BYRON’S PASSOVERS AND NATHAN’S MELODIES, an article in Judaism – A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought – American Jewish Congress, January 2002*) But, while Nathan made excellent progress in all his studies, he continued to display “*such exceptional aptitude for music that his parents were persuaded to allow him to abandon theology for music.*” (LEGGGE, R.H. rev. David J. Golby: *OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY Oxford University Press 2004-7*) In 1809, Nathan’s father apprenticed him to the London-based Italian maestro, Domenico Corri (1746-1825) who, like Haydn, had been trained by Nicolo Porpora. Nathan flourished under Corri’s guidance and published his first song, *Infant Love*, after only eight months. Within a year he was Corri’s chief assistant; similar works followed, the best of which – according to R.H. Legge – was the song, *The Sorrows of Absence*.

It was only in the reign of George the Third (1760–1820) that Jews became socially acceptable in Britain. According to Charles Rimbault Dibdin, Nathan began to establish himself as “*a well-known and successful teacher of singing and a musical composer of some merit and importance...chiefly in the production of vocal music, which at that time had a large part in social life*”. Moreover, Nathan’s “*good appearance and engaging manners, backed by his reputation as a teacher, brought him into contact with various personages of importance.*” **(DIBDIN, Charles Rimbault: ISAAC NATHAN, an article in *Music & Letters*, Vol. 22 No 1 Oxford University Press 1941)**

One of his early patrons was Lady Caroline Lamb, daughter of the Earl of Bessborough and niece of the Duchess of Devonshire. One of the leading social and literary figures of her day, and a devoted mother to her mentally and physically handicapped son, Lady Caroline’s many accomplishments have long since been overshadowed by her passionate and highly publicized liaison with Lord Byron. Five years older than Nathan, she enjoyed music and drama, spoke French and Italian, was skilled in Latin and Greek; and she was obsessed with the waltz, the Viennese dance craze that was all the rage in London. “*A creature compact of imagination, caprice and head-strong feeling,*” according to Peter Quennell, she was “*pretty, too, though in the manner that was provocative rather than voluptuous, with her thin graceful body, her large, dark but somewhat unduly prominent eyes and her dishevelled short-clipped curls ...*” **(QUENNELL, Peter: BYRON – *The Years of Fame* Faber & Faber 1935)** In 1805, she had married the son of Lord Melbourne, William Lamb (later to inherit his father’s title and become Prime Minister under Queen Victoria). Caroline admired her husband; but his tolerant, stoical detachment was not calculated to check her extravagant nature. Isaac Nathan “*does not make it clear when he met her; but she was certainly his patroness by 1814, the year of her maddest pursuit of Byron, for Isaac tells us that it was about this year that she wrote some words for him to set to music.*” **(MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963)** After the publication of *A Love Song, written by a Lady, the Music by Mr. Nathan*, Lady Caroline wrote to him, in an undated letter: “*Thank you for my song. I gave one copy to Lady Cork, who is here, and she has nieces who play and sing very well.*” **(Quoted by Charles Rimbault DIBDIN in ISAAC NATHAN, an article in *Music & Letters*, Vol. 22 No 1 Oxford University Press 1941)**

“*Though selected Jews and even musicians ... might mix in good society and dine at tables of the great, marriage was a different matter.*” **(MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963)** In the summer of 1812, as the half million soldiers of the Grande Armée marched across Europe in Napoleon’s doomed Russian campaign, Isaac Nathan – at twenty-one – had fallen in love with one of his pupils, seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Rosetta Worthington. She was the only child of an Irish army officer from County Cork. Her uncle, Sir William Worthington, had thrice been Lord Mayor of Dublin; another uncle was a Judge of the Irish Supreme Court. Her mother had brought Rosetta to London to finish her education, not “*to see her married to a penniless Hebrew singing master of doubtful foreign antecedents.*” **(Ibid)** In spite of parental objections, on both sides, the young couple eloped (much as the nineteen-year-old poet, Percy Shelley, and sixteen-year-old Harriet Westbrook had done the year before) and they married twice: “*first at St. Mary Abbot’s, Kensington, and then, three months later, at a London synagogue.*” **(Ibid)** Apparently the Anglican beliefs and social prejudices of Rosetta’s family had been affronted so deeply that all further relations with her were severed. Thus cast out, she converted to Judaism, though all her children – two sons and four daughters – would be baptized in the Anglican Church.

To further establish his reputation and meet his newfound responsibilities, Nathan had begun work on a project that was to prove not only timely but also lucrative. Collections of national songs – Indian, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, etc. – were increasingly finding favour in London. Nathan felt sure that a set of Jewish songs (along the lines of Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies*) would be successful. With more zeal than accuracy, he had been pursuing the theme of continuity in Jewish musical tradition; and, in May 1813, a notice appeared in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* informing readers that “*Nathan is about to publish ‘Hebrew Melodies’, all of them upward of 1000 years old, and some of them performed by the ancient Hebrews before the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem.*” He planned to sell the songbook

by subscription; and London's most renowned tenor – and a fellow Jew – John Braham, when “*putting his name down for two copies, suggested that he should aid in their arrangement, and sing them in public.*” (LEGGE, R.H. rev. David J. Golby: **OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY Oxford University Press 2004-7**) Braham's renditions of such early pieces as ‘The Illiterate Boy’ and ‘The Soldier's Farewell’ had already introduced Nathan's songs to a wider public. In gratitude, the composer had named his eldest son, Charles Braham Nathan.

Originally billed as Master Abraham, Braham had begun his stage career as a child, first appearing at Covent Garden, aged ten; then, in 1794, under the name John Braham, he “*started his amazing career as the first tenor of his generation in Italy, Paris and London, where he eventually built the famous St. James's Theatre (pulled down in 1958).*” (ARUNDELL, Dennis: **THE STORY OF SADLER'S WELLS Hamish Hamilton 1965**) The librettist, James Robinson Planche, writing in 1872, said of him: “*He was the greatest English tenor perhaps ever known, was about the worst actor ever seen, and the most unromantic person in appearance that can well be imagined.*” (Quoted by SIMPSON, Harold: **A CENTURY OF BALLADS 1801-1901 Mills & Boon 1912**) Braham was a composer as well as a singer and often wrote the music for his own parts in the various operas in which he appeared and “*will always be associated with the immortal ‘Death of Nelson’, which he wrote for his opera The Americans.*” (Ibid) In the event, however, Braham's public engagements did not permit him to take an active role in the arrangement of Isaac Nathan's melodies, other than as consultant and adviser to his much younger and less famous friend.

Meanwhile – in search of an eminent wordsmith to lend prestige to the project – Nathan wrote to Sir Walter Scott in Edinburgh, asking the acclaimed poet if he might consider providing the lyrics for his Hebrew melodies. This was in 1814, the same year that Scott – whose verse romances were already being read avidly throughout Europe – began to publish anonymously the series of historical novels that would soon transform him into a bigger selling author – in proportion to the possible readership – than Edinburgh's more recent literary phenomenon, J.K. Rowling. Scott declined the invitation, with his customary modesty, claiming he felt he was “*not adequate to the task.*” (Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**)

It was Lady Caroline Lamb who encouraged Nathan to approach the young Lord Byron who, at twenty-four, had achieved unprecedented success with the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; 10,000 copies sold on the day of publication. Having read the poem, Lady Caroline – the fever of Romanticism throbbing in her veins – had decided she must meet the poet and the two fell almost at once into a frenzied intimacy. Byron was astonished at her “*total want of common conduct*”; her heart, he said, was like “*a little volcano*”; (MARCHAND, Leslie A.: **BYRON'S LETTERS & JOURNALS 12 Vols. John Murray 1973-82**) and, in the end, it was this reckless indiscretion and her habit of making scenes that repelled him. Their hectic and much talked of affair had lasted only about three months before he was demanding that she exert her “*absurd caprices upon others; and leave me in peace.*” (Ibid) But she refused and coined for him the phrase ‘*mad, bad and dangerous to know*’. The ending of their affair appears to have precipitated her gradual mental decline.

In the midst of this extraordinary episode, Nathan's brief letter to Byron, on June 13th, included a copy of his musical setting of the lines, ‘*This rose to calm my brother's cares*’, from Byron's recent publication, *The Bride of Abydos*. Two weeks later, on June 30th – having received no reply – Nathan wrote again, this time at much greater length in a letter remarkable for its tone. It begins: “*The high character your Lordship bears for liberality of feeling could alone induce me to press on your attention; but, having endeavoured in vain to obtain an introduction, and not being fortunate enough to succeed, will I trust, plead my apology for the unwarrantable liberty I now take in thus addressing you. ... I have with great trouble selected a considerable number of very beautiful Hebrew melodies of undoubted antiquity, some of which proved to have been sung by the Hebrews before the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem.... I am taking great liberty with your Lordship in even hinting that two songs written by you would give the work great celebrity. I have since been persuaded by several*

*Ladies of literary fame and known genius, to apply to your Lordship.... if your Lordship would permit me to wait on you with the Melodies and allow me to play them over to you, I feel certain from their great beauty, you would become interested in them, indeed, I am convinced no one but my Lord Byron could do them justice. ...*” After expressing several more such servile and flattering sentiments, seeking the poet’s participation, Nathan concludes by saying: *“If I should have, through too great an anxiety to obtain this, my most sanguine hope, in any way invaded on the respect so justly your due, I know your Lordship will pardon it and place it to the real cause, my ardent wish of having that publication in any way countenanced by your Lordship. I have the honour to be your Lordship’s humble and devoted servant.”*

Given the turbulence of his private life, it is not surprising that Byron failed to acknowledge Nathan’s letters. But, thanks to the intervention of a mutual acquaintance, the Hon. Douglas Kinnaird, Byron’s financial adviser – in October 1814 – Nathan received an invitation to dinner. Quipped Byron afterwards: *“I only interfered to oblige a whim of Kinnaird’s!”* (**MARCHAND, Leslie A.: *BYRON’S LETTERS & JOURNALS 12 Vols. John Murray 1973-82***) Nonetheless, he quickly became enthusiastic about the project. Norman Lebrecht points out that, *“to the romantic imagination, music of the Temple amounted to the lost grail, the hidden source of Western harmony”*. (**LEBRECHT, Norman: *THE LEBRECHT WEEKLY August 15, 2001***) Byron penned *Saul*, a poem of sixteen lines, in less than an hour with no erasures; and, on October 20, he wrote to his fiancée Annabella Milbanke, describing *“... the real old undisputed Hebrew melodies which are beautiful and to which David and the prophets sang the ‘songs of Zion’ – and I have done nine or ten – on the sacred model – partly from Job, etc. and partly my own imagination ... It is odd that it should fall to my lot – who have been abused as ‘an infidel’ – Augusta says ‘they will call me a Jew next.’”* (**Ibid**) According to Byron’s biographer, Leslie A. Marchand: *“The sad bewailing complaints of the Old Testament, which he had read through and through before his eighth year, struck a responsive chord in Byron’s being. And the Hebraic strain, bound up with his Calvinistic fatalism, was congenial to his present mood.”* (**MARCHAND, Leslie A.: *BYRON – A Biography John Murray, 1957***)

Byron was at great pains to secure the success of the project, spending many hours with Nathan to compare ideas and plan suitable lyrics. *“For a period of about a year they were on as intimate terms as was possible between a lord, who wrote to ‘My dear Nathan’, and a musician who continued to address him in reply as ‘My Lord’, and signed himself ‘Your very obliged and devoted servant.’”* (**DIBDIN, Charles Rimbault: *ISAAC NATHAN, an article in Music & Letters, Vol. 22 No 1 Oxford University Press 1941***) In all, Byron wrote twenty-nine lyrics; and Nathan set them to music. Few of the melodies, if any, were derived from the ancient Jewish Temple, as Nathan claimed. Indeed, as A. Slater calculated in 1952, only seven of Nathan’s melodies have been identified as synagogal music. Four of them are German folk songs, dating from the 15th and 16th centuries, and long since absorbed into the synagogue service; and only two may actually be ancient. Slater commented: *“Pious persons who bought the Hebrew Melodies in the expectation of finding sacred poetry by Lord Byron found instead a book almost as secular as The Bride of Abydos. Nine of the poems are Biblical in subject but Byronic in treatment; two are love songs; five are reflective lyrics, neither Jewish nor Christian; and five are expressions of what might be called proto-Zionism.”* (**SLATER, A.: *BYRON’S HEBREW MELODIES Studies in Philology 1952***) Nevertheless, *Hebrew Melodies* represented the first serious attempt to set the traditional music of the synagogue before the general public.

In April 1815, Nathan published the collection in a large folio edition, with the frontispiece framed in architectural gothic by Edward Blore. The title read: *“A Selection of Hebrew Melodies, Ancient and Modern, with appropriate symphonies and accompaniments by J. Braham and I. Nathan, the poetry written expressly for the work by the Right Honourable Lord Byron.”* Ten thousand copies were printed, retailing at the price of one guinea each. To help boost sales, John Braham had allowed his name to be used: and, in return, received half of the first five thousand pounds profit. He received no further money and his name was deleted in later editions; but, in London, when he sang the

Nathan/Byron melodies for the first time, “*large audiences attended the concerts ... and critics raved as much over the music as over the verse.*” (MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST** Currawong Publishing Co. 1963) The success of these concerts meant that the melodies “*remained in print until 1861 and became the foundation and highlight of Nathan’s English career.*” (LEGGE, R.H. rev. David J. Golby: **OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY** Oxford University Press 2004-7)

Nathan was later to claim that he had been appointed as singing teacher to the Princess Royal, Princess Charlotte, and Music Librarian to the Prince Regent, later George IV. As with various apocryphal stories alleging that Nathan’s father was the illegitimate son of Poland’s King Stanislas Poniatowski, no evidence has ever been uncovered to support these claims. However, Nathan’s edition of the *Hebrew Melodies* was dedicated to Princess Charlotte by royal permission.

The Hon. Douglas Kinnaird had witnessed the document in which Byron assigned the copyright of *Hebrew Melodies* to Isaac Nathan. In January 1815, Byron wrote to Nathan telling him his publisher, John Murray, “*being about to publish a complete edition of my poetical effusions has a wish to include the stanzas of the Hebrew Melodies – will you allow him that privilege without considering it an infringement of your copyright? I certainly wish to oblige the gentleman but you know, Nathan, it is against all good fashion to give and take back. I therefore cannot grant what is not at my disposal; let me hear from you on the subject.*” (MARCHAND, Leslie A.: **BYRON’S LETTERS & JOURNALS 12 Vols. John Murray 1973-82**) Apparently Nathan did not consent. His edition – with the musical accompaniment – was published in April; and, the following year, Murray published Byron’s poems in a separate edition without the music.

By April 1816, London society had ostracized Byron due to the scandal arising from his incestuous relationship with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh. As the embittered poet prepared to quit England forever, Nathan sent him some matzah as a going away gift. “*My Lord,*” Nathan wrote. “*I cannot deny myself the pleasure of sending your Lordship some holy biscuits, commonly called unleavened bread, denominated by the Nazarenes motsas, better known in this enlightened age by the epithet Passover Cakes; and as a certain angel, by his presence, assured the safety of a whole nation, may the same guardian spirit pass with your Lordship to that land where the fates may have decreed you to sojourn for a while!*” (Quoted by BARON, Jeremy Hugh: **BYRON’S PASSOVERS AND NATHAN’S MELODIES, an article in Judaism – A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought – American Jewish Congress, January 2002**) Byron wrote a letter of thanks, on April 23, just before he left his house at Number Thirteen, Piccadilly Terrace, bound for Dover: “*My dear Nathan, – I have to acknowledge the receipt of your very seasonable bequest, which I duly appreciate; the unleavened bread shall certainly accompany me in my pilgrimage; and, with a full reliance, on their efficacy, the Motsas shall be to me a charm against the destroying Angel wherever I may sojourn; the serene highness, however, will, I hope, be polite enough to keep at a desirable distance from my person, without the necessity of besmearing my door posts or upper lintels with the blood of any animal. With many thanks for your kind attention, believe me, My dear Nathan – Yours very truly, Byron.*” (MARCHAND, Leslie A.: **BYRON’S LETTERS & JOURNALS 12 Vols. John Murray 1973-82**) As the two friends shook hands, Nathan said that Byron gave him a fifty-pound note, saying: “*Do not be offended with me at this mode of expressing the delight you have afforded me – till we meet again, farewell!*” (Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST** Currawong Publishing Co. 1963)

On March 12, 1816, Nathan had made his debut at Covent Garden, singing the role of Bertram in Henry Bishop’s opera with dialogue, *Guy Mannering* (one of eleven such Bishop adaptations from the novels of Sir Walter Scott). At this time Covent Garden was still being put to a wide variety of theatrical uses: it was not dubbed an Opera House until 1847. Henry Bishop had been appointed its musical director, in 1810 – at the age of twenty-four – and his duties included providing incidental music to revivals of Shakespeare’s plays and ‘adapting’ European operas for the English stage – *Don*

*Giovanni, Marriage of Figaro, Barber of Seville and Fidelio* among them – mercilessly rewriting portions and introducing music of his own, as was the accepted custom. “*It seemed impossible,*” wrote Desmond Shawe-Taylor, “*to present any foreign opera without a quantity of interpolations and additional music.*” (SHAWE-TAYLOR, Desmond: **COVENT GARDEN Max Parrish 1948**);

Unfortunately for Isaac Nathan, his voice, “*though agreeable and well-trained, was not effective on the stage.*” (DIBDIN, Charles Rimbault: **ISAAC NATHAN, an article in Music & Letters, Vol. 22 No 1 Oxford University Press 1941**) It was not the end of his theatrical career, however, for Catherine Mackerras records that Lady Caroline Lamb sent him an undated letter (later reprinted in his *Fugitive Pieces and Reminiscences of Lord Byron*) in “*about 1817, when he was appearing at Drury Lane*” (MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**) In it, she wrote: “*Nathan, I am, and have been very ill; it would perhaps cure me if you could come and sing to me “Oh Mariamne – now will you? I entreat you, the moment you have this letter, come and see me, and I promise you that if get well I will come to your Theatre – but I use no bribe, I merely ask – come and soothe one who ought be happy, but is not.*” She formed a habit of summoning him like this, which greatly flattered him; but, as Catherine Mackerras points out, “*he does not tell us that she was doubtfully sane, and, towards the end of her life, wholly deranged.*” (Ibid)

Teaching remained Nathan’s principal source of income. “*He founded an ambitious Academy of Singing at his house in Nelson Square, where pupils were received as boarders, learning languages, deportment and all other branches of the art, for one hundred and twenty guineas per annum.*” (Ibid) Nathan must have been an excellent instructor. Robert Browning, was one of his pupils – according to Thomas L. Ashton – and, sixty years later, the English poet recalled: “*As for singing, the best master of four I have, more or less, practised with was Nathan, Author of the Hebrew Melodies; he retained certain traditional Jewish methods of developing the voice*”. (Quoted by ASHTON, Thomas L.: **BYRON’S HEBREW MELODIES Routledge & Kegan Paul 1972**)

At all times Nathan was assisted by his wife, Rosetta, even though the birth, in 1817, of their second daughter, Louisa Caroline, meant she was now caring for three very young children. Lady Caroline Lamb consented to act as the little girl’s godmother and the appreciative poem that Nathan wrote to her, in Hebrew, he also reprinted in his *Fugitive Pieces*. As well as attending to her maternal duties and her chores at the Academy, Rosetta maintained a career as a novelist. According to Catherine Mackerras, “*her works are no more unreadable today than are most of the minor effusions of Regency England.*” (Ibid) Her first book, *Elvington* – highly romantic and melodramatic – was written, when she was sixteen, in the form of letters exchanged between several characters. This epistolary style had flourished in eighteenth century England with many authors influenced by its greatest exponent, Samuel Richardson. They included Tobias Smollett, Fanny Burney and even Jane Austen (twenty years older than Rosetta) who had also experimented with the form when she was sixteen. *Elvington* is lovingly dedicated to Nathan: “*To Him whose example has taught me fortitude in adversity, and whose firm reliance on the dispensation of Providence presented a bright beacon of hope to guide me through the mazes of affliction. Whose unutterable tenderness has withstood the machinations of malevolence and duplicity, and whose cheering smile of approbation first encouraged me to present the following work to the public. To my Husband, these pages are dedicated as a very small tribute of gratitude by an affectionate wife.*” (Ibid) Much has been made of this dedication, with commentators hinting at various lurid explanations for its wording. In fact, it expresses sentiments perfectly consistent with the sensibility of a young woman disowned by her family and cut adrift forever from the scenes of her childhood.

The Nathans’ fourth child, their second son, Alfred, was born in 1821; and Jane Selina, their third daughter, the following year. In 1822, *Langreath*, Rosetta’s second novel, also appeared. It was a Welsh romance, with quotations from Byron at the beginning of most of its chapters. A copy was sent to Lady Caroline Lamb who wrote to Nathan, acknowledging “*your delightful gift*” and – in return for

Rosetta having kindly remembered her – she promised to send a copy of her own new novel, *Ada Reis*, that was about to be printed by her friend, John Murray (also Byron’s publisher). A strange apocalyptic fantasy, it included some Byronic verses, set to music by Nathan. At the end of her letter, there is a pathetic message to the little girl, Louisa Caroline: “*Tell my goddaughter to love me.*” Lady Caroline was, “*by this time, sorely in need of friends. Her long-suffering husband had consented to the separation his family had long urged upon him.*” (**Ibid**)

It was at London’s recently rebuilt Haymarket Theatre – with its present-day exterior and Corinthian portico designed by architect John Nash – that, on July 7th, 1823, two of Isaac Nathan’s most enduringly popular ballads, ‘Why are you wand’ring here, I pray?’ and ‘I’ll not be a maiden forsaken’, were introduced to the public, along with the four other numbers he contributed to *Sweethearts and Wives*. This was Nathan’s first collaboration with the prolific, forty-three-year-old, Irish dramatist, James Kenney, whose pen was seldom idle, variously producing tragedy, comedy, opera, farce, interlude, and melodrama. The nervous affliction from which Kenney suffered gave him such an eccentric appearance that, it was said, he was more than once mistaken for an escaped lunatic; but *Sweethearts and Wives* was considered to be one of his best works and, following a successful run of fifty-one performances, it was revived at the Haymarket several times.

In the leading role was “*a fascinating woman with large lustrous eyes and dark hair,*” (**HARTNOLL, Phyllis: THE OXFORD COMPANION TO THE THEATRE Oxford University Press 1952**) twenty-six-year-old Madame Vestris, who, according to the theatre historian, Walter Macqueen-Pope, “*was said to have the most shapely legs in the world.*” (**MACQUEEN-POPE W.: THE CURTAIN RISES Thomas Nelson 1961**) Born Lucia Bartolozzi, she started her career, aged sixteen, at the King’s Theatre where the French ballet master, Auguste Vestris, became her first husband. When he deserted her, she decided to retain his name. She excelled in male roles and the sensation she created playing Ralph, in *Puss in Boots*, inaugurated the tradition of the female Principal Boy in English pantomime. In 1817 her performance in the title role of *Giovanni in London*, William Moncrieff’s burlesque of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, was hailed as a triumph. As a singer Madame Vestris seems to have had few equals: “*one of the most luscious of low voices,*” according to the actor, George Vandenhoff, “*great sprightliness and vivacity.*” (**Quoted by WILSON, A.E.: THE LYCEUM Dennis Yates 1952**) Every time she sang Nathan’s ‘Why are you wand’ring here, I pray?’ during *Sweethearts and Wives*, the audience demanded an encore. It fast became one of the hit songs of the age, still in print in 1883.

Nathan published ‘*An essay on the history and theory of music, and on the qualities, capabilities, and management of the human voice, with an appendix on Hebrew music*’ in 1823. It was “*a ponderous and learned tome on singing and the history of music*” (**MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**), dedicated, by royal permission, to King George IV, and it revealed Nathan’s erudition and idiosyncrasy. The notice in the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* said that, “*taken as a whole, Mr. Nathan’s work contains matter that is useful, mixed up with many sensible remarks. The work however wants method and curtailment, for, with all our disposition to encourage every endeavour to unite literature with music, we cannot conceal, even from ourselves, that there is a great proportion of common-place, and a general lack of discrimination and order in the choice and arrangement of the materials. Thus we have page after page of notes (sometimes of notes upon notes) and quotation, in no very good taste.*” (**Quoted by YOUNG, Percy M. in his review of “A Selection of Hebrew Melodies Ancient and Modern by Isaac Nathan and Lord Byron” by Frederick Burwick & Paul Douglas Music & Letters Vol. 71 No. 1 – Feb. 1990 Oxford University Press**) The European press gave Nathan’s *History* a better reception. In Rome, there appeared a Latin ode to Isaac Nathan, which was reprinted in the *Revue Encyclopedique* in Paris.

In 1823 the father of Isaac Nathan, Menehem Mona, died. He had been living in London, near his son, and he was laid to rest in the London Jewish Cemetery, alone. Why Nathan never attempted to explain the name ‘Nathan’ is no more mysterious than why he never mentioned his mother. “*Family tradition*



says that she deserted his father, and eloped with an Englishman, and that this was the reason why he left Canterbury in middle age.” (MACKERRAS, Catherine: *THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963*)

In early 1824 there came an even greater calamity. One winter afternoon, Nathan and his wife were giving a musical party. In the midst of the entertainment, Rosetta suddenly left the room. Now thirty, and once again pregnant, she “*ran hastily upstairs*” – according to the memory of her daughter, Louisa (then aged six) – “*falling with great violence against her bedroom door, which she slammed behind her.*” (Ibid) The next morning she was dead, having given birth to a baby daughter. After some delay, Rosetta – who was evidently considered a doubtful convert to Judaism – was buried in the unconsecrated section of a Jewish cemetery. The broken-hearted Nathan wrote some lines and asked the deeply sympathetic Caroline Lamb to translate them into verse “*that they might be engraven in the hearts and minds of my six very young children, as a memento of their highly talented, virtuous, amiable and inestimable mother.*” (Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: *THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963*)

To help support himself and his young family – the eldest child, Charles, was only eight – thirty-four-year-old Nathan had gone into partnership with his younger brother, Barnet, conducting a music warehouse and publishing business in Westminster. Barnet, or Baruch, was “*better known to the public as Baron Nathan, a dancing master*”. (DIBDIN, Charles Rimbault: *ISAAC NATHAN, an article in Music & Letters, Vol. 22 No 1 Oxford University Press 1941*) He was caricatured in Punch, dancing “*his celebrated egg hornpipe*”, which he performed blindfolded among “*a whole shillingworth*” of eggs laid out in patterns on the stage. He was also “*master of the ceremonies, managing director and presiding genius of the once greatly famous Rosherville Gardens, beloved of the Cockney,*” (Ibid) at Gravesend, where his young sister-in-law, Henrietta Buckley, was also a dancer (not then a socially acceptable profession). She was twenty when Nathan married her, in 1826, at St Mary Abbot’s Church in Kensington. The traditional Jewish marriage contract was drawn up; and Henrietta – like Rosetta before her – was referred to as ‘Sarah, daughter of the Patriarch Abraham’, in the customary style of the converted woman. This time, however, the contract was never signed; perhaps because “*Nathan had himself weakened in his ancestral faith, and all his children were baptized in the Church of England, doubtless for social reasons ... the synagogues had had enough of his frolics.*” (Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: *THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963*)

In the mean time, Nathan and Kenney had written *The Alcaid, or, The Secrets of Office*, another comic opera starring Madame Vestris. Nathan supplied an overture and sixteen songs, including the show-stopping quartet, ‘*Befriend us! Befriend us!*’ *The Alcaid* opened on July 14, 1824, at the Haymarket, where, the following year, in *Paul Pry*, Madame Vestris introduced the song with which she was always associated: Charles Horn’s famous ‘*Cherry Ripe*’ – “*one of the ballads that has lived, and is likely to live for many years yet,*” according to Harold Simpson in 1912. (SIMPSON, Harold: *A CENTURY OF BALLADS 1801-1901 Mills & Boon 1912*) In 1830 Madame Vestris gave up performing to enter the field of theatre management. This extraordinary woman took over the Olympic Theatre and completely revolutionized current staging practices, even evolving London’s first box set, complete with ceiling.

Shortly after the directors of the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, had designated the young American, Stephen Price, to manage their theatre, another of Nathan and Kenney’s collaborations – an operatic farce, *The Illustrious Stranger, or, Married and Buried* – was given its first performance there on October 7, 1827. The leading role of Benjamin Bowbell was played by “*one of the great comedians,*” said Macqueen-Pope, “*with the funniest face in the world.*” (MACQUEEN-POPE W.: *THE CURTAIN RISES Thomas Nelson 1961*) This was John Liston who, in private life, was “*nervous and melancholic, and much interested in the study of theology, but he had only to appear on the stage to set the audience laughing.*” (HARTNOLL, Phyllis: *THE OXFORD COMPANION TO THE*

**THEATRE Oxford University Press 1952)** Nathan wrote the overture and ten songs (all of which were published) and *The Illustrious Stranger* was revived several times at Drury Lane over the next few years.

Nathan was well aware that the extraordinary life of the most widely read English poet of his generation would continue to fascinate; and astute enough to know that his own reputation would prosper if people were regularly reminded that he had been a friend of Lord Byron's; even if, as Roger Covell points out, "*there was not much that could be called Byronic, in the sense in which this term has come to be understood, about Nathan's own music.*" (**COVELL, Roger: AUSTRALIA'S MUSIC Sun Books 1967**) In 1829, five years after the death, at Missolonghi, of the thirty-six-year-old poet in exile, who had been assisting the Greeks in their fight for independence – and a year after the death of forty-two-year-old Lady Caroline Lamb, whose last years were spent in seclusion after an accidental encounter with Byron's funeral cortège had accelerated her madness – Nathan published *Fugitive Pieces and Reminiscences of Lord Byron: Containing an Entire New Edition of the Hebrew Melodies – Also Some Original Poetry, Letters and Recollections of Lady Caroline Lamb*. According to Charles Rimbault Dibdin, Nathan's small volume includes "*a full account of his intercourse with Byron and the preparation of the Hebrew Melodies, as well as Braham's connection with that work, an interesting section of letters, anecdotes and recollections of Lady Caroline Lamb, much information about his own publications, and other matters. Except for a rather explosive 'Advertisement' about some unfavourable critic, it is much better written than some of his later fulminations, graced with quotations in Hebrew, Latin and French.*" (**DIBDIN, Charles Rimbault: ISAAC NATHAN, an article in Music & Letters, Vol. 22 No 1 Oxford University Press 1941**)

Nathan composed the music for John G. Millingen's lyric drama, *The King's Fool*, or *The Old Man's Curse* – staged at the Victoria Theatre on July 17, 1833 – and commenced work on an ambitious plan to enlarge his history of music. However, "*it appears that only the first volume materialized*" (**LEGGE, R.H. rev. David J. Golby: OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY Oxford University Press 2004-7**) Entitled *Musurgia vocalis: an essay on the history and theory of music, and on the qualities, capabilities, and management of the human voice*, it was favourably reviewed when it was published in 1836. Nathan followed it with a book about the celebrated Spanish mezzo-soprano, Maria Malibran, *Memoirs of Madame Malibran de Beriot*. She had died, aged twenty-eight, in Manchester, on September 23, 1836, as the result of injuries sustained in a horse-riding accident. A singer of exceptional vocal range, power, and agility, she died at the very height of her fame and quickly became a legend of the early Romantic period.

"*A faint air of disreputability*" hangs about Nathan's last years in England, according to Catherine Mackerras. "*Of course, though he had been described in the papers as 'a London notable' for many years, his social position was never a good one. He was a hanger-on to the fringes of the aristocracy.*" (**MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**) His second wife, not as well educated as his first, lacked the experience to be a successful stepmother to his children. Moreover, she now had three children of her own and Nathan's successes were never quite sufficient to keep him out of financial difficulties. In fact, his progress in London was so much interrupted by the incivilities of importunate creditors – including some months, at least, spent in debtors' prisons – that, apparently, he was compelled to make a number of retreats, for months at a time, to the west of England. At a certain low point, he sold his copyright to the *Hebrew Melodies* to his married sister, presumably to avoid it being lost in bankruptcy. It ought to have ensured him a steady income but it had become involved in a series of legal disputes and changed hand six times in twenty-six years. It has also been suggested that Nathan's habit of gambling on the outcome of prizefights was another reason for his financial difficulties. He frequently wrote about boxing for the popular press in London.

Isaac Nathan is supposed to have undertaken some mysterious service for the king, the nature of which remains unknown. It is alleged that he acted as a confidential agent for both King George IV and his

brother, William IV, presumably recovering various documents detailing infidelities of members of the royal family. When Victoria became Queen in 1837, her prime minister, Lord Melbourne – husband of the late Lady Caroline Lamb – apparently refused to pay for Nathan’s services. According to Eric Irvin, Nathan had “*claimed £2,326 from the government, but instead was given £326 and dismissed.*” (IRVIN, Eric: **DICTIONARY OF THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE Hale & Iremonger 1985**) Whatever the truth of these allegations, Nathan’s financial affairs were undoubtedly in complete disarray. By 1840 he had despaired of finding justice. His creditors, as usual, were demanding payment and Nathan, “*‘the Victim of Loyalty’ (it is his own name for himself henceforth), was to embark on a very long journey indeed.*” (MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**)

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With his wife, Henrietta, their three children, and five of the children from his previous marriage – only Louisa elected to stay behind – Isaac Nathan set sail for Australia where, from a European viewpoint, there was still “*very little music apart from the sound of regimental pipes, bugles and drums.*” (LEVI J.S. & BERGMAN G.F.J.: **AUSTRALIAN GENESIS – Jewish Convicts and Settlers Rigby 1974**) Not that he was the first musician of note to take up residence in the colony. The 23-year-old Irish-born violinist and conductor, William Vincent Wallace, had arrived here in 1835. He played in several concerts; and, with his flautist brother, Spencer, and his soprano sister, Eliza, he had opened a musical academy that helped transform the quality of musical performance. However, as the *Sydney Gazette* reported on 8 February 1838: “*Mr. Wallace, the Australian Paganini, left the colony in a clandestine manner on Wednesday last, and has sailed for Valparaiso, having contracted debts in Sydney amounting to nearly £2,000.*” Wallace played his violin in South America, the West Indies, Cuba, Mexico and the United States before finally achieving international fame when his opera, *Maritana*, opened at Drury Lane in November 1845. Of course, just as Isaac Nathan gave it out in London that he was leaving for Australia ‘to seek a warmer climate, so Wallace was officially alleged to have abandoned Sydney ‘for his health’. Meanwhile, his brother and sister remained. She married an amateur singer, John Bushelle, with whom she often appeared, and she would become one of Nathan’s very first pupils.

When Nathan, now fifty-one, disembarked in Melbourne, in February 1841, he immediately gave a concert with the French violinist, Henri Gautrot, and played one of his *Hebrew Melodies*. Melbourne had only been established for five years; and, in late March, Nathan and his family returned to the ship to continue their journey to Sydney.

The town was agog with rumours that St. Mary’s new organ, imported from England at great expense, would rival the great organs of Westminster Abbey and St Paul’s Cathedral. To celebrate its inauguration and to mark his Sydney debut as composer, singer and conductor, Nathan wasted no time in organising a grand oratorio concert (the largest yet heard in the colony), with an orchestra of twenty-six musicians and the St. Mary’s choir augmented with the best soloists he could find (including his two daughters, Marian and Jessy Rosetta, who sang in a vocal quartet with his son, Charles and himself). On June 30, 1841, works by Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Callcott, and Isaac Nathan were performed before a congregation of eight hundred people. The interior of the cathedral was brilliantly lit for the first time by jets fueled from Sydney’s new gas supply. The only disappointment was the organ itself. It could scarcely be heard because no musician in the colony – not even Nathan – was able to do it justice. Consequently, no organ solos were played and some of the accompaniments had to be provided by a military band. After the success of this concert, Nathan was appointed choirmaster and the *Australasian Chronicle* reported that “*the choir of St. Mary’s, under the laborious and judicious instruction will soon be one of the best in the British Empire.*” (Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**)

As in England, teaching would be Nathan's main source of income and, undaunted by the meagre supply of musical equipment in his adopted country, he immediately set about establishing an Academy of Singing. Notices appeared in the *Herald* advertising instruction 'in all branches of the vocal art.' His daughter, Marian, was his chief assistant, and soon there were branches at Parramatta and Windsor. In Sydney, the address of the Academy for many years was 105 Hunter Street, one of seven houses in Horbury Terrace, a new building on the corner of Macquarie Street.

Right from his arrival in Sydney, Nathan regarded himself as "*the town's self-appointed musician laureate, composing, performing and mostly publishing almost fifty works ...*" (PONT, Graham: **A DICTIONARY OF AUSTRALIAN MUSIC – ed. Warren Bebbington Oxford University Press 1998**) He was engaged to give lessons and train a choir at the Sydney College, where he arranged a grand madrigal concert, in the presence of the Governor, Sir George Gipps. At the Royal Victoria Theatre – in Pitt Street, between Market and King – he conducted a concert, in August 1841, made up mainly of excerpts from his own semi-operas. *The Illustrious Stranger; or, Married and Buried* had already been seen in Sydney, first staged at Barnett Levey's New Theatre Royal in 1834, with Joseph Simmons scoring a great success as Bowbell. He performed the role for the last time forty-five years later – at his benefit in 1879 – when, aged seventy, he was "*apparently as exuberant, as boisterous, as talented as ever.*" (IRVIN, Eric: **DICTIONARY OF THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE Hale & Iremonger 1985**)

When Sydney was incorporated as a city in 1842 – by acts of the Legislative Council of NSW – its first Municipal Council was inaugurated with feasting and music and Isaac Nathan rose to the occasion. He wrote an ode to the Queen, '*Long Live Victoria*', which he dedicated to Governor Gipps: and which was sung, by Eliza Bushelle, to great acclaim. He himself sang '*Australia, the Wide and Free*', a drinking song, at the inaugural dinner. The words for both these patriotic effusions were by William Duncan, the young Scottish editor of the *Australasian Chronicle*, which had sponsored the concert in the cathedral. Nathan also composed a 'choral ode' – '*Hail, Star of the South! Australasia Advance!*' – and this was sung during the festivities that followed. Its words were the creation of Mrs. Eliza Harrington Dunlop, a poet whose chief interest was in the colony's indigenous people. In 1843, Nathan's opera about King Charles II, *Merry Freaks in Troublous Times*, may well have been the first opera ever written in Australia but it was never performed.

Nathan's eldest son, Charles, had run away from home after his mother died. Aged thirteen, he apprenticed himself to an apothecary; and, having obtained his Licentiate of the Royal Society of Apothecaries at an early age, he next enrolled as a student at Westminster Hospital. He won scholarships throughout the four years of his training and graduated with honours. The twenty-five-year-old doctor was in practice at Belgrave Square when – in loyalty to his father and out of love for his mother's children – he agreed to resettle in Australia where, at that time, his qualifications were extraordinarily high. He set up practice in Elizabeth Street North and, from the outset, was successful. Within a year, he had become engaged to Harriet Fisher, the sixteen-year-old daughter of a prosperous wine merchant. They were married in Christ Church St. Lawrence in October 1842. A devout Anglican, Charles became a warden and trustee of St. James's Church, in King Street, where his memorial stone describes him as "*the perfect pattern of a Christian gentleman.*"

Nathan was invited by Governor Gipps, who "*was most friendly to him and his family*", (MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**) to give a private concert at Government House. Just as the singing party was about to set off from Hunter Street, Nathan's nineteen-year-old daughter, Jessy Rosetta – born within hours of her mother's death – was seized with a mortal illness and died shortly afterwards. Her beautiful voice and charming appearance and manner had been much admired. The *Sydney Gazette* was particularly taken with the young singer and said her father's song, *The Aboriginal Mother*: "*was sung by Miss R. Nathan with a simplicity, chastity and pathos truly thrilling.*" (Ibid) Nathan was distraught at the sudden loss of his favourite daughter; she had been a perpetual reminder to him of the tragic end of his romantic first

marriage. Meanwhile, the necessities of providing for his family were pressing down heavily as imminent financial collapse in Sydney began to rob him of most of his pupils.

When Nathan arrived in New South Wales, the colony's prospects had been poor. By 1843, they were nonexistent. In March, the collapse of the Bank of Australia was the chief disaster among several such failures. The financial depression induced panic among new settlers who had journeyed in expectation of a new world exempt from the economic hardships of the old. On New Year's Day, 1844, an angry mob gathered in Hyde Park to hurl abuse at Governor Gipps and to protest against unemployment. There were four thousand bankrupts in Sydney. "*Isaac Nathan was one of them; his liabilities were given in the Herald as £530/17/6, his pitiful assets were but £75.*" (**MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**) Charles Nathan survived the economic blizzard; in fact, he had become Sydney's leading surgeon by the end of it.

In February of 1844, John Lazar, the manager of the Royal Victoria, announced the first performance in the colony of "*Rossini's celebrated Opera of Cinderella, with the original Music, new and splendid Scenery, Machinery, Dresses &c.; to conclude with the laughable farce of The Irishman in London.*" (**Quoted in BRISBANE, Katherine ed.: ENTERTAINING AUSTRALIA Currency Press 1991**) The 'original' music was actually an arrangement by Isaac Nathan, with the violinist Henri Gautrot, the flautist Spencer Wallace (brother of William) and the conductor, John Gibbs, of Nathan's selection of 'the most effective portions' of Rophino Lacy's English version of Rossini's *La Cenerentola*. Nathan, like other early opera enthusiasts "*had to cope with every imaginable difficulty – a shortage of sheet music; difficulty in getting and training a chorus; tenors having to sing baritone roles; sopranos singing tenor roles; and inadequate orchestras. More often than not operas had to be given in shortened versions, so as to fit in with the long programmes demanded at the time.*" (**IRVIN, Eric: DICTIONARY OF THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE Hale & Iremonger 1985**) Eliza Bushelle appeared as Cinderella; and she also gave a concert with Nathan in which she sang scenes from opera. Also, in this year of his bankruptcy, Nathan conducted four concerts with the Philharmonic Society, playing Mozart, Gluck and Rossini. The concerts were successful but, in its review, the *Herald* expressed the opinion that "*in the present depressed state of the Colony, tickets should not exceed 3/-, reduced to 2'6 for repeated performances.*" (**Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**)

Although he had abandoned Jewish observance in his personal life, Isaac Nathan maintained a close contact with the Jewish community. The *Sydney Herald* reported – in its coverage of the opening of the York Street Synagogue, on April 2, 1844 – on "*the great success of the consecration service,*" which, it said, "*was accorded to the musical talent of Mr. Isaac Nathan.*" In the *Australian* it was noted that "*the hymn 'Blessed is he who cometh in the way of the Lord' was harmoniously sung by the choir, which had been trained by Mr. Nathan, and the music, which had been expressly composed by him, was exceedingly appropriate. ... A setting of Psalm 84 was by Mr. Leo, a pupil of Mr. Nathan, who in this very effective composition proved himself worthy of his master.*" (**Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**)

In this year of his bankruptcy, Nathan also delivered three rather long-winded lectures on the Theory and Practice of Music at the Sydney College. He subsequently published them as a pamphlet and – in his preface – he comments on the tribulations of the musical pioneer in Sydney. His main complaint concerns the difficulties of publishing music. There was no printer who could set up music-type; and, moreover, all such type had to be imported from England at considerable expense. The *Herald's* type foundry, the first in Sydney, had been set up four years before and dealt in ordinary type only. "*I work as a compositor not from choice but from necessity,*" wrote Nathan, "*to still the vulgar inwards cravings of bairns who are still unprovided for.*" (**Ibid**) He was referring to the young children of his second marriage. Another little boy had been born a few months before. At the end of 1844, on December 23, Nathan heard two of his most popular ballads – 'Why are you wand'ring here, I pray?'

and 'I'll not be a maiden forsaken' – performed at the Royal Victoria when *Sweethearts and Wives* was staged in Sydney for the first time. It was still on the boards at the Victoria in 1854.

In 1845, Nathan wrote an ode, to words by Robert Lynd, mourning the 'scarcely doubtful fate' of the German explorer, Ludwig Leichhardt, who had been presumed dead, after an absence for two years on his northern expedition to Port Essington. Leichhardt had arrived in Australia in 1841, the same year as Nathan. He was a naturalist and applied for the job of setting out Sydney's Botanical Gardens. His application was refused but, through this interest, he met Lieutenant Robert Lynd, Barrack Master of the 63rd Regiment, "a man interested in all scientific and cultural endeavour, and a friend of Isaac Nathan, who had used the regimental band to supplement his orchestra at concerts."

**(MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963)** When Leichhardt became an explorer he called a river and a mountain range after Lynd; and the Nathans gave the name Henry Lynd to the son born in 1844. When Nathan – who had often met Leichhardt at Lynd's house – was asked by the grieving lieutenant to set his elegiac verses to music, he took great pains over the composition. According to Roger Covell, there are passages in *Leichhardt's Grave* "that rise above the level of facile opportunism of which Nathan was so ready a practitioner. Its opening section, in an insistent C minor, is in fact a remarkably fine example of sombre declamation in an English tradition that goes back fitfully to the time of Purcell. It would require only sympathetic performance to sound as impressive today as it must have done in 1845."  
**(COVELL, Roger: AUSTRALIA'S MUSIC Sun Books 1967)**

A ceremonial performance of *Leichhardt's Grave* was arranged at the Royal Victoria Theatre, but Leichhardt, having reached Port Essington in December, suddenly turned up in Sydney. The explorer wrote of his return: "No King could have been received with greater joy or affection. I thought the whole town would go mad with joy." Leichhardt insisted that *Leichhardt's Grave* be performed as arranged while he sat in a box and applauded. Afterwards Nathan had a surprise for him, a cheerier piece – *The Greeting Home Again – A Paean on Leichhardt's Return*, set to sentimental doggerel by a writer called A.K. Sylvester.

Business had revived by 1846 and Nathan resumed his self-appointed role of music laureate to the colony. To celebrate the fifty-eighth anniversary of the founding of Sydney, Nathan wrote a song that, he said, was "inscribed with the utmost devotion and respect to the fair sex of Australia." **(Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963)** The song's title – *The Currency Lassies* (1846) – referred to the deep and sometimes bitter division in Sydney colonial society between English-born temporary residents, usually merchants and officials ('sterling'), and native-born Australians, the sons and daughters of convicts and poor settlers ('currency'). "The song itself," wrote Roger Covell, "launched over a marching bass that seems too ponderous for its subject, takes wing gallantly in the last line of each stanza with double-speed repetitions of the title phrase." **(COVELL, Roger: AUSTRALIA'S MUSIC Sun Books 1967)**

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In May 1847 Isaac Nathan's *Don John of Austria*, the first opera to be wholly written and composed in Australia, was performed at the Royal Victoria Theatre; it is one of Nathan's few manuscripts to have survived. For a libretto, he had turned to twenty-eight-year-old Jacob Levi Montefiore, the well-educated nephew of one of Sydney's leading shipping agents and merchants, Joseph Barrow Montefiore, who was the President of Sydney's first Jewish congregation. Jacob was the son of a London merchant named Isaac Levi; but, since his mother, Esther, was a first cousin of Sir Moses Montefiore – of the great English Sephardi family – he and his brothers had adopted her name. After the death of his father in 1837, the eighteen-year-old Montefiore – who was born in Barbados – had journeyed to New South Wales. An admirer of the new French Romantic drama, in 1843 he translated Lockroy and Baden's play, *Un Duel sous le Cardinal Richlieu* as *The Duchess of Chevreuse*; and, when a collaboration with Isaac Nathan was mooted, Montefiore suggested an adaptation of Casimir Delavigne's drama.

If Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas *pere* and Alfred de Vigny are remembered today as the chief exponents of French Romantic drama, in Paris – in the eighteen-thirties and forties – it was Delavigne, their contemporary, who was unsurpassed in prestige and popularity. “*For a new people, a new art,*” Hugo had proclaimed after his drama, *Hernani*, was greeted on its first night with a constant barrage of catcalls, whistles, cheers and applause at the Comedie-Francaise in 1830. The “*bataille d’Hernani*” became famous all over Europe as the battleground on which the young Romantics in Paris had routed the old guard defending the citadels of French classical drama.

Delavigne’s great success – as dramatist, poet, and satirist – was largely due to the extraordinary times in which he lived. Born at Havre on 4 April 1793, and educated at the Lycée Napoléon in Paris, he was eighteen when his *Dithyrambe sur la naissance du roi de Rome* – a poem celebrating the birth of a son to the Empress Marie Louise (Napoleon’s second wife) on 20 March 1811 – secured him a sinecure in the revenue office. In 1818, the young poet became famous overnight when his verse diatribe, *Les Messéniennes* – written in the wake of Napoleon’s catastrophic defeat and the allied occupation of France – caused his contemporaries to thrill with patriotic fervour as more than twenty-five thousand copies were sold. A further extraordinary crisis in French history, in 1830, when Paris revolutionists deposed Charles X, and the Duc d’Orleans, Louis Philippe, was made ‘citizen King’, inspired Delavigne to compose his second poetic triumph, *La Parisienne*. Set to music by Francois Auber, for many years it rivalled *Le Marseillaise* in popularity. A member of the French-Polish Committee – along with Victor Hugo and Theophile Gautier – Delavigne dedicated his companion piece, *La Varsoivienne*, to the people of Poland.

As a playwright, Delavigne enjoyed enormous success during his lifetime. With his 1819 tragedy, *Les vèpres Siciliennes*, he broke with the Classical tradition. When it opened at the Odéon – second only in importance to the Comedie-Francaise – it was rapturously received. The theatre’s founder and manager, playwright Louis Picard assured him: “*You have saved us! You are the founder of the second French Theatre.*” His most popular works included comedies, historical epics and tragedies, among them *Comédiens* (1820), *Paria* (1821) and his best comedy, *L’Ecole des vieillards* (1823), which gained him his election to the Academie Francaise in 1825. Delavigne pursued the ideas of the Romantic school on subjects taken from all sides, from history, from hearsay and from legend. His string of successes included *La Princesse Aurélie* (1828), *Marino Faliero* (1829), *Louis XI* (1832), *Les Enfants d’Édouard* (1833), *Don Juan d’Autriche* (1835), *Une Famille au temps du Luther* (1836), *La Popularité* (1838), *La Fille du Cid* (1839) and *Le Conseiller rapporteur* (1840). Suffering from ill health and exhaustion, Delavigne was *en route* to Italy to rest, when he collapsed and died, aged fifty, in Lyon. His brother, the librettist Germain Delavigne, helped him finish his last work, his opera, *Charles VI*. A complete edition of Delavigne’s works was published in 1855.

While Hugo’s *Hernani* describes the young Hapsburg King of Spain, Charles I, competing with the courageous outlaw, Hernani, for the love of the beautiful Donna Sol in a completely fictitious plot that climaxes with three onstage suicides in the space of thirty seconds, Delavigne, in *Don Juan d’Autriche*, bases four of his characters on historical fact. When Charles became the Holy Roman Emperor in 1519 – as Charles V – uniting the old Hapsburg lands with the Spanish empire, his realms stretched from Brussels to Sicily, from Castile to Hungary, from the Philippines to Peru; in fact, he was “*the first man of whom it was said (truthfully) that he ruled an empire on which the sun never set.*” (ROBERTS, J.M.: *A HISTORY OF EUROPE Helicon Publishing 1996*) Calling himself ‘God’s standard bearer’, he ceaselessly traveled among his subjects, attempting to preserve his authority as the leader of Christendom. But to make the universal empire he envisaged into a reality would have proved impossible – given sixteenth century communication and administration – even without the colossal strain the Protestant Reformation imposed upon his reign.

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Of Barbara Blomberg, daughter of a respected burgher of Regensburg, very little is known except that, in 1546, she bore Charles V an illegitimate male child. He was soon removed from his mother’s care

and grew up in the house of his father's major-domo, the faithful Don Luis de Quexada, and his wife Magdalena. When the aging emperor, wearied and overwhelmed by a multiplicity of competing problems, finally abdicated the Imperial throne in 1556, (in favour of his brother, Ferdinand) and the Spanish crown (in favour of his son, Philip II), he retired to Yuste, where his villa was situated alongside the monastery of St. Jerome. When Magdalena joined Don Quexada there, in the summer of 1558, the twelve-year-old boy, whom they called Geronimo, came too. He was still not recognized as Charles's son, but "*when he appeared about the Court, performing the duties of a page, his lively blue eyes and fresh fair complexion filled his father with a new joy.*" (**BRANDI, Karl: *THE EMPEROR CHARLES V* Alfred A. Knopf 1939**) Before his death in September, Charles V wrote a special codicil ensuring his son's future and leaving a small annuity to his mother. As Geronimo grew older the secret of his birth could no longer be kept. According to Sir Charles Petrie, one of the first acts of Philip II on his return from the Netherlands was to meet his half brother, some twenty years younger than himself. "*The boy knelt down and asked permission to kiss the King's hand, which was at once extended to him. Philip gazed at him for a few moments and then asked if he knew who was his father. Don John remained silent, whereupon the King dismounted and exclaimed as he embraced his brother: 'Take courage, my child, you are descended from a great man. The Emperor Charles V, now in glory, is your father as well as mine.'*" (**PETRIE, Charles: *PHILIP II OF SPAIN* Eyre & Spottiswoode 1963**) Under the name of Don John of Austria, the young man was to become one of the most notable figures of the sixteenth century, with exceptional gifts in battle and in the leadership of men. "*His inspiring presence swept men off their feet,*" wrote Roger Merriman, "*and made them temporarily forget their own selfish aims in an overwhelming enthusiasm for the common cause.*" (**MERRIMAN, Roger Bigelow. *THE RISE OF THE SPANISH EMPIRE – Vol. IV* The Macmillan Co. 1934**)

Meanwhile, Philip II – austere, penitential and proud – strove to enforce "*a spiritual and administrative uniformity, which the variety of his vast dominions would never permit.*" (**DAVIES, Norman: *EUROPE –A History* Oxford University Press 1996**) His creed of 'one monarch, one empire, one sword' led to the death of his imprisoned son, Don Carlos; and drove the Inquisition to another wave of *autos-da-fe*. As champion of the Counter Reformation, he wanted to destroy infidels and heretics alike and he sought to crush Protestantism, first in the Netherlands, then in England and France. Ultimately, the destruction of the Spanish Armada and the continuing revolt of the Netherlands – combined with domestic economic problems and internal dissent – caused his reign to be generally deemed a failure. The use made of the Inquisition in the machinery of his government has always formed one of the gravest charges against Philip II; yet, as Petrie says, "*even his most severe critics have been prepared to say that his policy was not unpopular with his subjects.*" (**PETRIE, Charles: *PHILIP II OF SPAIN* Eyre & Spottiswoode 1963**)

It was the role of the Inquisition in Delavigne's drama, and the plight of his heroine, Donna Agnes, that particularly attracted Jacob Montefiore (himself a Sephardi Jew) to *Don Juan d'Autriche*. For more than a thousand years, Sephardis – the term is a corruption of an old name of Spain – had inhabited the peninsula. They were transmitters of classical science and philosophy and formed a bridgehead of the Latin world in Arab culture and vice versa; "*among the Muslims they were almost indistinguishable from the Moors, some of them actually professing Islam,*" writes Barnet Litvinoff. "*Amid the Christians they could be as Spanish as the grandees, whether they followed Christ or honoured Moses. ... Exiled because they were Jews, they were recognized long afterwards in their dispersal as Spaniards – their Hebrew designation, Sephardim, proclaimed with fierce hidalgo pride.*" (**LITVINOFF, Barnet: *THE BURNING BUSH* Collins 1988**) Ethnically, about a third of Spain's nobility was part Jewish by the sixteenth century, due to conversion to Christianity and inter-marriage. The Inquisition was a way of centralizing royal power by attacking the wealth, autonomy and self-confidence of the nobility. Church and State combined to search out and destroy those among the converted Jews who, by still practising Judaism in secret, were legally heretics. In its whole terrible history, through to 1700, the Inquisition hunted down approximately 341,000 victims. Of these, more



than 32,000 were burned to death, 17,600 were burned in effigy and 291,000 received lesser sentences. After 1480, *Marranos* (converted Jews) “only suffered execution by burning if they persisted in being loyal to Judaism or were repeatedly convicted of secretly being Jews. Probably half of these condemned *Marranos* were strangled before being burned.” (CANTOR, Norman: **THE SACRED CHAIN Harper Collins 1995**)

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Montefiore wrote three letters to the colonial secretary seeking permission to stage *Don John of Austria*. Until 1847, censorship in New South Wales had taken place as a matter of course; but then, having been incorporated into the theatre license, it became a legal requirement. Playwrights and composers in the British colony saw no reason to question the procedure; after all, censorship of all plays and operas, before their performance, was standard practice in England. The only restriction peculiar to New South Wales, with its population largely made of convicted criminals, was the ban on the depiction of the criminal as hero. “Clearly there was to be no place for bush-ranging dramas such as *Burn’s and Harpur’s*,” writes Margaret Williams, “with their critical eye on social justice and colonial administration.” (WILLIAMS, Margaret: **AUSTRALIA ON THE POPULAR STAGE 1829-1929 Oxford University Press 1983**) Best to steer clear in dialogue and plot of anything local, political, sectarian or immoral. “The work is little else than an alternation of *Casimir Delavigne’s* celebrated Drama of *Don Juan D’Autriche*,” wrote Montefiore in the second of his letters. “The story is perfectly harmless.” (Ibid) Delays in obtaining a reply from the colonial secretary’s office were not uncommon, and several actor-authors hoping to stage their own plays for their Benefit nights – at which new works were often given a trial run with an indulgent audience – became a little agitated as the important night drew near.

*Don John of Austria* was first performed on May 3, 1847, in the presence of a crowded and fashionable audience, at the Royal Victoria Theatre in Pitt Street which – since its opening in 1838 – had served as Sydney’s major theatre and would continue to do so until fire destroyed it in 1880. The auditorium was horseshoe in shape; the inclined benches of the pit were estimated to seat 800; the lower tier held 26 boxes (most of them seating nine people); the centre tier was divided into four large boxes – for families or individual patrons – and two side slips (the slips being for the ‘women of the town’); the third tier contained the gallery. “Box seats were cushioned and covered with crimson cloth. The tier ceilings were of zinc, against the danger of fire ... The box fronts were coloured pale salmon, each with a pale blue panel, these being separated by circular medallions presenting, alternately, the rose, the shamrock and the thistle, in gold on a crimson ground. Crimson cloth, probably baize, covered the seats and lined the dress boxes, while the stage boxes, one at each end of this tier, next to but not built into the proscenium, had ‘elegant’ chairs and were festooned with crimson drapery.” (IRVIN, Eric: **DICTIONARY OF THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE Hale & Iremonger 1985**)

On the playbill, the music was attributed to Isaac Nathan and the libretto to ‘a gentleman and a scholar’. Francis Nesbitt, the Irish-born actor hailed as ‘the Kean of the Southern Hemisphere’, appeared as Brother Carlos, John Howson as Philip II, Albert Spencer as Don Quexada, Frank Howson as Don John, Mr. Fenton as Don Ferdinand de Valdes, Theodosia Guerin (the mother of Nellie Stewart) as Agnes and the wife of the conductor, Louise Gibbs, as Dorothy. “Under the baton of John Gibbs, the opera proved eminently successful and at its close the composer, author and principal performers were loudly called for. The first and last made their obeisance, but the author could not be prevailed upon to show himself before the curtain.” (HALL, Humphrey & CRIPPS, Alfred J.: **THE ROMANCE OF THE SYDNEY STAGE Currency Press/National Library of Australia 1996**) The plot, said the *Herald*, was “somewhat tame and gloomy” and the music “better suited to the drawing room than to the stage.” (Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**)

Isaac Nathan was given a special benefit, on May 17, when a large audience gathered at the theatre “to pay substantial tribute to his talents, and to witness a revival of his opera,” (HALL, Humphrey & CRIPPS, Alfred J.: *THE ROMANCE OF THE SYDNEY STAGE* Currency Press/National Library of Australia 1996) as well as the staging of his musical farce, *The Illustrious Stranger*. Parts of *Don John of Austria* were printed in Nathan’s book, *The Southern Euphrosyne*, published in 1849. Why only parts? He had run out of music type. “Although we have not yet arrived within twelve years of that terminable age allotted to man, the metallic vapour and electric fluid arising from the music-type at which we have ourselves been compelled to work at this publication, frequently eighteen and nineteen hours out of every twenty-four has made sad havoc of our optic nerves, so that we have been forced to decorate our countenance with spectacles.” (Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: *THE HEBREW MELODIST* Currawong Publishing Co. 1963)

Jacob Montefiore became one of Sydney’s foremost businessmen, with mining and farming interests in NSW and Queensland. He was a magistrate, the Belgian Consul, the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, a director of the Bank of Australasia, a director of the New South Wales Marine Assurance Co., a founder of the City Bank, the founding chairman of the Pacific Fire and Marine Insurance Co. and director of many other companies. From 1862 to 1865 he had traded on his own, living at Birchgrove House in Balmain, with his brother, Octavius, and a cousin, Herbert, whose firm was Montefiore & Montefiore. In 1866, he joined them in Montefiores & Te Kloot but, in 1867, with S.A. Joseph, he established Montefiore, Joseph & Co. Montefiore was fascinated by political economy. In his pamphlet, *A Few Words upon the Finance of New South Wales, addressed to the members of the First Parliament*, he advocated a tax on unproductive land to encourage farming, reduce land speculation and provide revenue; he also recommended a central or national bank and a railway from Sydney to Melbourne. In 1861 he published *Catechism of the Rudiments of Political Economy*, ‘an unanswerable defence’ of free trade. In 1874 Montefiore was appointed to the Legislative Council on Henry Parkes’s recommendation. A member of the Jewish congregation from his arrival in the colony, Montefiore had advocated the claims of the Jewish community for a share in state aid to religion in 1845; and, in 1868, he secured official recognition by the Council of Education of the Sydney Hebrew Certified Denominational School. In 1876, after a farewell banquet organized by the Chamber of Commerce, Montefiore returned to London where he was a director of the Queensland National Bank and the Queensland Investment and Land Mortgage Co. In 1880 he served on the London Commission for the Sydney International Exhibition. A fellow of the Royal Colonial Institute from 1877, Montefiore died on 24 January 1885.

“On my arrival in Australia,” said Isaac Nathan, “I felt anxious, for the honour, pride and glory of musical tradition, to make myself acquainted with the characteristic peculiarities of the native aboriginal airs.” (Ibid) He initiated a study of Aboriginal musical practice, collecting music, both personally and from certain missionaries. In due course, he began to produce a series of *Australian Melodies*. Of these, the best known is *Koorinda Braia* (1842). But the most ambitious, “according to Nathan, is “*The Aboriginal Father – A Native Song of the Maneroo Tribe ... The melody, as sung by the Aborigenes* (sic), *put into rhythm, and harmonized with appropriate symphonies and accompaniments.*” (Quoted by YOUNG, Percy M. in his review of “*A Selection of Hebrew Melodies Ancient and Modern by Isaac Nathan and Lord Byron*” by Frederick Burwick & Paul Douglas *Music & Letters* Vol. 71 No. 1 – Feb. 1990 Oxford University Press) And so the pattern of the *Hebrew Melodies* was repeated. This time, in the poet’s role, we have Mrs Eliza Harrington Dunlop instead of Lord Byron. She supplied lyrics for Nathan’s melodies, including some based, it was claimed, on Aboriginal folksongs. Mrs. Dunlop’s husband was a police magistrate and a Protector of Aborigines on the Wollombi and, presumably, this gave some suggestion of authority in the matter.

Nathan was not the first to incorporate Aboriginal music into a European tradition. In 1834 the Czech naturalist, John Lhotsky, had published a collection of songs “of the Women of the Menero (sic) Tribe Near the Australian Alps arranged with the assistance of several Musical Gentlemen for the Voice and Pianoforte.” Nathan was decidedly unimpressed by Lhotsky, describing one of his melodies as

*“deformed and mutilated by false rhythm ... false basses and false harmony ...”* Nathan was not writing as an ethnologically minded purist. As he relates (in *The Southern Euphrosyne*) when he had a chance to hear this melody actually sung by one of the ‘Maneroo’ (sic) tribe, he at once *“discovered the key to its latent rhythm, and excellent scope for good basses, rich transitions, and progressions of harmony.”* According to Roger Covell, *“examination of the Aboriginal melodies in Nathan’s transcriptions and arrangements gives these last phrases a rather ominous ring. Precisely because he was more accomplished than most of the colonial musicians who had preceded him, he could be more industrious in producing a genteel travesty of traditional chant.”* (COVELL, Roger: **AUSTRALIA’S MUSIC Sun Books 1967**) In the ‘versifying’ of the words and the addition of harmonies and rhythmic strictures, the original music was obscured. The result is a set of songs, put into modern rhythm and harmonized as solos, quartettes, etc., that are typical of the nineteenth century genre.

*“Nothing of this is personally disgraceful to Isaac Nathan,”* writes Roger Covell. *“It is hard to think of any other musician of his time who would have done at all better in transcribing Aboriginal calls or melodies for a European or European derived society.”* (Ibid) Nathan’s song, *The Aboriginal Mother* – a lament inspired by the notorious 1838 Myall Creek massacre of Aborigines in NSW – shows an unusual sympathy with the Aborigines for that time; and Nathan’s commemoration of the ‘koo-ee’ (now coo-ee) deserves some notice. He claimed to have spent some time in noting and comparing these calls, which were originally the property of the Aborigines and were later adopted by European settlers as a practical means of making their position or finding friends in lonely bush country.

His *Australian Melodies*, together with an account of aboriginal customs, and an affirmation of his belief in the aptitude for learning among Aborigines, all became part of Isaac Nathan’s amazing compilation, *The Southern Euphrosyne and Australian Miscellany*, published in 1849 in both London and Sydney. The Greek goddess, Euphrosyne, was one of the three Graces, daughters of Zeus, who dispensed joy and gentleness. The book’s sub-title accurately describes the curious juxtaposition of material, including both musical components and embittered details of Nathan’s personal affairs. There is a strong Jewish flavour that indicates *“his orthodox Jewish education, his training under Dr. Lyon at Cambridge, still more the Hebrew tales he had learned at his father’s knee, were never forgotten.”* (MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**) Catherine Mackerras calls the book *“revealing and concealing; a sad book, the book of a disappointed and embittered man, whose passions still burned within him as in his youth.”* (Ibid)

Despite all his difficulties and complaints, the years 1846 to 1856 were relatively prosperous for Isaac Nathan. He taught many pupils, among them some of Sydney’s leading professional singers. His artistic prestige stood high after the Leichhardt episode and the staging of *Don John of Austria*. In 1850 he bought five acres at the first subdivision of Randwick and, in 1853, he built Byron Lodge, *“an elegant five-room dwelling complete with stabling for ten horses and a double coach house”* (Ibid); and wide verandahs on all sides in the colonial style. The three children of Nathan’s old age, Henry Lynd, Una and Walter Byron, were still in the nursery when Byron Lodge was built. Nathan took a great interest in local civic affairs. His son, Temple Nathan, was the secretary of the committee formed to supervise the eight miles of road, leading to Randwick from the waterworks, Sydney’s first water supply, known as ‘Busby’s Bore’. It drew its water from Randwick and the road began at what is now Centennial Park. In 1859, when Randwick became a municipality, Nathan became a patron of the Randwick Orphanage, built in 1856, for which he organized a huge concert at the Royal Victoria. Sir Thomas Mitchell, the Surveyor-General, owned land in Randwick and he wrote some verses *“on the arrival in Australia of steamers from Suez and San Francisco and in anticipation of the telegraph cable.”* Nathan set these verses to music and, at the bottom of the uncompleted manuscript, copied in Nathan’s own beautiful script, Sir Thomas has written: *“Byron’s Nathan set my verse to music, he of the Hebrew Melodies. A pity ‘tis no more.”* (Quoted by MACKERRAS, Catherine: **THE HEBREW MELODIST Currawong Publishing Co. 1963**)

When the first elections for Responsible Government were held in New South Wales, in 1856, Nathan responded to a request that he should stand for Parliament in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* as follows: “*1st, I have neither the ambition to become a member nor the inclination to incur the expense of its attainment; 2nd, my political notions are so firmly fixed and determined that I would not have any man indulge the crotchet in his head that I would pledge myself to any particular party ... I bar every attempt to force me into a promise to perform a solo or take part in canon, fugue or chorus of any composition not in unison with my theatrical notions of harmony and time.*”

Sadly, the building of Byron Lodge had been a financial undertaking beyond Nathan’s resources. The house had to be sold (it was pulled down in 1912) and a last move was made to 442 Pitt Street. Though Isaac Nathan helped organize the Musical Festival in honour of the opening of the Great Hall of the University, he took little active part in it. His last composition, *A Song to Freedom*, was sent through the Governor, Sir John Young, as a gift to Queen Victoria. But before it had reached the royal presence, Nathan’s extraordinary life came to an abrupt end, at about five o’clock, on the afternoon of January 15, 1864, just after he had alighted from Sydney’s first horse-drawn tram (the ‘*Young Australia*’).

His death was reported in *The London Jewish Chronicle* as follows: “*Mr. Nathan was a passenger by No. 2 tramway car... (he) alighted from the car at the southern end, but before he got clear of the rails the car moved onwards ... he was thus whirled round by the sudden motion of the carriage and his body was brought under the front wheel.*” The accident occurred at the intersection of Pitt and Goulburn Streets, within a hundred metres of his home. He was Australia’s (indeed. the southern hemisphere’s) first victim of the horse-drawn tram. His children had him buried privately in the churchyard of St Stephen’s, Camperdown. His wife, Henrietta, lived on until 1898.

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