

## STANFORDIAN THOUGHTS

A periodical series of reflections on recorded and unrecorded works by Stanford  
by Christopher Howell

### 25. “East to West” in Chicago and Cincinnati

The published vocal score of Stanford’s Ode “East to West”, op. 52, set to a specially written poem by Algernon Charles Swinburne, bears the impressive legend “Dedicated to the President and People of the United States of America, January 1893”.

It was first performed at the Royal Albert Hall by the Royal Choral Society under Sir Joseph Barnby on 10 May 1893. Stanford himself conducted a further performance at a notable Cambridge University University Society concert on 12 June 1893, when it was to follow works by Bruch, Saint-Saëns, Boïto, Tchaikovsky and Grieg, played or conducted by the composers, who would receive doctorates *honoris causa*, though illness prevented Grieg from attending. The programme note for “East to West” announced that “It will be one of the most important of the English works performed at the Chicago Exhibition this year”<sup>1</sup>. Presumably the programme for the London première said something similar, since Bernard Shaw was clearly aware of the aspirations of both poet and composer:

NOVELLO'S ORIGINAL OCTAVO EDITION.

# EAST TO WEST

AN ODE

BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

SET TO MUSIC FOR CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA

BY

CHARLES VILLIERS STANFORD.

(Op. 52.)

THE PIANOFORTE ARRANGEMENT BY THE COMPOSER.

PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

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*In the evening, at the Albert Hall, we had Stanford’s setting of Swinburne’s Exhibition Ode entitled East to West – Putney to Chicago. As a rule, exhibition art is not high art ...*

*Consequently Professor Stanford, if he had composed a particularly bad ode, might have pleaded that this is just what a great composer invariably does on such occasions. However, as it happens, the apology is not needed. The two qualities needed for a good Chicago ode are tunefulness and bounce; and there is an allowance of both in East to West, though it is certainly stinted by the*

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Gerald Norris: *Stanford, the Cambridge Jubilee and Tchaikovsky*, David & Charles 1980, p. 396.

*professorism which is Stanford's bane. ... But the native audacity of the composer asserts itself more freely than in any of his recent compositions; and the entire welcomeness of the change was proved by a tremendous ovation at the end of the performance ...*<sup>2</sup>

For as long as Stanford was deemed unworthy of proper attention, it was assumed that "East to West" was commissioned by the Chicago Columbian Exhibition and duly performed there. However, when Frederick Hudson, aided by colleagues in Chicago, searched for details, no trace of a performance was found, though curiously, vocal scores and string parts existed in the library of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Of possible relevance was the fact that the orchestra for the Exhibition was disbanded, and the director Theodore Thomas dismissed, about a month before the end<sup>3</sup>. Smith<sup>4</sup> and Rodmell<sup>5</sup> both refer to Hudson's "extensive enquiries" and Smith concludes that the work had no subsequent performance after these two, but Dibble, in a footnote, tells us that

DEDICATED TO  
THE PRESIDENT AND PEOPLE  
OF  
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.  
  
January, 1898.

*Stanford, a member of the British committee for the Chicago Exhibition, composed East to West for performance at the Exhibition later in 1893. It appears, however, that, due to the 'musical fiasco' at the World's Fair, which led to the dismissal of the musical director of the Bureau, Theodore Thomas, and the subsequent disbanding of the orchestra, Stanford's piece was not given (see Musical Times 34 (1893), 719). Thomas did, however, honour his promise by conducting the ode at the Biennial Music Festival in Cincinnati in May 1900<sup>6</sup>.*

Could I discover more about this Cincinnati performance? At first, it seemed not. The second volume of Theodore Thomas's autobiography<sup>7</sup> is a list of all his concert programmes. Thomas was conductor of the biennial Cincinnati May Festival from 1873 to 1904. By some editorial error, the supposedly complete list of programmes jumps from the 13<sup>th</sup> Festival, in 1898, to the 15<sup>th</sup>, in 1902. Likewise, in the list of works of which Thomas gave the American premiere, the only one by Stanford is the Serenade in G (New York, 19 January 1884). Did Thomas not conduct the 1900 Festival?

Curiously, the report in "The Musical Critic"<sup>8</sup> mentions the chorus master and also the soloists (not needed for "East to West") but not Thomas. For that matter, it does not specifically state that the Stanford "Ode" performed was "East to West".:

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Shaw: *Music in London, 1890-1894*, Vol. II, Constable 1932, pp. 309-10.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Hudson, *A New Catalogue of the Works of Charles Villiers Stanford 1852-1924, compiled from the original sources*. Typescript, 1994, A15a. The link to a PDF copy which I have given in previous articles seems no longer to work.

<sup>4</sup> Peter John Smith (2008), *The Choral Music of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) and the Press c.1875-1925*. Masters Thesis, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2542/>, pp. 155-6.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Rodmell, *Charles Villiers Stanford*, Ashgate 2002, p.171.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Dibble, *Charles Villiers Stanford, Man and Musician*, OUP 2002, p.249.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Thomas, *A Musical Autobiography*, ed. George P. Upton, 2 vols, A.C. McClurg & Co., Chicago 1905.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. III, no. 8, June 1900, p. 12.

*The board of directors set out in the determination to make the chorus a success so far as that was possible and their efforts were rewarded. ... The chorus number a little over 400 voices ... under Mr. Glover's direction, everything was done to bring together the right kind of material. The most successful works were "St. Paul", the Stanford ode and the Brahms Requiem.*

The critic did feel, however, that an orchestra of 106 was too large for the choral items. Seventy to seventy-five, he felt, would be ideal.

Nevertheless, according to Thomas's widow, "in spite of the warnings of nature", he did conduct the festival<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, the copious programme booklet for the 14<sup>th</sup> May Festival can be viewed online at the Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library<sup>10</sup> and Theodore Thomas is clearly named as Musical Director, with Edwin W. Glover as Chorus Conductor. "East to West" opened the second concert, on 9<sup>th</sup> May, and the booklet silences any remaining doubts as to a performance at the 1893 Chicago Festival:

*At the approach of the American Centennial Celebration, Professor Stanford, having conceived the plan of offering a musical tribute for the occasion, requested Mr. Algernon Charles Swinburne to furnish a poem for this purpose. The result was the ode, East to West ... Although intended for production at the Chicago Columbian Exposition, Mr. Stanford's East to West was not brought out on that occasion. Its only performance previous to the present one was given by the London Royal Choral Society, on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1893, at Royal Albert Hall.*

The writer is evidently unaware of the Cambridge performance but we may assume that, with regard to the work's American history, he is on safe ground.

The "Musical Courier" of May 1900 had a fairly detailed article on the festival. As was the custom in those days, programmes were long. The concert began with Stanford's ode<sup>11</sup>, after which Marcella Sembrich sang "With Verdure Clad" from Haydn's "Creation". Then came Schubert's "Unfinished" symphony and the first part ended with Brahms's Alto Rhapsody, in which the

soloist was Ernestine Schumann-Heink. After the interval, the same soloists were joined by Ben Davies and David Bispham for a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The reporter offered a fairly favourable assessment of "East to West". He, too, queried the relative sizes of choir and orchestra:

*The ode is not difficult, nothing in it technically is supremely taxing for the chorus, but its three parts, closely strung together, each represent a different theme and character of treatment. It was by no means an easy task to give the proper expression and coloring to these, and it was done well*

CINCINNATI, May 11, 1900.	
The second Festival concert on Wednesday night offered the following program:	
Ode, East to West.....	Stanford
Chorus, orchestra and organ.	
Aria, With Verdure Clad (The Creation).....	Haydn
Madame Sembrich.	
Symphony, B minor —unfinished.....	Schubert
Rhapsody, Op. 53.....	Brahms
Madame Schumann-Heink.	
Chorus of men and orchestra.	
Symphony No. 9, D minor.....	Beethoven
Madame Sembrich, Madame Schumann-Heink, Ben Davies, David Bispham.	
Chorus and orchestra.	

<sup>99</sup> Rose Fay Thomas, *Memoirs of Theodore Thomas*, Moffatt, Yard and Company, New York, 1911, pp. 480-1.

<sup>10</sup> <https://digital.cincinnati.org/digital/collection/p16998coll21/id/58422>, retrieved 19 June 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Stanford estimated a timing of ten minutes, in a letter to Tchaikovsky dated 8 February 1893 and quoted in Norris, *ibid.* p. 272. At that time, the work had not yet been performed. If the metronome marks in the vocal score, which seem broad but plausible, were to be followed, a timing of almost fifteen minutes is more likely.

*by the chorus. The Festival chorus this year represents, above all else, a well sustained musical quality of tone. The attack was prompt and the tone volume adequate. The basses made up the strongest division, and they sang the crescendos and fortissimo of the third part with magnificent vigor. While the tenors were scarcely heard, it ought to be said to their credit that this was no fault of theirs. In proportion to their numbers their tone volume was all that could be asked for, and they represented quality as well. But what can a body of fifty-four tenors do against the balance of the chorus, with an orchestra of 106 men swelling into a climax of fortissimo?*

What, indeed? Given that a putative modern performance might have an orchestra not that much smaller, but would be lucky to have a choir of between a quarter and half the Cincinnati's four hundred, we would be left guessing as to the sheer impact of the rendering our forebears heard.

It seems to have been the choir's day, at least in the eyes of this critic. The Brahms Rhapsody received no comment beyond the fact that it was "given its first Festival performance", the Haydn aria, sung by Sembrich, was "entirely unsuited to her style" and the Schubert "was played by the orchestra with fine finish, but with little regard to dramatic contrasts and interpretative force". Comment on the Beethoven was limited to praise for the chorus, but the following should stop us in our tracks:

*When it was given four years ago the chorus, even though the last movement was transposed a tone lower – to C – was a good deal short of doing it justice.*

The mind boggles. Thomas, by the way, brought his own Thomas Orchestra with him, later renamed the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, though the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra was already in existence and is today the Festival's resident orchestra. This explains the existence of vocal scores and string parts in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra library.

Thus the American première of "East to West". I have not found mention of any further performance. Is it possible to find more about the "fiasco" in Chicago?

Firstly, as regards Dibble's statement that Stanford was on the "British committee" of the Chicago exhibition, I do not doubt that he could quote chapter and verse, but he does not and, with the limited resources available to me<sup>12</sup>, I have found no further reference. It would be interesting to know who else was on this Committee. What does emerge is a fairly large involvement of Sir Alexander Mackenzie, on which the Musical Times kept its readers well informed, beginning in October 1892:

*It is now settled that Dr. A. C. Mackenzie will go to Chicago in September next "to represent English music by conducting performances of his own compositions". As at present arranged, he will conduct three performances, but of course developments may take place<sup>13</sup>.*

One healthy development might have been a realization that Mackenzie was a Scot, not an Englishman. Another was reported elsewhere on the same page.

*Dr. Mackenzie is rapidly completing the score of his "Bethlehem", which is to be produced at the Chicago Exhibition in September next.*

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<sup>12</sup> Issues of the Musical Times covering the period available online with search function; a complete run of microfilm copies of the Chicago Daily and Sunday Tribune available at the Internet Archive, though the text recognition search function is not entirely reliable; general Google searches which sometimes turn up useful leads.

<sup>13</sup> Musical Times, 1 October 1892, p. 597,

The story continued in the next issue:

*In our last issue we announced Dr. Mackenzie's acceptance of an invitation to conduct a certain number of Concerts at the Chicago Exhibition of 1893. The indefatigable trio consisting the "Bureau of Music" – Messrs. Theodore Thomas (Musical Director), William L. Tomlins (Choral Director), and G. H. Wilson (Secretary) – had, however, also sent invitations to a number of other eminent composers of various nationalities, and several have since replied, among them Brahms and Joachim, who, with much regret, decline – mainly, it would seem, on account of distance. Saint-Saëns accepts, and will not only conduct, but play, several of his own compositions<sup>14</sup>.*

#### EAST TO WEST.

##### I.

SUNSET smiles on sunrise: east and west are one,  
Face to face in heaven before the sovereign sun.  
From the springs of the dawn everlasting a glory  
renews and transfigures the west,  
From the depths of the sunset a light as of morning  
enkindles the broad sea's breast,  
And the lands and the skies and the waters are glad  
of the day's and the night's work done.

##### II.

Child of dawn, and regent on the world-wide sea,  
England smiles on Europe, fair as dawn and free.  
Not the waters that gird her are purer, nor mightier  
the winds that her waters know.  
But America, daughter and sister of England, is  
praised of them, far as they flow:  
Atlantic responds to Pacific the praise of her days  
that have been and shall be.

##### III.

So from England westward let the watchword fly,  
So for England eastward let the seas reply;  
Praise, honour, and love everlasting be sent on the  
wind's wings, westward and east,  
That the pride of the past and the pride of the future  
may mingle as friends at feast,  
And the sons of the lords of the world-wide seas be  
one till the world's life die.

A. C. SWINBURNE.

*programmes of their own choral and instrumental works in both Festival Hall and Music Hall. Mr. Saint-Saëns will also appear as organist, and in chamber concerts<sup>16</sup>.*

"East to West" is mentioned for the first time in February 1893, but without reference to the Chicago Exhibition.

*We have much gratification in placing before our readers, by the courtesy of Mr. Algernon Charles Swinburne, the following poem, written at the request of Professor Villiers Stanford, and intended as an expression of the brotherhood which unites the Old World and the New. Professor Stanford has already set the Ode to music, and the work will shortly be published by Messrs. Novello and Co. [The poem is then printed in full]<sup>15</sup>.*

A month later, the presence of Mackenzie and Saint-Saëns was confirmed:

*The following paragraph is official, with reference to musical arrangements for the Chicago Exhibition:- September: During this month Mr. Camille Saint-Saëns, of Paris, and Dr. A. C. Mackenzie, of England [sic!], will visit the Exposition, conducting several*

The June issue dedicated more than a page to news of the Chicago Exhibition, detailing the programmes given to date. Turning to September, Saint-Saëns' multi-role presence is again confirmed, together with that of Mackenzie:

*Concerts under the direction of Dr. Mackenzie will be given during a period of two weeks from Monday, September 11<sup>th</sup>. The programmes will include a first performance of his new oratorio "Bethlehem"<sup>17</sup>.*

<sup>14</sup> Musical Times, 1 November 1892, p. 658.

<sup>15</sup> Musical Times, 1 February 1893, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Musical Times, 1 March 1893, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Musical Times, 1 June 1893, p. 329.

Not only is “East to West” not mentioned, but elsewhere in the same issue the Royal Albert Hall première of the Ode is favourably reviewed without any suggestion that it was intended for Chicago or that it might be performed there in September<sup>18</sup>.

Mackenzie’s “Bethlehem” was originally intended for the 1892 Gloucester Festival, but was not completed in time. This seems to have been due to a failure by the librettist Joseph Bennett to deliver the text sufficiently in advance for Mackenzie to do a decent job with the music, though both parties blamed each other so vituperatively that they did not collaborate again for another fifteen years<sup>19</sup>. Mackenzie did have some thought of “pimping it out in Chicago”<sup>20</sup>, but in the end he had to wait until 12 April 1894 for a performance, when Barnby conducted it in the Royal Albert Hall.

Mackenzie had a further role. While the leading American composers were asked to indicate which of their works they wished to have included, and two received a specific commission, others were invited to submit scores:

*All scores received before October 15, 1892, will be submitted to the following committee: Sir Alexander C. Mackenzie, London; Asgar Hamerick, Baltimore; B. J. Lang, Boston; William L. Tomlins and Theodore Thomas, Chicago. The favourable recommendation of this committee will be final and will insure performance<sup>21</sup>.*

Twenty-one works were submitted and seven selected.

Thus far, so good. Unfortunately, Thomas’s extremely ambitious plan, which practically offered a survey of western music to date, was proving “caviar to the general” and the organizers, facing financial loss, demanded that something more popular be put in its place<sup>22</sup>. Thomas’s strong response, and subsequent resignation, did not entirely surprise the Musical Times commentator:

*In resigning his post as Musical Director at the Chicago Exhibition, Mr. Theodore Thomas wrote: “The reduction of expenses of the Fair has obliged the bureau to cancel all the engagements made with foreign and American artists and musical organizations and to abandon all future festival performances, thus leaving very little of the original scheme except the bands and the Exposition orchestra, with which are giving every day popular and symphony concerts. My suggestion is, therefore, since so large a portion of the bureau’s scheme has been cut away, that, for the remainder of the Fair, music shall not figure as an art at all, but be treated entirely on the basis of an amusement. More of this class of music is undoubtedly needed at the Fair, and the cheapest way to get it is to divide our two fine bands into four small ones for open air concerts, and our Exposition orchestra into two small orchestras, which can play such light selections as will please the shifting crowds in the buildings and amuse them.” So this is the end! But it might have been, and was, anticipated. We in London know from experience that a sight-seeing crowd will not pay to hear artistic music<sup>23</sup>.*

<sup>18</sup> Musical Times, 1 June 1893, p. 341.

<sup>19</sup> The story is told in Duncan James Barker, *The Music of Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie (1847-1935), a Critical Study*, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1441/>, pp.114-116.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Samuel Aitken, 20 May 1892, quoted in Barker, *ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> Rose Fay Thomas, *ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>22</sup> For detailed accounts see Theodore Thomas, *ibid.*, pp. 193-201 and (especially) Rose Fay Thomas, *ibid.*, pp. 386-421

<sup>23</sup> Musical Times, 1 September 1893, p. 536.

So was it a fiasco or a noble failure? The Musical Times reported, with some bemusement, an article in the Chicago Indicator that, siding perhaps with the “shifting crowds”, thought the former:

*American journalists are nothing if not forcible. A recent article in the Chicago Indicator, professing to sum up the case of the musical fiasco in the World's Fair, exemplifies this in a most amusing manner. It informs the world that the cause of failure was “the downright stupidity and arrogance of the musical director of the Bureau, Theodore Thomas”. ... “He is one of the kind of men,” says the Indicator, “that believe no one should have the temerity to criticize or suggest”. ... “The Bureau of Music became an eyesore. It seemed to be organized chiefly for the benefit of Director Thomas and Secretary Wilson. Thomas was defiant and arrogant. He shook his fist at the whole music trade, and the music trade turned about and, like a python, crushed Mr. Thomas in a twinkling.” ... “That was the beginning of his humiliation”<sup>24</sup>.*

Ironically, according to Rose Fay Thomas, who quotes convincing figures<sup>25</sup>, at about the time Thomas left, the public began to flock to the Exhibition and the financial tide turned, allowing them to finish with a bumper surplus. But the damage had been done.

And all this without a mention of Stanford or “East to West”. Fay Thomas tells us that the cancelled music events were:

- I. *A series of Symphony concerts, to include several Wagner programmes, and the Ninth Symphony, under the conductorship of Hans Richter.*
- II. *A series of concerts under the conductorship of Sir Alexander Mackenzie of London, including a performance of his Oratorio, “Bethlehem”, with Lillian Nordica and Ben Davies as soloists.*
- III. *A three weeks’ series of concerts under the conductorship of Saint-Saëns, including his best choral and orchestral works<sup>26</sup>.*

So was “East to West” to be included among these? Presumably, Saint-Saëns’s programmes would have consisted entirely of his own work, though he rather liked Stanford’s Ode when he heard it at Cambridge, finding it “not elaborated but brilliant, and written by a master-hand, which is all we have any right to expect from an ‘oeuvre de circonstance’.<sup>27</sup>” All reports in the Musical Times indicated that Mackenzie, too, would have conducted only his own works. However, he enjoyed generally good relations with Stanford and on other occasions proved more than willing to conduct music by his British contemporaries, so perhaps Stanford had persuaded him to insert the Ode in one of his programmes. Richter, too, had given many of Stanford’s works in England. They eventually fell out, though that came later. The signs are that “East to West” was not a specific commission but that Stanford (possibly irked at Mackenzie having been chosen instead of himself) wrote it anyway and got some sort of promise out of Richter or (more likely) Mackenzie, presumably with Thomas’s knowledge and approval. If the exact programmes to be directed by these two musicians had been defined by the time of their cancellation, no information seems to have reached the press.

That, so far as I can trace it, is the history of “East to West” in America. A few things remain to be said about the work itself.

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<sup>24</sup> Musical Times, 1 December 1893, p. 719.

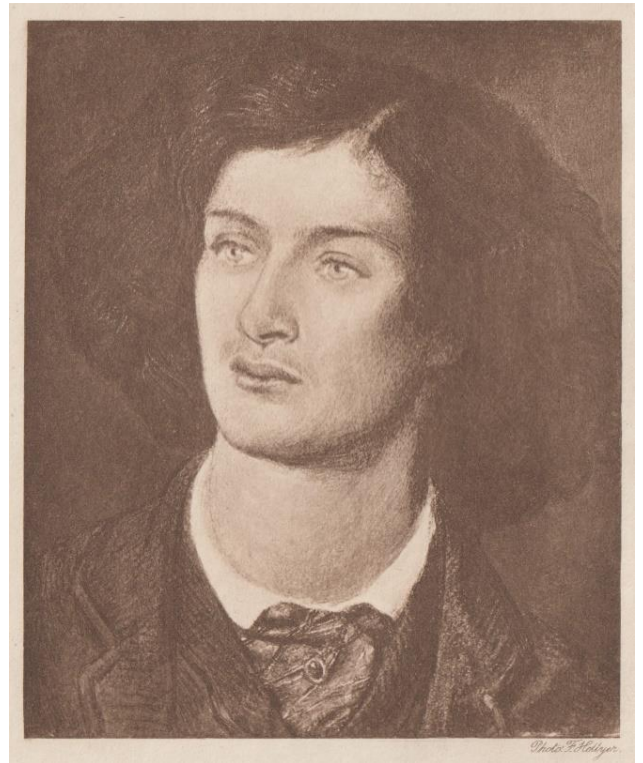
<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Smith, *ibid.*, p. 156.



Firstly the poem. The obvious person for Stanford to go to would have been Tennyson, for so many years the esteemed Poet Laureate and an early friend to Stanford. But Tennyson had died in 1892 and the post of Poet Laureate was as yet vacant. By general consent, the only man with the artistic credentials to succeed him was Swinburne<sup>28</sup>, a man whose morals did not amuse Queen Victoria. So things remained in abeyance until the gap was stopped, rather badly, by the appointment of Alfred Austin in 1896. Stanford's choice of Swinburne implies that, if he had had any say in the matter, the poet's lifestyle would not have been an issue. By having the poem published in the *Musical Times* prior to a performance of the music, he was practically nailing his flag to the Swinburne mast, even surreptitiously encouraging Swinburne to display his credentials. And it must be said that both men showed that they could meet official requirements without compromising their lyrical vein. "East to West" is a well-constructed, well-varied piece in three connected movements, with the opening theme returning at strategic moments. Shaw and Saint-Saëns between them got it about right, but maybe underestimated the genuine poetry that emerges in the slow central section. There are other Stanford works still awaiting modern performance and/or recording that might have priority, but the composer's growing reputation would not suffer from a performance of "East to West".



**Christopher Howell © 2024**

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<sup>28</sup> The portrait of Swinburne, derived from that by D. G. Rossetti, appeared in *Selections from the Poetical Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, Catto & Windus 1910.