

Charles Godfrey Jnr. - the insult that lasted nine years

Gavin Holman, 4 April 2021

Charles Godfrey Jnr. (1839-1919) was the son of Charles Godfrey Snr. (1790-1863), the well-known bandmaster of the Coldstream Guards Band from 1825 to his death in 1863. He had equally notable brothers in Daniel Godfrey (1831-1903) - bandmaster of the Grenadier Guards from 1856 for forty years, also a noted composer of marches and waltzes; and Adolphus Godfrey (1837-1882), known as "Fred", who took over from his father as bandmaster of the Coldstream Guards in 1863, until 1880, also an accomplished arranger of music for military bands.



Charles Godfrey Jnr., as a schoolboy, played with his father's orchestra at the Royal Surrey Zoological Gardens, went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music, and he played the clarinet in Jullien's orchestra. In 1860 he became bandmaster of the Scots Fusiliers, going on to be the bandmaster of the Royal Horse Guards from 1868 to 1904. He was a prolific arranger for military and brass bands, and he adjudicated many brass band contests in his career.

His arrangements of selections of classical and operatic music for brass band were particularly popular with audiences and bands alike. These were often selected as test pieces for many brass band competitions and, in particular, the British Open Brass Band Championships, held each year in September, where one of his arrangements was the test piece each year from 1872 to 1923 (with the exception of 1922).

At the British Open contest on Monday 3 September 1888, Charles Godfrey Jnr. was one of the three adjudicators judging the 16 bands who competed, out of the 21 that had entered; the others being J. Kendrick Pyne and George Miller. The test piece that day was Godfrey's arrangement of Richard Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

The contest proceeded as usual, with the bands drawing an order to play, unknown to the judges, who were hidden from sight behind screens, thus ensuring a fair adjudication on musical merit with no bias (conscious or unconscious) from the three "men in the box".

Leeds Forge Band took the stage first, conducted by Edwin Swift, and the others followed apace, concluding with Todmorden Old Band, conducted by Edwin Swift again. It was not unusual for professional conductors to lead several bands at a contest,

particularly for the higher-ranked bands and competitions – Edwin Swift led three of the bands that day; John Gladney, three; and Alexander Owen, five.

It was only when the results were announced that matters took an unsavoury turn. Wyke Temperance Band took first place, winning £30, a trombone, and a cornet. Black Dyke Mills Band were second, winning £25 and a cornet. Todmorden Old Band were third, winning £20 and a baritone. Wyke Old Band were fourth, winning £12. Oldham Rifles Band were fifth, winning £8. The last prize-winning band, Rochdale Amateur Band, were sixth, winning £5.

Seeing the first four prizes being taken by Yorkshire bands, some of the audience showed their dissatisfaction of this result “presumably friends of those who were not successful” – and the judges were “subjected to some hustling” as they left the room. Charles Godfrey is reported to have remarked that “... he had officiated at these contests for 17 years, and this was the first time he had been subjected to such treatment”.

An account from the Manchester Guardian in the following days:

“As soon as the contest had concluded the greatest excitement prevailed in the hall. The decision of the judges, however, was not long delayed. Mr. Godfrey announced their decision. ... It was evident that the judges' decision did not meet with general approval when announced to the audience which crowded the great hall. And while we have the greatest respect for the abilities of the gentlemen who acted as judges on this occasion, and are fully sensible of the difficult and onerous character of their duties, we do not wonder that their awards were received with some surprise. That the Besses-o'-th'-Barn Band was not awarded the first prize was a surprise to many - ourselves included; but that it should not even have been placed amongst the first six was inexplicable.”

Sadly, only the judges' remarks for the prize-winning bands were published in the *Brass Band News*, of October 1888, so any comparison with the remarks of the aggrieved bands' performances is not possible. A letter from “Crochet”, in that same issue of *Brass Band News*, states:

“I have been an attendee at the Belle Vue Brass Band Contests for the last 30 years, and as a musician (professional) for many years, I have taken great interest in the above contests, but, to my mind, I never was more surprised at any decision of judges than that given on this occasion. I sat and listened, along with a brother professional, for over five hours, each with conductor's copies, and we decided that by far the best performance was that rendered by the Besses-o'-th'-Barn Band. And what could induce the judges to ignore the performance of this band to me and many others is enveloped in mystery.”

Another correspondent, “The Professor”, from Skipton, makes a number of points in his letter:

“Will you allow me a little space to enter a protest against the disgusting exhibition of brutality and ignorance by the disappointed bands or their hot-headed followers at Belle Vue? Are we to revert to the primitive style of judging contests? Are the

awards to be placed in the hands of the audience? It seems that this is what is desired by the fools alluded to above. I have heard a little whisper, and I hope it is true, that if Messrs. Jennison can find out which particular band or bands were the chief offenders, they never allow them to compete at Belle Vue again. Bravo! say I. One or two of the disappointed bands are cheering themselves with what one or two judges have told them, viz., "Can't understand it; you ought to have been first or second," &c. I would remind these gentlemen (judges) of Pope's line - Fools rush in where angels fear to tread — for I know that neither of them can measure against any one of the Belle Vue adjudicators as musicians. And, moreover, I have heard each of these meddling gents "cursed most heartily" as unjust judges by the very men they were flattering. I am as certain as I write this that if the most perfect musician of all time, Mozart, was to rise from his grave to adjudicate this contest he would not satisfy all. Ridiculous exaggeration is what is practiced all round. The music written is not good enough, it must be improved until the composer himself would hardly know it. I never heard a band at Belle Vue playing a *ff* movement, but my taste and good sense revolts against it. They say it is not overblowing. If it is not overblowing, then I am sure that it is impossible to overblow, for each man blows as hard as he possibly can. It is painful to see the blowers gasping like half-strangled men. And the men who never heard the music in its original place, and know nothing of the intentions of the composer, set themselves up as judges of judges. However, I have protested and will not say much more. I hope Mr. Godfrey will not, in his disgust, resolve to hold himself aloof from Belle Vue, but I do hope that he will stipulate that, if anyone can bring home to any band or bands the charge of creating the uproar that they shall never more be allowed to compete. P.S. We are told how the people of Athens got tired of hearing one of their rulers termed "The Just," and so murdered him. Is Mr. Godfrey *too just* for the self-sufficient people I have been speaking of?"

Other newspaper reports stated:

"A slight disturbance took place at the close."

"The judges were hissed and hooted, and as they left the large hall in which the contest took place, attempts were made to subject them to rough usage. Mr Godfrey found it necessary to secure the protection of a police constable. The judges were naturally incensed at such conduct, which, if repeated, may tend to prevent their attendance at future contests."

A contemporary assessment of Godfrey's selection arrangement of the Flying Dutchman indicates the pitfalls that some bands may well have encountered:

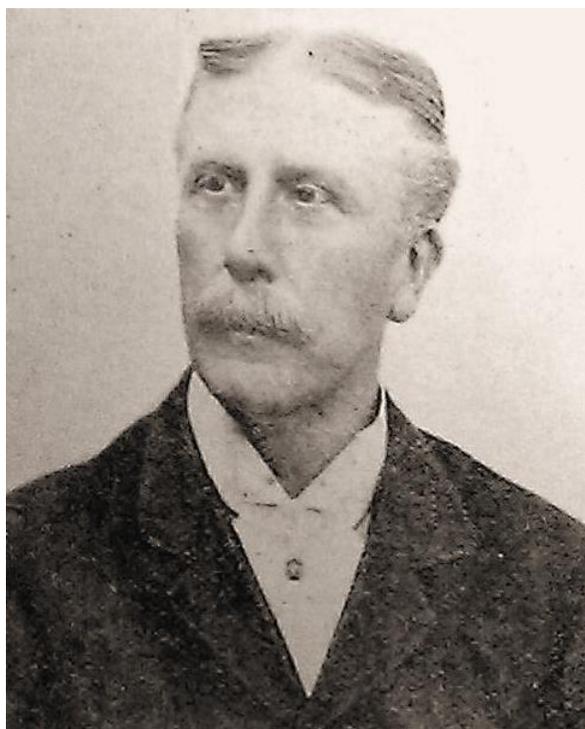
"Copies of the arrangement were supplied to the competing bands some weeks ago. In preparing this selection Mr. Godfrey had an eye to testing the artistic skill of the performers rather than their executive ability, but an inspection of the score shows that no slight demand was made upon the bandsmen in this latter respect, especially in the case of the bass instruments, not a few of the passages for which required both delicate and rapid treatment. It is not surprising, therefore, that where weakness was observable in any of the bands it was usually in the trombones and kindred instruments, and this was chiefly to be noted in the few phrases of solo music given to them here and there in the score. The cornets generally came out well, and exhibited nice tone and delicacy of treatment. Taken as a whole, however, the

playing can scarcely be said to be up to the level of the performances at previous competitions, and this probably is to be attributed to the fact that the players were not familiar with Wagner's music, and that it requires a rather different treatment to that of the composers with whose works they are better acquainted. The bands one and all played with precision and made the distinctions between light and shade, but in many cases the distinction was too clear and too sudden, and there was an absence of that artistic playing which Mr. Godfrey had desired to elicit. ... In nearly every case the bandsmen, on mounting the orchestra, dropped their hats and jackets - a practice which, however bad it might look to the spectators, was perhaps permissible considering the heat of the room. The applause was generous, but frequently ill-timed, and many of the audience must have lost some of the finest passages in consequence of the noise made by hundreds of persons entering and leaving. This, however, was unavoidable."

Following this, which clearly upset Godfrey, he announced that he would no longer adjudicate at brass band contests in Lancashire and Yorkshire. This was a promise that he kept for the next nine years - indeed he did not judge any other brass band contests - until he was persuaded to return to the judge's box for the 1897 British Open Contest, at which his arrangement of Rossini's *Moses in Egypt* was the test piece.

He had, however, continued his arrangements for brass bands, despite his rough treatment in Manchester in 1888, and these continued to be selected for the British Open contests even though he was no longer willing to act as a judge.

His relationships with brass band contests obviously now healed, he continued to act as an adjudicator at the British Open and the National Championships through to 1914.



An interesting article appeared in *The Hospital* - a medical journal - of 13 April 1889, following pieces on the diseases caused by too tight lacing of women's bodices, and the benefits, or otherwise, of skimmed milk:

"Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast. So sang the poet, and so all men have believed. But however truly the poet may have spoken in regard to "savage" breasts, it appears quite certain that in "civilised" bosoms the effect of music may be the very opposite of "soothing." The North of England, and particularly the manufacturing districts of West Yorkshire and Lancashire, delight in "contests" of all sorts. "Dog-running" is popular there, and "pigeon flying," and "cockfighting," and, it is to be feared, "pugilism." But the love of fighting shows itself in milder forms, and "contests" of rival brass bands are among the chief pastimes of the summer

season. Music, therefore, in these cases is put to quite a different use from that of "soothing"; it is, in fact, merely an additional method of defying and conquering your enemy. Unhappily, every brass band cannot carry off the "blue riband" of victory. Only one can take first prize; many must always go home without any prize at all. That the North countryman refuses to understand. Like our splendid Peninsular veterans, he never knows when he is beaten. This dogged determination of his to be on the winning side is likely to cost him dear in the immediate future. Mr. Charles Godfrey, so long and so well known as an adjudicator in band contests, declines, it is stated, to act as a "judge" any more, either in Lancashire or Yorkshire, owing to some rough usage he received at Bellevue last year at the hands of disappointed competitors. North country people will not be surprised to hear of the rough usage, however deeply they may regret it. They know the temper of their fellow countrymen all too well. Not very long ago, in another part of the country, it is said to have been quite a common thing for those bands to whom no prize had been awarded to lay prompt hands on the adjudicators and "duck" them in the nearest pond. Of course all this has its amusing side. But membership in a brass band is often of great educational and health value to thousands of men who are cooped up in factories and coalpits five or six days a week, and it is eminently desirable that all possible stimulus shall be given to the men to practise and excel in their work. No stimulus is stronger than that of competition, and no competition is worth anything except that which is adjudicated upon by competent judges. To adopt a course of conduct which drives the best judges from the judgment seat is a death-blow to all excellence. In the interests of a healthy and educational recreation of great value, it may be hoped that Mr. Charles Godfrey will reconsider his decision, and that Lancashire and Yorkshire men will learn to accept defeat with a better grace."

Charles Godfrey's experiences with the unhappy losers at the contest were not the only instances where judges had to make swift exits from the contest ground, and while the emotions and rivalries in band contests remain strong to this day, it is now rare to have any overt or outward displays of displeasure at results – though the cries of "we was robbed" have often echoed in the pubs and band rooms across the land!

The "souvenir" below was reprinted from the *Brass Band News* of 1st September 1888, and it was distributed to attendees at the Belle Vue contest on the day of the British Open that year.

THE 36th ANNUAL BELLE VUE CHAMPION BRASS BAND CONTEST, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1888.

TEST PIECE

THE "FLYING DUTCHMAN."



CHARLES GODFREY.

JOHN GLADNEY.

STORY OF THE OPERA.

ALTHOUGH Wagner, in his later years, would fain disown this child of his early prime, yet "The Flying Dutchman" holds a very high place in the regard of critical lovers of opera, and is always greeted with warmest welcomes whenever it is announced for presentation. The legend is as follows: A Dutch sea-captain, Vanderdecken by name, in trying to sail around the Cape of Good Hope in the teeth of a furious gale, swore that he would keep on sailing for ever, but he would accomplish his purpose. The devil hearing his oath, condemned him to sail on, without aim or purpose, until the Day of Judgment, without hope of release, unless he should find and espouse some maiden who would be faithful until death, and he was to be allowed to go ashore every seven years in search of a bride. The opera opens with the appearance of the Dutchman's ship, with blood red sails, in a harbour on the coast of Norway into which Daland, a Norwegian captain, has just been driven by stress of weather. A term of seven years having just expired, he asks hospitality of Daland, shows him his wealth in his cargo, and is invited to sail to the house of Daland, which is but a few miles distant. Learning that Daland has a daughter, he asks permission to woo her, and Daland, desirous of securing a wealthy son-in-law, consents, and the two ships set sail for Daland's home. The second act opens in Daland's house, with a "Spinning Chorus" by Senta, Daland's daughter, Mary, her former nurse, and a number of Norwegian girls, who are at work with their spinning-wheels. (See "Spinning Chorus" below.) Senta, who has heard the legend of the Flying Dutchman, is fascinated by his portrait, which hangs upon the wall, and in a ballad she recites his sad story. (Opening motive of selection.) Now Erik, Senta's lover, enters and announces the approach of the two ships, and the eager maidens at once prepare food for the sailors who are expected. Erik pleads his suit with Senta, fearing that if he does not secure her hand at once, her father will find a richer husband for her. Senta listens as one who is absorbed in some one far away, and the youth tells her a dream, in which he saw her father bringing the sailor, whose portrait hangs on the wall, to her for a husband. Senta is much excited and cries out that she will be the bride of the unknown mariner. Erik departs in despair, leaving Senta wrapped in thought, gazing at the picture. Meanwhile, Daland and his guest reach the house. She recognizes him as the original of the portrait; gazes spellbound at him, while he gazes at her charmed at her beauty and simplicity. (Third movement of selection.) Daland asks her to receive the stranger as a guest and as a husband, and in a long scene he asks her hand; she promises to be his wife until death, and he receives her assurances with rapture. Daland announces the arrival to his crew, who are about to have a feast after the hardships of the voyage.

The third act opens with a chorus by the Norwegian sailors, the two ships lying side by side near the shore—(second movement of selection)—the maidens come with food and refreshments for both crews, but being unable to arouse the Dutch crew, leave all the provisions they have brought for the Norwegians. While the latter are feasting, the Dutch crew arouse themselves and sing the story of their captain. A dark bluish flame is seen, and the sound of a rising storm in the heart. They attempt to drown the moans with their own singing, but are silenced, and in fright quit the ship's deck, signing the cross, seeing which the Dutch crew utter a shrill laugh, and all is quiet again; the storm subsides, the blue flames, which have flitted about the rigging, cease, and all is dark and silent.

Erik now appears with Senta, urging her to give up her new fancy, and reproaching her for her faithlessness to him. (See euphonium solo.) The Dutchman entering, overhears what Erik says to Senta, and supposing that the maiden, having been unfaithful to her first lover, may also forsake him, runs to his ship in despair, in spite of Senta's entreaties. Erik urges her not to rush to her own destruction, as she follows the Dutchman, evidently determined to link her fate with his, and cries for help. The Dutchman declares who he is, goes aboard his ship, and sets sail. Senta follows to reach the ship, ascends a high cliff overlooking the sea, into which she casts herself, calling to the Flying Dutchman, and protesting her faithfulness unto death. The Dutchman's ship immediately sinks with her crew, the sea rises high and sinks back in a whirlpool, and in the glow of the sunset, over the wreck of the ship, are seen the forms of Senta and the Dutchman embracing each other, rising from the sea and floating upwards.

In this opera, the great composer doubtless took his first steps towards the music of the future in his use of motives, his wonderful treatment of the orchestra in enforcing the expressions of the text, and his combination of the voices, and instrumentation in what he terms "the music drama."

MR. GODFREY'S SELECTION.

Without a doubt this selection is the very best that has ever been heard at Belle-vue, and every reader attending the contest should secure a solo cornet conductor's copy, if he does so he will get a valuable music lesson. No showy cadenzas, no difficulty is introduced for the sake of difficulty—all is legitimate. The test is artistic rather than executive. The selection opens (pp) with the motive in which Senta, in the second act, sings the "legend." Mr. Godfrey has given the motive as it occurs in the overture—

Andante, 100 crotchets.



"Ye can the spectre seaman be freed from the curse infernal," &c.

The opening bars, as above, are given to the horns, euphonium, and baritone, for the first four bars; then it is repeated by the horns, which will produce a beautiful effect, by contrast of tone colour. After this the horns, baritone, and euphonium take up the second portion of the melody. Then the basses, which hitherto have been silent, give out the remarkable phrase—



"Yo-ho-ho! Yo-ho-ho! Yo-ho-ho!"

The melody—for it certainly is no less—is constructed out of two notes only. Instantly you hear it, you know that it is a seaman's song—it smells of ships and the sea. The phrase is heard all through the opera when any reference is made to the Flying Dutchman.

This leads us into the second movement of the selection—
Animato ma non troppo. Allegro, 80 crotchets.



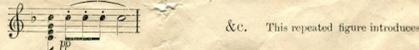
"Mariner! Drink with us. Mariner! Drink with us," &c.

This is the "Sailors' Chorus" from the third act of the opera, and surely no music was ever written which will bring before the mind's eye a crew of jovial sailors drinking, singing, and dancing in boisterous sailor fashion, as this music does. Why, one can positively see them skipping about and hitching up their trousers.

The two first movements will be recognised as the same which Mr. H. Round has used as the first two movements of his selection, "Wagner."

The 3rd movement of the selection is taken from Act 2

Sostenuto, 80 crotchets.



The Dutchman's song (trombone). (See description of opera above where Daland introduces the Flying Dutchman to Senta.) After gazing, captured at Senta (cornet) the Dutchman sings—



ALEXANDER OWEN.

EDWIN SWIFT.

Trombone Solo.



"O! and the torment of my night eternal
I gazed upon some vision fair,
Still was I driven by Satan's power infernal
O! my dread course, in anguish and despair." &c.

Senta listens, as one in a dream, to the Dutchman's song, then she gives vent to her feelings (flute, cornet and trombone).



Cornet (Senta)—
"He dwindleth there with all his griefs, believe me,
If tells us all his sorrows, his despair." &c.

Trombone (Flying Dutchman)—
"As oft through weary ages of my dreaming,
Behold mine eyes, my form I see." &c.

This magnificent duet gains in dramatic intensity as it proceeds. The perforation is splendidly acted out, concluding with a double cadenza. This leads into the 3rd movement, which is the celebrated Spinning Chorus, opening 2nd Act of opera. Chorus of girls at their spinning-wheels spinning, and singing merrily. Allegretto, 66 crotchets; for 4 bars of introduction the chorus commences.



Baritone and 2nd Horn.

The maidens sing—

"Hail and hail, good wheel ye whirling,
Lively, lightly dance around,
Spinning, thou and threads art twirling,
Let thy pleasant hain re-ward."

Un poco, 50 crotchets—

"My love dash sail the ocean o'er,
Forsake he sight and sweetheart's eyes;
My faithful wheel, oh, crush and roar,
Ah! if thy breeze but raled the seas,
I would soon my love to me restore."

While the maidens (cornets, soprano, flute, and solo horn) are singing thus the whirr and hum of the spinning wheel is heard from the euphonium, baritone, and second horn. This movement leads into the beautiful cavatina which Erik (euphonium) sings in the last act of the opera, when reproaching Senta for her faithlessness to him. The euphonium solo is introduced by the fluted horn, who plays a waiting prelude of eight bars pure solo (no accompaniment).

Andante, 50 crotchets.



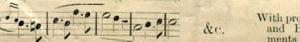
Then Erik's (euphonium) cavatina with obbligato for solo horn—



Erik's song (euphonium) as he reproaches Senta—
"Is that, far day no more by thee remembered,
When from the vale thou called me from the height,
When fearlessly I'er rugged peaks I clamber'd,
And gathered for thee many a wild flower bright?"

This solo finishes with a cadenza (euphonium) leading into the last movement of the selection—duet, Senta and Dutchman (Allegro molto, 96 crotchets).

Solo Cornet (Senta). Trombone (Dutchman).



Senta (cornet)—"Why is my heart so sadly beating?" &c.
Dutchman (trombone)—"Thou evil star for ever faded,
Senta (on repetition of above phrase)—
"Such joys I breathe with every breath,
Dutchman—"Hope's glorious light shall shine a-ave."

At the end of this repetition the basses commence a figure, which is several times repeated, and which we, we guess, provoke some of the basses to indulge in language not quite fitted for Sunday. Here is specimen of the BB-flat bass part—



When it is remembered that the pace is about 104 crotchets to the minute, it will be seen that the basses do not get off very easily, even if they had no other difficult passages; but they have many. The second portion of the *fandl* is *piu vivo*—104—being a continuation of the duet (cornet and trombone). This brings us up to the two pauses where the duet finishes in the opera. But to wind up, Mr. Godfrey has added the first eight bars of Senta's song as a tutti *ff*, the selection concluding with a rushing scale passage from the bass against the sustained harmony of the cornets and trombones.

There are two things which we wish our Readers to bear in mind—as they listen to the Selection as layed by most of the Bands at Belle Vue—firstly, that Wagner could not write melody; secondly, there is no music in a brass band. Old Fogeyism has harped on these two themes ever since "Wagner" and "Brass Bands" began each their respective careers—Therefore, according to dear Old Fogeyism, the music of Wagner should be well fitted for brass bands, being full of noisy, unmeaning discords such, in fact, as one might fancy he had written expressly to show off the lung power of the brass band. When you are at Belle Vue, listening to the best bands, just turn your eyes and the immense concert-room for a moment. See the thousands of eager faces of those who drink every sound like nectar. Look again—Are they not all honest, genuine sons of toil? Did you ever in your life see such enthusiasm amongst them who wear silk, broadcloth, and fine linen? Never! The people have, perhaps, a keener love of music than any other class in the world. It is not a pastime with them. It is their sole study and engrossing pursuit outside their daily labour.