

# “Forward Gaily Together”—The School Music Compositions of Samuel McBurney

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As one of the leading figures in nineteenth century school music in Victoria and more widely in Australia, Samuel McBurney contributed significantly to the promotion of Tonic Sol-fa as a music teaching method as well as to supporting the role of music as a subject in the school curriculum. However his role also extended to that of composer of vocal and choral works for both adults and children. Although largely conforming to the established genre of choral writing of his time, McBurney’s compositional output nevertheless represents a variety of styles ranging from lieder to school and popular songs, and from children’s cantatas to celebratory and patriotic anthems.

This paper considers a representative sample of McBurney’s compositional output in the light of both its musical and extra-musical content. It is argued that his compositions represent several important themes that emerged in Australian colonial society during the latter part of the nineteenth century. His music contributed not only to the moral and aesthetic development of school children but also supported the growing tide of nationalism (which resulted in Federation in 1901) in adult choral music making. Moreover, particularly in relation to his school cantatas, McBurney continued the tradition established by earlier school music composers in Australia—such as James Fisher in New South Wales—by providing a repertoire of choral music for use in schools which, to the present day with the current vogue for school musical productions, continues to be a source of enjoyment, celebration and “healthful recreation” for young people.

## Introduction

One medium for school music education that has re-emerged over the past decade or so and is now employed extensively at the primary school level has been variously described as ‘the Musical’, ‘the Mini-Musical’, ‘the Production Piece’ or simply ‘the Musical Production’. Typically these musicals range in performance time from 10 to about 50 minutes duration and, depending on the level of difficulty, cater for the abilities and interests of children from lower to upper primary levels and beyond. Many of these musical productions incorporate a wide-range of musical and dramatic forms including narration, solo songs, choruses, vocal sound effects, simple scat, rap-style chant, simple percussion playing, simple acting parts and simple dance forms. One of many publishers of school musicals—the Melbourne-based arts education publisher Bushfire Press—has a catalogue of musicals produced by local composers including Lynne Bartlett, Geoff Maddern, Susie Davies, Phillip Splitter, Rob Fairbairn, Mark Leehy, Kevin O’Mara and others.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Bushfire Press publishes school song books and other music educational resources which, for the primary school music teacher, supplement other school song materials which are published by state education departments—for example, the *Vocal-Ease*<sup>2</sup>—as well as the annual *Sing* books and, before that, *The ABC School Songbook* produced since the 1960s by what is now the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Some of these musicians have, through their composing and publishing of school musicals as well as other class and choral singing repertoire, established themselves as professional or semi-professional composers of children’s music as well as adult performance repertoire.

While many music educationists may quite reasonably criticize schools for substituting participation by their students in an annual or bi-annual musical production, or even a music program consisting principally of class singing or choir participation for a more ideal curriculum based on sequential and developmental classroom music program, there is nevertheless undoubted value for students, particularly in terms of more recent curriculum policies (such as the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards*<sup>3</sup>), for these forms of singing-based activity as part of a school’s co-curricular program. Many of today’s primary school teachers

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<sup>1</sup> See Bushfire Press website, <<http://www.bushfirepress.com/primary/musicals.html>> (accessed 20/9/2006).

<sup>2</sup> Sydney: New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> See *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* website, <<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>> (accessed 20/9/2006).

see these musicals as being an innovative and relevant form of music education, but the reality is that musicals and other forms of choral singing have, since the introduction of music to primary education, provided children with worthwhile musical and extra-musical experiences as part of their primary schooling.

The principle objective of this paper is to document the work of one of the many nineteenth century Australian composers of children's music whose multifaceted role as a musician, music teacher and educationist represents a worthy model for emulation. Samuel McBurney was a composer of music in a variety of genres including children's music that contributed to the musical education of young people as well as to promoting childhood culture and extra-musical precepts during the latter part of nineteenth century in Australia. Broadly speaking, this paper takes a case study approach. The "case"—in this instance—is that part of the life history of McBurney that focuses on his role as a composer and more broadly as a music teacher and educationalist. Data for this paper is provided by archival documents, reports in contemporary published sources (such as journals), published music as well as other contemporary artefacts. Examination of the data involved both documentary analysis and, in the case of the compositions selected for examination, both textual and musical analysis.

### **A Man of Many Parts**

Samuel McBurney was born at Glasgow, Scotland on April 30, 1847, the eldest son of Dr Isaiah McBurney and his wife Margaret Bonnar.<sup>4</sup> His father was then Classics Master at the Glasgow Academy and later Principal of the Athol Academy at Douglas on the Isle of Man. McBurney was taught to read music by the Tonic Sol-fa method from an early age by John McLelland and became involved in teaching singing by this method while still a boy (Stevens 1974, p.128). McBurney attended the University of Glasgow but, as was then quite common, left without completing his studies and taking a degree. He opened a school at Bathgate near Edinburgh but, for health reasons, emigrated to the Colony of Victoria in 1870 where he held several teaching positions (at Kyneton, South Melbourne and Sale) before being appointed as the district singing master at Portland by the Education Department in 1875. The following year McBurney returned to England where he attended the Summer Session of the Tonic Sol-fa College in London (which had recently been incorporated as the official training school of the Tonic Sol-fa method), and having passed all the examinations available at the time, returned to Australia and with his wife took over operation of the Geelong Ladies College.

In an effort to disseminate Tonic Sol-fa as a choral singing method, McBurney called together all the Tonic Sol-fa-ists whom he could locate in the colony and founded the Victorian Tonic Sol-fa Association in 1878. This led to the formation of several tonic sol-fa choral societies and the adoption of the method by many church choirs. In 1883 McBurney organised the first Inter-colonial Tonic Sol-fa Conference at the Geelong Ladies College and in further efforts to propagate tonic sol-fa, he commenced choral singing classes, undertook lecture tours, offered postal courses and examined candidates for certificates of the Tonic Sol-fa College.

McBurney then began to campaign for recognition of the Tonic Sol-fa method for use in Victorian Education Department schools. The Inspector of School Music, Joseph Summers, and several of the senior singing masters in the Education Department were strongly opposed these moves, preferring instead Waite's 'tonic numeral' method which employed scale degree numbers as a mnemonic aid to reading music from staff notation. A vigorous battle was waged chiefly through the daily press and a monthly education journal, *The Australasian Schoolmaster*, and it was not until 1887 that an alternative music program based on the tonic sol-fa method and its notational system was finally placed on an equal footing with the existing staff notation program in Victorian state schools.<sup>5</sup>

Early in 1887 McBurney and his wife left Victoria on an extended tour of the eastern Australian colonies, New Zealand and the United States *en route* to Britain. McBurney's Australian tour was undertaken with a threefold purpose—to collect data on local dialect peculiarities for the English phonetician Dr. A.J. Ellis, to investigate the

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the sources of biographical and other details for McBurney are cited in R.S. Stevens, "Music in State-Supported Education in New South Wales and Victoria, 1848-1920" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> See Stevens, *op. cit.*, 333.

state of music education in state schools, and to disseminate the tonic sol-fa system wherever possible through lectures, public meetings and, in the case of Queensland and New South Wales, establishing of tonic sol-fa associations to carry on the work of disseminating the method. After a similar tour of New Zealand, McBurney left for San Francisco early in November 1887 and on arrival in the United States, began his efforts to disseminate the tonic sol-fa method in the American school system. During his eight months on the West Coast, he lectured extensively on the tonic sol-fa system at teachers colleges and teachers institutes before embarking on a lecture tour across the American continent, including a visit to Canada.

After attending the 1889 Summer Session of the Tonic Sol-fa College in London, McBurney became determined to demonstrate that the tonic sol-fa system could be successfully applied to the highest levels of musical scholarship. He therefore entered for the Bachelor of Music examinations at Trinity College, Dublin and having gained the degree, successfully attempted the examinations for the Doctor of Music degree a few months later. He also passed all the examinations of the Tonic Sol-fa College to qualify as a Fellow of that institution in July 1891, thereby attaining the distinction of holding the highest qualifications in both staff notation and tonic sol-fa notation.<sup>6</sup> Before embarking again for Australia, McBurney spent several months examining the state of music education in Germany and France and briefly returned to London to participate in the Tonic Sol-fa Jubilee celebrations.

On arriving back in the colony of Victoria, McBurney was commissioned to report on musical standards in Education Department schools as compared with those in Europe and America. After a time acting as relieving Inspector of Music for the Education Department, he was officially appointed to that position at the beginning of 1893. Unfortunately this appointment was short-lived as, due to the worsening economic depression, the position of Inspector of Music together with all positions for specialist music teachers in state schools were abolished in June of that year. McBurney and his wife then took over Oberwyl Ladies College in St. Kilda. As well as resuming his public choral classes and postal courses, McBurney also conducted in-service training courses in the tonic sol-fa method for state school teachers, adjudicated at choral festivals and competitions both in Victoria and in other states, and kept up a steady stream of propaganda in support of tonic sol-fa in *The Australasian Schoolmaster*. In 1902 McBurney revived the Victorian Tonic Sol-fa Association, again becoming its president, and the following year joined the staff of the University of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music as a teacher of sight singing and ear training, having been admitted to the degree of Doctor of Music (*ad eundem*) in 1891. McBurney's fervent advocacy of the tonic sol-fa system ceased only with his death in 1909 at the age of sixty-two.

In addition to his work as a tonic sol-fa advocate, McBurney contributed significantly to school music teaching pedagogy, particularly at the kindergarten level, as well as contributing to local Victorian musical culture through his choral compositions. During the early 1890s McBurney published a number of school songbooks including a two-volume work entitled *The Australian Progressive Songster*. Being for junior and senior school classes respectively, these two volumes formed a course of "graded songs, rounds and exercises in staff notation, tonic sol-fa and numerals with musical theory specially prepared for the requirements of Australian schools".<sup>7</sup> Another publication, *Hints on Infant and Elementary Music Teaching* (1892) was followed by a sequel entitled *Kindergarten Music Training* which was published by J. Curwen and Sons about 1894. This textbook (which included sixty-six 'Bird Songs') together with the separately-published *Bird Modulator* formed an exceedingly well-devised kindergarten music teaching method.

Firmly believing that the tonic sol-fa system could be successfully taught to kindergarten children, McBurney devised his coloured *Bird Modulator* to illustrate to children the "mental effects" of the scale tones by correlating each with a particular bird and its characteristic colour or an assigned colour. Thus the tonic note *doh*—the strong or firm tone was represented by the "Black Crow", *ray*—the rousing or hopeful tone was represented by an orange humming bird, *me*—the calm and steady tone by two green parrots ("Love Birds"), *fah*—the desolate or awe-inspiring tone by a blue owl, *soh*—the grand and bright tone by a red parrot ("Pretty Joe"), *lah*—the sad or weeping tone by a lavender dove, *te*—the piercing or sensitive tone by a yellow canary and the upper tonic—*doh'*—by a black jackdaw (a near relation of the crow). McBurney appears to have devised the *Bird Modulator* during the late 1880s, having demonstrated it while on tour in the United States and also in England at the Tonic

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<sup>6</sup> *The Musical Herald*, February 1891, 35

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, title page.

Sol-fa Jubilee Exhibition in 1891. The *Bird Modulator* was used in conjunction with the especially composed “bird songs” to teach children how to read from sol-fa notation.

McBurney’s literary output, aside from numerous articles advocating the tonic sol-fa system, included a chapter on ‘Pronunciation and Musical Terms’ which was published in a revised edition of Curwen’s *The Standard Course* in 1900. McBurney’s interest in the education of blind people led him to devise a new form of Braille raised type for tonic sol-fa notation which improved upon the existing tonic sol-fa Braille. He introduced this new Braille system to blind asylums in Scotland in 1889 and it was featured in the Tonic Sol-fa Jubilee Exhibition held in London in 1891. McBurney also utilized the system in Australia at the Victorian Institute for the Blind during the late 1890s.

A life-long interest in linguistics and dialects led McBurney to take an active part in the Victorian Esperanto Society, serving as its secretary for several years. He also collected material on colonial dialect peculiarities during his tour of the eastern Australian colonies in 1887, his findings being published in A.J. Ellis’s *On English Pronunciation, Volume V*.<sup>8</sup> He also authored the chapter on “Pronunciation and Musical Terms” in the “New Edition, Re-written 1900” of Curwen’s *The Standard Course*.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most revealing aspects into what, from a contemporary perspective, may be identified as McBurney’s seeming interest in and commitment to promoting the ideals of internationalism was his postcard correspondence with Esperantists world-wide during his years of retirement in the early 1900s. A fascinating insight into this aspect of McBurney’s Esperanto work came to light in 2000 when a collection of postcards which McBurney had received from Esperanto correspondents came to light. This collection of about sixty postcards addressed to McBurney at his address at the time—2 Alfred Square, St Kilda—were written in Esperanto and came from correspondents in countries world-wide including Japan, New Zealand, Ceylon, the United States, Canada, European countries (France, Spain, etc) and Eastern European countries (Czechoslovakia, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, Russia, etc). This interest in Esperanto as the new international spoken and written language, together with his long-standing promotion of Tonic Sol-fa also as a new musical language capable of achieving universal musical literacy tends to suggest that McBurney was part of or at least influenced by the movement towards internationalism that was prominent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>10</sup>

### Compositional Works

McBurney’s interest in and talent for composing manifested itself as a child when he composed a piano piece entitled ‘The Crichton Royal Gallop’.<sup>11</sup> Given his advocacy of Tonic Sol-fa as a choral singing method, his compositions were mainly vocal and choral. His compositional output may be categorised according to genre as art songs for solo voice, popular songs for solo voice, part songs (generally SATB settings for adult choirs, including patriotic songs), school cantatas, secular cantatas (for adult choirs) and ‘examination exercises’ for music degrees.<sup>12</sup> Four representative examples will now be considered.

“*Tale of the Bell-Birds*” (c.1895)

This is one of songs especially composed by McBurney for his publications entitled *The Australian Progressive Songster, No. 1 for Junior Classes* and *The Australian Progressive Songster, No. 2 for Senior*

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<sup>8</sup> Ellis, A. J., *On Early English Pronunciation, Vol. V*. (London: Rubner and Co., 1889)

<sup>9</sup> J. Curwen, *The Standard Course of Lessons and Exercises in the Tonic Sol-fa Method of Teaching Music* (New Edition, Re-written 1900) (London: J. Curwen & Sons, Ltd., 1900).

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of nineteenth century internationalism, see *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*, ed. by M.H. Geyer and J. Paulmann (Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> *The Musical Herald*, February 1891, 36.

<sup>12</sup> These are listed according to genre in the Appendix to this paper, with those for which there is an extant score being marked with an asterisk.

*Classes*.<sup>13</sup> These songbooks consisted of several prefatory pages outlining music theory and notation in both staff and Tonic Sol-fa notation, then a series of exercises in dual notation, and finally a more extensive section of Songs and Rounds. "Tale of the Bell-Birds" was included in two differing arrangements in the No 1 and No 2 editions, the No 1 version (pp.34-35) being an arrangement for two vocal parts and the No 2 version (pp.35-36) being for three vocal parts. Both versions include the direction "Use Metallophones (Metal Dulcimers) for the three notes 'Ring, ring, ring' and chorus".

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, one of the main forms of entertainment for children was singing. This could be done as part of a class or a choir in the formal situation of a schoolroom, a public hall concert, a church or Sunday school hall, or children could simply sing on their own for their own enjoyment on the way to and from school or at home. Children who lived in the country often considered themselves luckier than town or city children because they had the cleared country side as well as the uncleared bush land to explore. This song is an example of a short children's story which combines the joy of singing, the telling of a story and the excitement of exploring in bushland. However, the song also has a definite moral—a warning of the dangers of the bush.

The words of the song come from a poem by the Australian literary figure, A. B. (Andrew Barton—"Banjo") Paterson (1864-1941). The words are an adaptation of Paterson's "Song of the Future", published in *The Bulletin* of December 21, 1889 and come in the sixth stanza of the poem:

But we have heard the bell-birds ring  
Their silver bells at eventide,  
Like fairies on the mountain side,  
The sweetest note man ever heard.<sup>14</sup>

The words of the song describe a story which would have been of interest and relevance to children at the time.

*Verse 1*

Ring, Ring Ring! The chime of the bell-birds rang.  
Over the old grey mountains. Over the ranges wide.  
Ring, Ring, Ring! Sweetly the bell-birds sang.  
Ringing the chime of their silver bells, Softly at even-tide.

*Chorus*

Ringing sweetly, ringing softly, O'er the ranges wide,  
Ringing sweetly, ringing softly, At the even-tide.

*Verse 2*

Ring, Ring, Ring! The bells have a silver chime,  
Such as a fairy's wedding bells, Greeting a fairy bride.  
Ring, Ring, Ring! Once in the olden time,  
The two children followed the fairy bells, Into the range's side.

*Chorus*

*Verse 3*

Ring, Ring, Ring! It came to them clear and true,  
Calling them to the fairies' church, After the fairy bride,  
Ring, Ring, Ring! Little children knew,  
'Twas but the chime that the bell-birds ring, Out on the mountain side.

*Chorus*

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<sup>13</sup> Sydney: Angus & Robertson, n.d. [c. 1895]. These two parts of *The Australian Progressive Songster* were later published as "Nos. 1 and 2 (Combined) for Junior and Senior Classes" by Angus and Robertson, 89 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

<sup>14</sup> From W.L. Ham, *The Works of Banjo Paterson* web site (1998), <[http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/P/PatersonAB\\_Banjo/verse/riogrande/songfuture.html](http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au/words/authors/P/PatersonAB_Banjo/verse/riogrande/songfuture.html)>, accessed September 20, 2006.

*Verse 4*

Ring, Ring, Ring! 'Twas nearly a fatal spell,  
Did not the bell of a pack horse tell, Someone was close beside.  
Ring, Ring, Ring! Louder the trampling grew,  
Rough, kindly men took the wand'ers again, Homeward at even-tide.

*Chorus*

The story of the poem is of two children who hear the sounds of the bell-birds and, because of the beautiful chime-like quality of the sound, imagine a fairies' wedding. They follow the sound of the bell-birds and get themselves lost in the bush. Then they hear another bell-like sound which comes from the bell on a packhorse and they are found by the party of bush men. The bush men take the children home and all ends well. Like so many stories of this time, the song has a strong moral message. In this case, the message warns that, although the bush may be an interesting and enticing place to explore, there are hidden dangers for young children including the danger of being lost in the bush.

In its three-part arrangement in *Progressive Songster, No. 2*, this song is written for Soprano I, Soprano II and Alto with the two soprano parts being on the upper treble stave and the alto part being on the lower treble stave. Below each of the treble staves, the song is written out in Tonic Sol-fa notation. In many respects, "Tale of the Bell-Birds" is typical of the Australian song content in *The Australian Progressive Songster, No. 1 for Junior Classes* and *The Australian Progressive Songster, No. 2 for Senior Classes*. Both publications included a variety of folk songs from the British Isles, original songs by past and contemporary composers such as Naegeli, Root, Bishop and Lowell Mason, as well as in No 1, three of the thirty-four songs and in No 2, twenty-two of the thirty-six songs were composed by McBurney. Interestingly, as well as "Tale of the Bell-Birds", there were two other songs with "Words by A.B.P.)" and it may be conjectured that McBurney had personal contact with Patterson either in person during his (McBurney's) visits to New South Wales or at least had corresponded with him. Given that the words of the song were not published separately by Patterson, it may well be that they were written by the poet specifically for McBurney to use for this song. Whatever the case, this song represents an excellent illustration of a children's song that was imbued with the culture of Australian childhood of the time and as well attempted to provide a medium for the enjoyment of singing and for learning about the Australian bush—both its charms and its dangers.

*"Victoria"—A school cantata (1875)*

This cantata consisting of nine discrete choruses (together with the National Anthem. "God Save the Queen", at the end) and interspersed with poetic narrative between each section was one of McBurney's early school music works composed and self-published about 1875. "Victoria" was "Composed and Dedicated to The Singing Masters of the Victoria State Schools" and was in its Second Edition when this version was published about 1875.<sup>15</sup> The music was printed by a Melbourne company (Clarson, Massina and Co) and was scored for unison through to four-parts, with piano accompaniment. At the time of publication, McBurney was resident at Portland in Victoria where he was employed by the Victorian Education Department and was also organist at St Stephen's Church of England. Although already an advocate of Tonic Sol-fa, McBurney published this cantata in staff notation only, although it is possible that later editions may have also included Tonic Sol-fa notation.

The cantata is prefaced by a narration of the opening poetic stanza of ten lines which sets the scene for the story to follow.

Down by the Yarra banks amid the trees,	Wander abroad in joyous picnic glee,
Whose branches waved to greet the passing breeze,	Or, gathering round some monarch of the wood,
Whose clustering foliage threw a cooling shade,	Sound forth their varied songs in tuneful mood.
O'er many a pleasant nook and grassy glade,	Such was the scene, and such were they who sang,
Victoria's children, from their tasks set free,	As loud upon the breeze Victoria's praises rang.

The first musical piece of the cantata (No 1), “Fair is our Native Land”, was a song sung by all of the children and expressed the beauty of the natural environment, the pleasing climate and the wealth of its resources—“Victoria on thy golden strand”—which is the theme of the cantata. This open piece is a lively two-part arrangement, with a piano accompaniment, expressed optimism about the future for the children of the colony.

The second poetic narrative further supports the main theme of the cantata:

There passes by an aged man	“Victoria’s golden Strand!
With hair unkempt and grey,	Yes, it <i>was</i> ‘golden’ that they said,
He listens to the children’s song,	Where is this golden land?”
He watches while they play;	And, as if answering him, the throng
And as they cease he mutters low—	Of children thus took up their song.

Song referred to is (No 2) “Gold” which is a three-part arrangement in simple duple metre and in the key of F major which describes the miners bring forth the “hidden wealth” from the “bounteous earth”. However, the message of this piece is contradicted in the next item (No 3) which is “The Girls’ Song—‘We want not Gold’”. This song, sung two parts, denounced the greed for gold and instead promotes “the gifts from Flora’s hand” and “the vines o’er acres spread”. After another poetic narrative, there is “The Boys’ Song—‘Leave Flowers and Fruit’” which presents the counter view of the colony’s young men going out on horseback with their guns and dogs and hunting for local game such as turkeys and swans, ducks and snipe, and possums and kangaroo.

The conversation between what emerges as opposing gender groups continues with “No 4—The Little Girls’ Song—‘In the woods’” that describes scenes of “tranquil bliss” with flowers, insects, grasslands and gentle breezes caressing wattle trees. This two-part song passes into a four voice round with sections of bird calls from “Pretty Joe” (presumably a parrot) “to be whistled” and section to be hummed with repeated sustained notes over several bars. Predictably, there follows “No 6—The Little Boys’ Song—‘Ducks and Geese’” which describes a lake with water fowl and, like “The Little Girls’ Song” ends with a four-part round about rain, accompanied by the singing of two varied rhythmic lines of the word “quack”. The poetic narration that follows describes the course of a stream of water as it grows in volume and flows as a river into the sea. The next song (No 7) is “The Stockrider” describes the work of mustering cattle on the plains with reference to cracking whips and the instruction in the score that “At ‘Crack’, the Trebles and Altos should clap hands, or a leather strap, alternatively, or together at [the words] ‘crack goes the whip’”. The alternation between songs that were sung by and related to the assumed interests of boys and of girls at this point in the cantata appealed to and reinforced the gender stereotyping which was obviously intended to prepare boys and girls to fulfil their respective roles—as dictated by nineteenth century colonial society.

The penultimate piece sung by all the children, No 8—“Little Folks in England”, reflected on their counterparts back in Britain who, because of their “old world heritage”, lived in fear of goblins and of ghosts haunting towers and steeples, whereas in Victoria, children were fearless in the security of a new country which free of the “cultural burden” of superstition. With the fall of evening, the children return to their homes singing No 9, “Victoria”, the first section of a piece in ternary form asking that “Heaven grant thy land in peace to stand, While England rules the wave”, before a second section remembering the pioneer work of English and Scottish immigrants who cleared the land and established the colony. The final piece of poetic narrative brought home the connection between the colony and its namesake.

‘Tis over; but before they reached the close,  
Thoughts of “Victoria the Good” arose—  
That other queen—her subjects’ love and pride,  
Whose power extends far as the world is wide,  
And as thickening darkness deeper grows,  
The well-known strain along the forest follows.  
    (Singing of “God Save the Queen”)

From a music-analytic perspective, the nine parts forming the cantata were each written in a contrasting metre, tempo and key (albeit that all of the choruses were in major keys which were presumably easier for children to sing) and all parts were arranged with a piano accompaniment. The melodic writing style was well suited to children's voices and the tunes duly reflected the content and sentiment of the words with complementary rhythms and melodic contour—the boys' choruses in particular reflected a martial style through dotted note rhythms in duple or quadruple metres and intervals of upward perfect fourths, whereas those for girls were more lyrical in nature with more stepwise melodic movement and in triple metres. The harmonic writing style was consistent with the prevailing tonal harmonic idiom of the mid-nineteenth century and included the almost obligatory modulation to the dominant key at about the three-quarter way point of the piece. Textural interest was achieved through scoring for different vocal combinations (two-, three- and four-parts) and through differing compositional settings such as four-part homophony and four-part rounds (which are effectively polyphonic in style).

*“Advance Australia” (pre-1887)*

Composed during his time at Geelong, this four-part song was an entry for the Australian National Song held prior to Federation in 1901. The words were written by J. Eccleston Walker who had previously supplied words for other of McBurney's songs. Aside from its publication in three editions (A) Tonic Sol-fa Arranged for Four Voices, (B) Solo or Duet, In both Notations, Key G, and (C) Ordinary Notation for Four Voices, Key A, this song was also included as the last song in *The Australian Progressive Songster, No. 2 for Senior Classes* (Angus & Robertson (n.d. [c. 1895]) and so formed part of the school song repertoire sung by children at the close of the nineteenth century. Being written in the style of a choral march, the piece is in quadruple metre. It has an opening motif based on an ascending broken-chord figure and otherwise the tune has a step-wise melodic progression. Predictably, given the optimism and cheerful outlook projected in this piece, it is set in the key of A major and has modulations to the dominant and sub-dominant keys. The five verses portray nationalistic sentiments such as Australia being “a land of labour, wealth and rest” and “a land where freedom ne'er can die” as well as extolling the populous to “Seize the standard, bear the Sway, Drive the clouds of sloth away” and other such postures. Binns and Hill point out that the song was performed at the inauguration of Commonwealth Parliament in Melbourne in May 1901 and suggest that this song could well have been inspired by P. D. McCormick's *Advance Australia Fair* (c.1878) with its rising broken-chord figure imitating the first bars of the verse and calls to ‘Advance Australia’.<sup>16</sup> This song represents a good example of the rising nationalist spirit in the lead-up to Federation in 1901 and undoubtedly inspired children of the time with a spirit of optimism in the future of their new nation.

*“Forward Gaily Together” (1890)*

Although not published specifically as a children's song, this choral work in its various settings and editions may well have been sung by children as its words are equally suitable for young people as for adults. Described by McBurney as the choral march, it was part of a larger work (which has seems not to have survived) entitled “Sea Spray”. Although lacking a specific context, the song appears to express the optimism felt by immigrants sailing to their new homeland of Australia.

Verse 1

Forward gaily together, Let us hail the festive day,  
 Nature smiling around us, Bids us cast dull care away;  
 Friends are waiting before us, With a welcome soon to be ours,  
 And our hearts as out footsteps Treading quickly o'er the flowers.

Verse 2

Happy homesteads surround us, In peaceful vulture arrayed;

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<sup>16</sup> G. Binns and J. Hill, The Centre for Studies in Australian Music presents Federation! (Concert presented April 21, 2001) website, <<http://www.music.unimelb.edu.au/about/CSAM/events.html>> (accessed 20/9/2006).

Beauty beams in the sunshine That bedecks each verdant blade.  
Gladly nature rejoices In the brightness born of the day;  
And a thousand cheerful voices, Give a welcome on our way.

Again, in keeping with its march style, this piece is set in quadruple metre and is in a major tonality (Ab) with modulations to related major keys. The piece was published in different choral arrangements—SATB and SSC—and in both staff and Tonic Sol-fa notation. This was undoubtedly one of McBurney’s most popular choral pieces and as such “Forward Gaily Together” was accorded the honour of being performed as a massed singing item at one of the four concerts held as part of the Tonic Sol-fa Jubilee Festival at the Crystal Palace London on July 18, 1891.<sup>17</sup> This work has a definite celebratory character and may well have featured in the festivities a decade later at the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia. Whatever its specific context, the piece epitomises much of the optimism widely felt in Australia as it approached the turn of the century.

### Conclusion

McBurney was not, of course, the only nineteenth century music educator composing school songs and other choral repertoire. There are numerous examples of Australian composers who turned their hand to composing for children as well as for adult amateur and professional musicians. One of the earliest of these composers was James Churchill Fisher in New South Wales who was the Singing Master for Sydney schools from 1867 to 1884.<sup>18</sup> Like many composers of his time, McBurney recognised the need to provide a repertoire of songs and choral music for use in schools which, aside from developing children’s musical skills and knowledge and being suitable for their tessitura and vocal capacities, also fulfilled other purposes deemed appropriate in educating young people. As has been demonstrated, McBurney recognised the role of school singing as a medium for teaching moral precepts and other extra-musical knowledge and for instilling a sense of patriotism and loyalty to the mother country together with a sense of nationalism in the movement towards Federation. Particularly in the case of McBurney, there was also a recognition in his own compositional output that school singing should also be a source of enjoyment, celebration and “healthful recreation” for children ... or, as one of his most popular songs expressed it, going “Forward gaily together”.

While many contemporary composers of music for children—songs, musicals and choral pieces—produce some excellent material, it is appropriate, particularly with the current curriculum focus being on interdisciplinary as well disciplinary teaching and learning, to consider again the potential of singing in the school curriculum and to build on the examples of the past to ensure that singing serves the widest possible purpose in the education of young people.

### About the Author

Robin Stevens is Associate Professor of Music Education at Deakin University and has undertaken research into the history of school music education in Australia, Britain, South Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. His present research is focused on the use of Tonic Sol-fa in countries outside the United Kingdom from both historical and contemporary perspectives.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Tonic Sol-fa Jubilee, 1891: Great Jubilee Festival at the Crystal Palace, Saturday, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1891, Selection of Music to be sung at the Evening Concert.* (London: Jubilee Committee, The Tonic Sol-fa College, 1891).

<sup>18</sup> See R.S. Stevens, “James Churchill Fisher: Pioneer of Tonic Sol-fa in Australia” in *Proceedings of the XXII<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Music Education* (2000), ed. by J. Southcott and R. Smith, 172-182 (Melbourne: AARME, 2002).

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**Appendix**  
**Catalogue of Musical Compositions by Samuel McBurney**

Songs for solo voice:

- A Voice Recalled\** Art Song (Voice with piano accompaniment in Staff notation). Words by J.B. O'Hara. Published by F.G. Shrimpton, London and Allan & Co. Prop. Ltd., Melbourne, c.1907.
- Beautiful in Fading\** (Art Song in Staff notation). Published by Tonic Sol-fa Agency, London, 1885.
- Das Verlone* (The Lost Ship)\* (Lied [German and English]). Published by Bremen, Praefer & Meier, Leipzig and G. Schirmer, New York, 190-?
- Dreaming* (Art Song), n.d.
- Evening Shades* (Art Song), n.d.
- L'Allegro* (Duet), n.d.
- Longing* (Art Song), n.d.
- Lovers Know\** (Art Song for Voice with piano accompaniment in Staff notation). Words by J.B. O'Hara. Published by Allan & Co. Prop. Ltd., Melbourne, 1907
- Merry Margaret* (Song [German & English]), n.d.
- On the Shore* (Song [German & English]), n.d.
- Some Day I'll Wander Back* (Song), n.d.
- The Upward Path* (Song), n.d.
- United we will be\** (An Australian national song for Voice with piano accompaniment in Staff notation). Words by William Carrington. Published by A. & W. Bruce (Melbourne), 190-?
- Were I a bird* (Song [German & English]), n.d.
- Songs for Supper Series*: 1. *Hunting Song*; 2. *Tom's Toast*; 3. *Heave Ho! Jolly Tars!*; 4. *Sea Song*; 5. *The German Professor*; 6. *Ebb and Flow* (Popular Songs), n.d.
- Tune of the Old Cow who Died* (Popular Song), n.d.

Part songs:

- Advance Australia\** (National Song [entry for the Australian National Song Competition] for SATB in Tonic Sol-fa notation, or Solo or Duet in Tonic Sol-fa and Staff notation, or SATB in Staff notation). Words by J. Eccleston Walker. Self-published, Geelong, pre 1887.
- Anniversary Anthem*, n.d.
- Esperanta Lando\** (Four-part Song [Esperanto] in Staff notation). Words by F.G. Rowe. Self-published, Melbourne: 2 Alfred Square, St Kilda, 190-?
- Beautiful in Fading\** (Four-part Song in Tonic Sol-fa notation). Words by R.B.M. Published by the Tonic Sol-fa Agency (*Tonic Sol-fa Reporter*, No. 934), 1885.
- Forward Gaily Together\** (Choral March; SATB in Staff notation, SSC in Staff notation, SATB in Tonic Sol-fa notation). Words by S. McBurney. Published by J. Curwen & Sons, London (*Tonic Sol-fa Reporter*, No 934, *Choruses for Equal Voices*, No 624, *Tonic Sol-fa Reporter*, No 934), 1890.
- Funeral Anthem*, n.d.
- He Cometh to Me*, n.d.
- Indian March\** (An Orchestral Sketch for Voices and Metallophones in Tonic Sol-fa notation), Unpublished manuscript (Tonic Sol-fa notation), 1885.
- No More Sea*, n.d.
- Our Home is the Ocean* (Part Song: SATB in Tonic Sol-fa notation). Published by the Tonic Sol-fa Agency (*Tonic Sol-fa Reporter* No.934), n.d.
- Praise Ye the Lord*, n.d.
- The Flag of the Union\** (A Federation Song for Solo, or Solo or Quartet and Chorus, or Chorus—with piano accompaniment in Staff notation). Words by J. Eccleston Walker. Published by Spectator Publishing Company Pty Ltd., Melbourne, 1901?
- There was a Maiden Fair* (Sight-test composed in the form of a Madrigal for SATB in Tonic Sol-fa and Staff notation). Published by J. Curwen & Sons, London (Choral Leaflets, No. 108; *Tonic Sol-fa Reporter*, No.523), 1891.

School Cantatas:

- Children's Festival*, n.d.

*The Christmas Greeting\** (An Australian Cantata or Drawing-room operetta suited for children's voices for Solos and Choruses in Staff notation). Published by J. Curwen & Sons, London, 1871?

*Victoria\** (A school cantata—composed and dedicated to the singing masters of the Victorian State Schools) (Two to Four-Part Choruses in Staff notation). Words by S. McBurney. Published for the composer by Clarson, Massina, & Co, Printers, Melbourne, 1875.

*Youthful Toilers\** (An opening ode for the Grand Sunday School Industrial Exhibition, October 1896—Solos and Four-Part Choruses in Staff and Tonic Sol-fa notation). Words by J.W. Meaden. Published by The Victorian Sunday School Union, Melbourne and A. & W. Bruce, Melbourne, 1896.

Miscellaneous Choral Works:

*The Crichton Royal Gallop* (Piano solo), n.d.

*Lady Isobel* (Secular Cantata for Adult Choir), n.d.

*Setting of the 23rd Psalm* (unpublished MusBac exercise, Trinity College, Dublin), 1890.

Setting of the 103rd Psalm (unpublished MusDoc exercise, Trinity College, Dublin for Soprano solo, double chorus and full orchestra), 1890

School Songbooks:

The Australian Graded Songster, n.d.

*The Australian Progressive Songster No 1 for Junior Classes\** (Unison songs and Duets in Staff and Tonic Sol-fa notation). Published by Angus & Robertson, Sydney, n.d.

*The Australian Progressive Songster No 2 for Senior Classes\** (Unison songs and Duets, Three- and Four-Part Songs in both Staff and Tonic Sol-fa notation). Published by Angus & Robertson, Sydney, n.d.

*The Australian Progressive Songster Nos 1 and 2 (Combined) for Junior and Senior Classes\** (Unison songs and Duets, Three- and Four-Part Songs in Staff and Tonic Sol-fa notation). Published by Angus & Robertson, Sydney, n.d.

Kindergarten Musical Training\* (Unison songs in Tonic Sol-fa notation). Published by J. Curwen & Sons, London, 1896.