

# Lardelli: The Changing Fortunes of a Wandering Signor

Richard Ward

William Henry Lardelli, also known by the self-styled Italianised version of his name, 'Signor Guglielmo Enrico Lardelli,' became prominent as an organist in Maitland and Sydney in the 1880s and 1890s. He also spent much time in England during the period 1885-1900. Later in life he lived in Grafton, Bathurst and Perth, followed by a short time in Queensland where he died at Charters Towers in 1910. He was the first Australian musician to be made a Fellow of the College of Organists (from 1903 the Royal College of Organists) and he wrote several pieces of organ music. He was a prolific composer of popular songs, piano pieces, operas and operettas and was named as one of Sydney's leading musicians in 1887 and as one of Australia's 'first-class' organists in 1896. From the late 1890s Lardelli concentrated on composition of popular music and the performance of humorous recitations and songs which took over from his career as an organist. Lardelli was a restless character who did not spend more than a few years in the same place and in later life became plagued by bad debts and ill health.

The fifth of eight children, Lardelli was born 12 May 1857 in Brighton, Sussex, the son of Italian immigrant Maurizio Giovanni Battiste Venanzi Lardelli, composer and teacher of music, and Louisa Matilda Lardelli, also a teacher of music. Maurizio Lardelli, a student of Giovanni Rubini,<sup>1</sup> had arrived in England in 1840 and married Louisa Matilda Strachan 6 Jan 1849 at St Nicholas Church, Brighton. Amongst his published works were a 'Grande Galop, les Brighton,' which was played during the 1840s by the Band of the Grenadier Guards at Windsor Castle,<sup>2</sup> and 'Les Folies: Grand Valses' said to be 'sparkling and pretty, as good as many of the most reputed *valse*s of Strauss and Lanner.'<sup>3</sup>

Later in life Lardelli was to say that he had been educated at the 'Modern Department of Brighton College, before he went to study music under the great conductor Li Calsi, of the Royal Opera Coy., in Covent Garden, to acquire mastery of the piano, under the head of Emmanuel Aquilar, and to learn singing from Claudius Deslouis, the famed French operatic baritone.'<sup>4</sup>

## Victoria and Hay, NSW, 1875-6

Following his arrival in Melbourne the eighteen-year old Lardelli was employed as a clerk with an annual salary of £80 when he married Louisa Agnes Emily Cary on 25 Oct 1875 at Christ Church, St Kilda.<sup>5</sup> By March 1876 the couple were living at Hay where Lardelli was a music teacher. It seems that Lardelli was duped into marrying the pregnant Louisa and when a child, Percy Lardelli, was born in April 1876 Lardelli concluded that he could not be the father and left his wife to return to England to live with his parents in Brighton.<sup>6</sup>

## Brighton and Seaford, Sussex 1876-1881

During this period Lardelli studied music further and was appointed organist of St Leonard's, Seaford in January 1878. At that time the *Sussex Advertiser* records that a 'popular entertainment' took place at the New Assembly Rooms and that 'Mr G. Lardelli, the newly resident organist' shared the accompaniments with a Mrs Hubert and the Vicar, the Revd W. H. M. Buck.<sup>7</sup> The programme included comic items, setting the style for future entertainments to be given by Lardelli in Australia.



W.H. Lardelli in Brighton, 1897

In March 1878 Lardelli gave his own concert at the same venue in which his mother and sisters sang while he played the piano. He and his sister also played piano duets.<sup>8</sup>

The organ played by Lardelli at St Leonard's had been built by August Gern, London in 1875,<sup>9</sup> and he must have been well enough impressed by the instrument to recommend the same firm in 1887 when an organ was ordered for St Mary's, Waverley, Sydney.

## Sydney and Maitland, 1881-1885

On his return to Melbourne in 1881 Lardelli sought a reconciliation with his wife but found that she had produced another child, Constance Lardelli, in 1880 and he decided to seek a divorce. He arrived in Sydney in February 1881 and was soon part of the musical scene. In March it was reported that he had played a piano duet with Montague Younger (St Andrew's Cathedral organist) at the Town Hall.<sup>10</sup> He was soon promoting his piano music - three pieces he had recently published in London: *Romance in A flat*, 'Estelle,' *Valse de Concert in E flat* and 'Rosa Bianca,' *Valsa Sympathica in D flat*.<sup>11</sup>

Lardelli was organist of St Matthias, Paddington when he gave two recitals for the opening of the new Willis organ at St Mary's, West Maitland on 20 Jul 1881. The programme included his own 'Meditation' and the 'Giant' Fugue by J. S. Bach, and Miss Edith Gorrick (whom Lardelli was to marry in 1882) sang 'He shall feed his flock,' from 'Messiah.'<sup>12</sup> Lardelli made quite an impression in Maitland and soon accepted the offer of the position of organist and choirmaster at St Mary's from 1 Oct

1881.<sup>13</sup> He was appointed for a further three years in April 1882 at an annual salary of £100.<sup>14</sup>

Before taking up his post at St Mary's, Lardelli gave two recitals for the opening of the new Walker organ at St John's, Tamworth in August 1881.<sup>15</sup>

During his time in Maitland, Lardelli gave frequent recitals at other churches – a 'Grand Organ Recital' was given on the organ of St John's, Newcastle in November 1881,<sup>16</sup> and a joint recital with Roland Randolph Arndell for the opening of the new Willis organ at the Wesleyan Church, West Maitland on 3 Oct 1882.<sup>17</sup>

Another joint recital was held at St Paul's, West Maitland with Mr Newcombe (St Paul's), Mr Winney (Wesleyan) and Lardelli on 19 Nov 1883, after the overhaul of the 1867 Willis organ by J. P. Broderick. It was reported that 'Mr. Newcombe's pieces were very conscientiously rendered, and people enjoyed them; Mr. Winney has yet to acquire command of so large an organ; but Signor Lardelli was in excellent form, and his masterly playing contributed the chief pleasure of the evening.'<sup>18</sup>

The same organists took part in a recital given in April 1884 on the 1876 Willis organ in St Peter's Schoolroom, West Maitland, still awaiting the building of the new church. It was reported that Lardelli took the 'larger part' of the programme.<sup>19</sup>

On 24 Apr 1883 a special recital was held at St Mary's 'to test the quality of the new stops recently obtained from Messrs. H. Willis and Sons, organ builders, London, through Mr. James P. Broderick, the local agent.' The Trumpet and 'Clarinet Bassoon' stops had been provided for and were installed by Broderick, along with a new 'recently invented metallic tremulant.'<sup>20</sup> Lardelli's programme included an 'Idyll,' composed by him 'expressly for the recital,' and items by gentlemen of the Newcastle Liedertafel<sup>21</sup> of which Lardelli had become conductor in July 1882.<sup>22</sup>

In a recital given in October 1884 on the 1855 Walker organ at St Luke's, Wallsend (the original organ from St Mary's, West Maitland) it was reported that: 'Though the organ is a small one, having only one manual, the king of organists of the district, Signor Lardelli, made it discourse marvellous music, and Signor Lardelli's skill and taste astonished his audience not a little.'<sup>23</sup>

Having obtained his divorce from Louisa in May 1882,<sup>24</sup> Lardelli married Edith Gorrick, the daughter of a prominent local solicitor, in June 1882 and was presented by St Mary's choristers with a marble and granite clock to mark the occasion.<sup>25</sup> A daughter, Annette Lardelli, was born on 14 Jan 1884. She was to become a proficient pianist and later to live in the United States.

During the time he spent in Maitland Lardelli seems to have been settled and productive though he had recurrent health problems and decided to return to England for a time. In January 1885 he was farewelled from St Mary's at an organ recital: 'Signor and Mrs. Lardelli with their child are bound for England, the gentleman in search of health, while both lady and gentleman design to pursue to completeness their musical education.' Lardelli was presented with a cheque for £25 and was thanked by the Revd Mr Yarrington, who said, '... when you came to us at first, you suffered from illness, it is to me a wonder that you have been able so long and so admirably to discharge the duties of organist of this church. I regret that the pressure of work has so affected your health as to render it necessary that you should return to England.'<sup>26</sup>

Before his departure, Lardelli had written to the Lord Mayor of Sydney in November 1884, offering his services as a consultant for the installation of an organ in the new Town Hall:

I notice by the newspaper reports that a sum of money is being voted for the purchase of a grand organ for the Great Hall of the new Town Hall and presume that an order will be sent home to one of the eminent organ builders in London.

As I premeditate visiting Europe in the early part of the coming year, and intend remaining a year or so, I beg to offer my services at once in advising the Corporation as to the most suitable instrument for the Building – and supervise its manufacture in England.

I can give you the highest testimonials as to my competency. At present I am, and have been since arrival in the Colony organist of S. Mary's Ch. E. West Maitland. Previously to my coming to Australia 4 years ago I had considerable practical experience of the largest and best organs and their builders in the United Kingdom and in Paris – including that in the Royal Albert Hall in London which is justly reckoned the finest in the world. I may mention that I hold in my possession a specification of this organ.<sup>27</sup>

Lardelli's offer was not taken up and he was to have no involvement with the plans for the Town Hall organ.

### London, 1885-1886

By January 1886 Lardelli had been appointed organist of Christ Church, Greenwich, and was also studying at Trinity College, London. On 15<sup>th</sup> January he wrote to friends in Maitland: 'I go up to-day to receive my diploma and hood as Fellow of the College of Organists from Rev. Sir Fred. E. Ouseley, Oxford University Professor. Passed a most satisfactory examination; only eight went through out of forty, many of whom were up for a second time. My Masters at Trinity College are awfully pleased. I fairly surprised myself and them too. I went prepared to fail, as I have lost so much time. I shall keep up my study to the last. Mrs. Lardelli joins Guildhall School of Music to-day. She sang 'May Queen' at a concert: quite a success.'<sup>28</sup>

On his return to Sydney, Lardelli was said to have 'obtained a pass in honours in the senior division at the examinations of Trinity College, London, in harmony and counterpoint, and the successive degrees of Associate [July 1885<sup>29</sup>] and Fellow of the College of Organists, suiting him to wear the hood and gown of the order. He succeeded in satisfying the following examiners:- Doctors of Music: Professor the Hon. Sir Frederick Gore-Ouseley, Jas. Higgs, Bridge (Westminster Abbey), Frost, Gladstone, Stainer (St. Paul's), Warwick Jordan; and Messrs. W. Parrott, W. S. Hoyte, and the grand old veteran, E. H. Turpin, receiving from the latter gentleman unbounded kindness and invaluable assistance. He intends to remain in Sydney, and has been appointed Professor of Music at King's School, Parramatta. Signora Lardelli has turned the visit to account by studying under the well-known teacher and voice-trainer, W. H. Cummings. This lady is credited with the possession of a full, genuine soprano voice of considerable power, ranging from B flat below C in alt, with a fine emotional middle register of pure mezzo-soprano *timbre* and rich quality. On making her first appearance recently at the Crystal Palace, London, at one of Mr. A. R. Mann's concerts, she received the great distinction of a recall for each of her two songs...'<sup>30</sup>

## Sydney 1886-1895

Arriving in Sydney in November 1886, Lardelli may never have taken up the post at Parramatta as by December he was advertising as a 'Professor of Pianoforte and Singing,' with his address as 1 Clifton Terrace, Victoria Street, Waverley.<sup>31</sup> 'Signora Lardelli' sang, accompanied by her husband, at an Evening Promenade Concert at the Gaiety Theatre on 27th November. It was reported that she had, 'in addition to a very agreeable voice, youth and a good share of personal attractions.'<sup>32</sup>

On 2 Sep 1887 Lardelli opened the first subscription concert of the YMCA Musical Society, at the YMCA Hall, playing the recently installed Hill organ of three manuals, with an organ selection including his own 'Alla Marcia' and Bach's 'G Minor fugue.' The *Herald* critic felt that Lardelli's composition showed 'considerable merit' but that nervousness had caused a 'serious tendency to hurry everything' which marred his performance in the other items.<sup>33</sup> He played in a second concert at the same venue on 24 Dec 1887 in a 'Grand Concert & Organ Recital' including 'Les Rameaux' by Fauré with a selection from 'Faust' by Gounod and pieces by Blumenthal, Scottson Clark and Costa.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout his life Lardelli had a long association with music education and teaching and by October 1887 was on the local committee for Trinity College, London.<sup>35</sup> He kept this position until his departure from Sydney in 1895.

By November 1887 Lardelli had been appointed organist at St Mary's, Waverley, however, his health may have been affected by the Sydney climate as he soon advertised for a month's exchange with an organist in a country town with a 'cool, dry climate indispensable.'<sup>36</sup>

In December 1887 Lardelli is mentioned along with John Delany, Montague Younger and Augustus Gehde in a list of leading Sydney musicians in connection with forming a National Musical Society for the Centenary celebrations.<sup>37</sup> Organ recitals were given at Christ Church, Enmore on 29 May 1888,<sup>38</sup> and on the new Halmshaw & Sons organ at St Luke's, Scone on 20<sup>th</sup> June and another at St Mary's, Maitland on 21<sup>st</sup> June.<sup>39</sup> The three hundred people present at the Scone recital were impressed by the 'masterly touch of Signor Lardelli.'<sup>40</sup>

While Lardelli was organist at St Mary's, Waverley it was decided to replace the 1864 single manual Walker organ with a larger instrument and Lardelli was responsible for drawing up the specification and probably for choosing the builder of the instrument in view of his earlier experience with the organ at St Leonard's, Seaford, Sussex. The organ with two manuals, thirteen speaking stops and six couplers, by August Gern, London was dedicated on 23 Feb 1889.<sup>41</sup>

Lardelli continued to take an interest in the new organ being built by Hill in London for the Sydney Town Hall and a number of letters were published in the *Herald* in July 1889 concerning access to the organ. "Fellow of the College of Organists," almost certainly Lardelli, wrote a rather pompous and satirical reply to a letter from "Amateur" which had suggested that 'every organist possessing the necessary qualifications, may be allowed to practice [on the organ] free of charge...'<sup>42</sup> The reply thought that the invitation should be extended to 'amateur organ-builders to potter about inside among the pipes and action' in order to 'train by degrees a number of artisans competent to repair so huge an instrument.'<sup>43</sup>

A 'Complimentary Benefit' concert 'to Signora and Signor' Lardelli, due to 'serious illness which has rendered a change of air necessary,' was held in the YMCA Hall on 7 Nov 1889, prior to their departure for Italy for three months. This time it was Signora Lardelli's health that had 'compelled her retirement for a long period.'<sup>44</sup> It was reported that '...offers of assistance at the complimentary concert were more numerous than was really necessary.'<sup>45</sup> During this trip Lardelli later said that he 'spent some time in Rome and Naples.' He also said that he spoke French and Italian as fluently as English and that he made 'teaching of singing in those languages a speciality.'<sup>46</sup> The Lardelli family invariably travelled as first class passengers with a maid to care for the children, showing that Lardelli had a taste for extravagant living.

The Lardellis returned to Sydney on 3 Mar 1890 and the Sands Directory lists Lardelli as a music teacher at Porter Street, Waverley 1890-92 and at Edgecliff Road, Woollahra in 1893. Two sons were born during this period, Mario in 1890 and Luigi in 1892. Both boys were to sing in the choir of St Patrick's, Brighton when the Lardellis were in England 1895-1900. Luigi was said to have had a beautifully clear soprano voice and frequently sang at public performances when the family lived in Perth 1903-1906.

On 21 Jul 1892, Lardelli played the organ in Sydney Town Hall for a concert with the Sydney Amateur Orchestral Society. He played arrangements from Wagner and Mascagni and an arrangement of Handél's 'Largo' for two violins, harp and organ.<sup>47</sup> It is not known if he played the organ on other occasions but he was to develop a friendship with the City Organist, Auguste Wiegand who maintained a monopoly on solo performances on the Town Hall organ and generally belittled the abilities of other organists in Sydney.<sup>48</sup> In 1896 Lardelli was to dedicate his 'Four Pieces for the Organ' as follows: 'Composed expressly for and dedicated to M. Auguste Wiegand, organist to the Corporation, Sydney, NSW.'

Early in 1894 Lardelli was advertising himself as a 'Professor of Music' at the Convent School of the Sacred Heart, Rose Bay, and at St Catherine's School (for daughters of the clergy), Waverley.<sup>49</sup>

In August 1894 Lardelli resigned as organist of St Mary's, Waverley 'owing to pressure of work as a teacher'.<sup>50</sup> He was later to say that, '... I have been a very busy [teacher]. In Sydney I used to give as many as ninety lessons a week, and I kept this up for seven or eight years, spending five hours a day in a single establishment.'<sup>51</sup>

He also presumably wanted to concentrate on writing his opera 'Katherine,' which was first performed (without costumes or scenery) at The Athenaeum Hall, Waverley in April 1895. At this performance 'Madame Lardelli sang the songs allocated to Katherine...'<sup>52</sup> Described as a comic opera in two acts, with libretto by Margery Browne of Drummoyne, the opera was published by John K. O'Meagher.<sup>53</sup>

The first full performance of 'Katherine' was in Sydney Town Hall on 16<sup>th</sup> May, with an orchestra of 'two score instrumentalists' and a chorus of 'nearly two hundred voices.'<sup>54</sup> On the previous day Wiegand had helpfully played an arrangement of selections from the opera at a Town Hall recital.<sup>55</sup> It was reported that nearly two thousand people were in attendance and that 'considering the necessarily incomplete nature of the performance, the

success achieved ... was surprising.' The *Herald* critic felt that the music 'shows a true melodic gift,' and that 'there are heaps of "good things" in the work.' Mme Lardelli was unable to sing in the title-role which was taken by Violet Birkenhead, who also sang the part of Dame Darling.<sup>56</sup> The critic from *Freeman's Journal*, however, was disappointed with the work and felt that while 'the hand of a clever musician is revealed,' at the same time, 'the instincts of a church organist were too strong in him, and the result was what may be described as a "blend" of the school cantata and a second-rate oratorio. Two of the songs would have been excellent as church offertories.'<sup>57</sup>

Lardelli was convinced that his opera would succeed overseas and the family departed on 27<sup>th</sup> May for London. The *Evening News* reported that 'there was quite a levee of musical folk, including M. Wiegand, on the wharf to bid him farewell,'<sup>58</sup> providing further evidence of the friendship between the Lardellis and Wiegand.

### London, 1895-1900

In October 1895 Lardelli was living in a boarding house in Willesden, London and was in negotiation for a production of 'Katherine.'<sup>59</sup> A change of fortune with the sale of six piano pieces to publishers Ashdown & Parry soon enabled him to take a house in Bedford Park W. for a year. It was reported in November that he had tried several producers without success, 'playing over thirty songs at Metzler's; their musical adviser, Mr. Coward, pronounced them "drivel."<sup>60</sup>

The *Evening News* reported in February 1896 that Lardelli had been engaged by Mr Lowenfeld as composer at the Prince of Wales Theatre 'for three years at a good retaining fee and has also been appointed to a professorship of singing at the Blackheath Conservatoire of Music.'<sup>61</sup> By February 1896 Lardelli had composed another operetta and blamed his failure to get a production for 'Katherine' on the 'book' (libretto)!<sup>62</sup>

In September 1897 it was reported that '...Mr Hedmond [Her Majesty's, London] has another opera at his disposal from the pen of Mr. Lardelli...'<sup>63</sup> and in February 1898 that in a new song published by G. Ricordi & Co. 'Guglielmo Lardelli's music has a catching tunefulness, and the accompaniment is easy, but not trivial.'<sup>64</sup> On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1898 a 'Signor Lardelli Matinee Musicale' was held at the Queen's (Small) Hall, London, in which the compositions were entirely by Lardelli.<sup>65</sup> This was to be the musical highlight of Lardelli's time in London.

In December 1898, at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, the new programme for the Christmas holidays was announced: '...The principal novelty ... is a fairy fantasy written by Mr. Mel B. Spurr, music by Signor Lardelli, entitled "The Gnome's Grot"' in which are presented a succession of marvellous mechanical and optical illusions.'<sup>66</sup>

During the period in London Lardelli composed some serious works, including what he impressively claimed as 'Five Masses.' The work, published by Schott & Co. in 1896 was '*Petites Messes faciles et chantantes pour deux voix ou chœur a deux parties et soli avec accomp. d'Orgue ou de piano.*'<sup>67</sup> It seems likely that his Toccata in G minor for organ was composed during this period. A piano version was published in 1900.

Another son, Noel was born in Brighton on 2 Jan 1898. Noel was also to excel in singing and he competed as a vocal soloist at the Townsville Eisteddfod in 1910.

During Lardelli's absence from Australia, early in 1896, a deal of correspondence appeared in the Sydney press about who should replace Wiegand as City Organist while he took five months leave for a visit to Europe. Lardelli was named with Sykes, Truman and Wale as one of Sydney's 'first class' organists capable of filling this role. He was, however, never regarded as one of the "inner circle" of Sydney organists.<sup>68</sup>

### Sydney 1900

Arriving back in Sydney in February 1900, Lardelli was able to say that 150 of his compositions had been published in London, of which eighty were for Edwin Ashdown Ltd who had made him their Australian agent.<sup>69</sup> This role involved a deal of travel around Australia and this seems to have resulted in Lardelli's unsettled life in his latter years.

He gave a 'bright concert' in the YMCA Hall on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, featuring a pianola (invented in 1895) which he had brought with him from Europe and the rest of the programme consisted of his own compositions of a 'light' nature.<sup>70</sup> He then spent several months travelling, giving performances in a similar vein, including ones at Melbourne Town Hall and Victoria Hall, Adelaide.

### Grafton 1901

Lardelli arrived in Grafton in February 1901 as a visitor, and within a month, accepted the post of organist and choirmaster at Christ Church Cathedral.<sup>71</sup> His intention was to teach piano, voice, French and Italian as well as to engage in some riding, fishing and duck-shooting! Lardelli made the extravagant claim that he had been organist in 'several cathedrals' and had been responsible for the placing of new organs in three of them. (No evidence has been found to support these claims.) At this time Lardelli's opinion, albeit somewhat tongue-in-cheek, of his own compositions is quoted:

"I thought it was time," said the Signor quietly, "that the country music teachers were induced to give "The Maiden's Prayer" and similar musical chestnuts a much needed rest. I hoped," he went on, with a twinkling eye, "to create a taste for a new class of composition, which should contain at one and the same time the study of a Mozart sonata, with the tunefulness of a Lardelli!"<sup>72</sup>

Lardelli's stay in Grafton was, however, short-lived and a farewell concert was held for him less than six months later. It was said that he was a 'misfit' in Grafton and that 'his lines didn't seem to be cast in pleasant places.'<sup>73</sup>

### Bathurst 1902-1903

In February 1902 Lardelli was engaged to take part in a complimentary concert for Thomas H Massey, the organist of All Saints' Cathedral, Bathurst.<sup>74</sup> He remained in Bathurst as organist at St Stephen's Presbyterian Church. During his tenure the 1893 Conacher organ was repaired and moved by Charles Richardson and was 'formally opened' on 6 Jul 1902 with a special service of praise.<sup>75</sup>

While in Bathurst Lardelli was the conductor of the Orange Choral Society which took part in a 'choral contest' in November 1902 with the Bathurst Choral Society (W Dryden), the Bathurst Federal Choir (T H Massey), Lithgow United Choir, Mudgee Philharmonic Society and the Sydney Railway & Tramway Society, competing for a first prize of £75.<sup>76</sup>



Lardelli in 1903

Lardelli gave an organ recital at St Stephen's in June 1903 and it was reported that the 'three organ numbers ... were rendered in a masterly manner.'<sup>77</sup> During 1903 Lardelli's name appeared in the Small Debts Court and he left Bathurst in about August 1903, presumably to avoid mounting debts.

### Perth 1903-1906

The *West Australian* reported that Lardelli had arrived in Perth on 24 Aug 1903 and that it was his intention to teach music there. It is also mentioned that Lardelli had written pianoforte pieces under the *nom de plume* of Henri Latour, A. Dubois and Eugene Dumas.<sup>78</sup> He was appointed organist at Wesley Church, Perth from 20 Sep 1903,<sup>79</sup> with a salary of £100 p.a. plus £50 in 'certain perquisites.' At this time, the Wesley Church possessed the 1875 Bishop & Son organ of two manuals and eleven stops.<sup>80</sup>

There was soon perceived to be a rivalry between Lardelli and the organist of St George's Cathedral, Reginald D'Arcy Irvine, as Lardelli conducted a concert on 1 Nov 1903 at the Queen's Hall for the visiting violinist Mr E. Toy at the same time as D'Arcy Irvine's sacred concert at the cathedral.<sup>81</sup> The perception of a rivalry was compounded when Lardelli conducted a performance of Handel's 'Messiah' at the Queen's Hall on Christmas night, 1903 while D'Arcy Irvine simultaneously conducted the same work at the Theatre Royal. Both performances were, however, very well-attended and at both venues there was 'standing room' only. D'Arcy Irvine performed the complete work while Lardelli ended his performance at the 'Hallelujah' chorus, 'an innovation recently brought into vogue in the Eastern States.'<sup>82</sup> The rivalry continued and it was reported in April 1904 that 'Signor Lardelli, the organist threatens to make music at the Wesley Church rival cathedral music.'<sup>83</sup>

However, the rivals were to join forces in January 1906 for the 'Lardelli-Irvine Concert' given in aid of the Bunbury Church Extension Fund at the Lyric Theatre, Bunbury. The choristers

of St George's Cathedral, 'comprising fully thirty boys and men,' sang, though the singers were reported to be "off-colour," Master Luigi Lardelli sang his father's "Ave Maria" and was warmly encored, while Lardelli performed humorous songs.<sup>84</sup>

During his time in Perth, the following piece, attributed to 'Dryblower' (Edwin Greenslade), appeared in the Perth *Sunday Times* of 24 April 1904:

### A Master of Music



*Lardelli's my Latinised name,  
For when classical music's your game,  
With no foreign blood  
Your name would be MUD  
On the glorious annals of fame.  
I'll play you Beethoven and Spohr,  
And reel off, from mem'ry or score  
Cavatina's by Raff,  
Or songs from a gaff  
Where they bawl for the balladists' gore.  
But fortune towards me has strayed  
Since Sankey and Moody I've played  
On my organist's bench  
In the Wesleyan Church,  
Where Sir George loses money and maid.*

Lardelli was again beset by financial problems and, according to a later report, 'the fragile little composer was driven to despair while in W.A. by monetary troubles,'<sup>85</sup> and he departed Perth in 1906 when a farewell benefit concert for him was held at the Queen's Hall on 7<sup>th</sup> March. The programme for this concert consisted entirely of Lardelli's own compositions and he was assisted by D'Arcy Irvine who provided the organ accompaniment for Luigi Lardelli in a performance of Lardelli's 'Ave Maria.'<sup>86</sup>

In August 1906 Lardelli was back in England and the London correspondent of the Evening News (Sydney), Emily Soldene, describes Lardelli as: "smart, mercurial, lively as a cricket, talking nineteen to the dozen, no getting a word in edgeways. Clever, entertaining, came to town with 250 pieces of manuscript music, sold two-thirds of them, sails for Adelaide next month ..."<sup>87</sup> There is an increasing sense of desperation in Lardelli's behaviour in his later years.

### Sydney 1907-1909

In July 1907, when the City Organist, Arthur Mason retired, a 'farewell recital' was held in the Town Hall at which Mason played several organ works. Lardelli was accompanist, presumably at the piano, for the vocal soloists who took part.<sup>88</sup>

Wesley Church, Perth appears to be Lardelli's last position as an organist and from 1907 onwards he devoted himself to giving entertainments consisting of recitations and humorous songs of his own composition. One such concert was "The Lardelli Entertainment" given in the Centenary Hall, Sydney on 14 April 1908. It was a benefit concert given as a 'well-deserved recognition of a kindly-natured and clever musician.' Lardelli was said to be 'an extremely popular, good fellow, [who] has accomplished many feats of generosity to all sorts of charitable concerts.'<sup>89</sup> The evening consisted of twenty-six short monologues and humorous songs by Lardelli, with another fourteen of his vocal and instrumental compositions performed by fellow artists! He was said to have had a 'lightly caressing touch' at the piano and his voice, 'an apology for a tenor, [was] adroitly employed, and the timbre possesses carrying power.'<sup>90</sup>

### North Queensland 1908-1910

Once again Lardelli's health dictated a change in climate and in June 1908 he arrived in Townsville as conductor of the 'new Liedertafel,'<sup>91</sup> and may, for a short time, have been appointed as organist at Townsville cathedral.<sup>92</sup> He gave a first concert of his own music, at the Theatre Royal, in August 1908 and his Townsville Ladies' Choir won an Eisteddfod at Charters Towers in April 1909.<sup>93</sup>

He moved to the less humid climate of Charters Towers in September 1909 where he gave lessons in 'voice production and singing.'<sup>94</sup> A concert was given by Lardelli at the Theatre Royal, Charters Towers on 21 Mar 1910, including vocal and instrumental items, a children's choir of 120 voices and a ladies' choir. It was reported that the 'Charters Towers portion of the Signor's Ladies' Choir sang their competition number, "Sound Sleep" (Vaughan Williams) and received the plaudits of the audience.'<sup>95</sup>

At the Townsville Eisteddfod which followed, Lardelli caused much controversy when he withdrew his three children's choirs (including one from Townsville) from further items when another children's choir from Charters Towers, conducted by Mr

Hinspeter won in competition with Lardelli's choirs.<sup>96</sup> Shortly after this, Lardelli became ill and died of pneumonia at Charters Towers on 7 July 1910, at the age of 55 years.

Lardelli's three sons became farmers in Queensland. The youngest, Noel, enlisted in the AIF in 1916 and served in France and the UK in WWI and in the RAAF during WWII. Mario's son, Mario (Mick) Lardelli (1919-2010), enlisted in 1939 and served overseas during WWII. He was the mayor of Ryde for many years and was awarded the AM in 1990 and the Centenary Medal in 2000. Mick's grandson, Tim Sargeant, then a piano pupil of Mark Quarmby, was to play the organ in Sydney Town Hall in a duet with his teacher for Young Organists' Day, 1993, on the organ played by his ancestor 101 years before!



Lardelli's great, great grandson, Tim Sargeant (second from left) with l to r, Nathan Carruthers, Arthur Lee and Nicolas Chen at YOD 1998. Photo: Hugh Knight.

Without doubt Lardelli was a very capable musician who achieved the highest level of qualification as an organist. He was an engaging character, energetic, clever and a good conversationalist, though rather pretentious in his adoption of the title 'Signor,' and extravagant in his claims of some of his achievements. As a composer he was prolific in output and noted for his gift of melody and rapidity of composition, said to be a clever technical musician, but his compositions pandered

to popular taste and lacked originality. Of his many published works, most were popular songs and piano pieces, with a handful of organ works. It is ironic that one of the few works to survive in the repertoire today is his Toccata in G minor for organ published in the late 1890s.

### Acknowledgements

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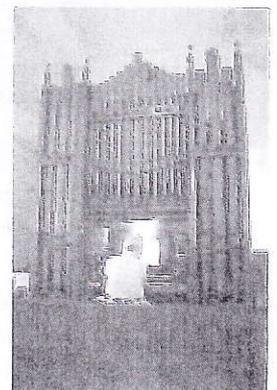
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