

# The Arion Club—A Pioneer Musical Society

The soul of music slumbers in the shell,  
Till wak'd and kindled by the Master's spell,  
And feeling hearts touch them, lightly pour  
A thousand melodies unheard before.  
—Godfrey.



In the "Arion Club," Victoria's celebrated male choir, which is just entering its seventeenth season; a picture of whose active, or singing members is produced above; this city enjoys the distinction of having the oldest male organization in the Dominion of Canada, or for that matter on the Northwest continent of America. To most Victorians, the Arion Club has for so many years been identified

laston and W. Greig being appointed to draft suitable bye-laws.

It is doubtful if the promoters of this little meeting ever dreamed of the success which was to attend their efforts, or the important position the Club was ultimately to fill in the musical life of Western Canada.

The first Club concert was given in the Institute Hall, View Street, Wednesday evening, May 17th, 1893. It was opened by the singing of the Club's Motto:

"Ecce quam bonum  
Quamque jucundum  
Habitate fratres in unum"

and since that date all Club concerts or functions have been opened with the singing of

prevails a very fine feeling of camaraderie, engendered by the numerous mutual concerts and entertainments in which the two clubs have participated. The "Orpheus Club" were heard in this city last year, when they were the guests of the Arion Club, at a big concert given in the Victoria theatre, and won general admiration by their fine performance. E. Wolff afterwards took charge of the musical part of the Pollard Juvenile Opera Company so well known in this city, while A. S. Aspland joined the Operatic stage with great success. Of the rest of the "old brigade," W. Greig, J. E. Martin (affectionately known as "Jemmie"), and Ross Monro (at one time lieutenant-colonel of

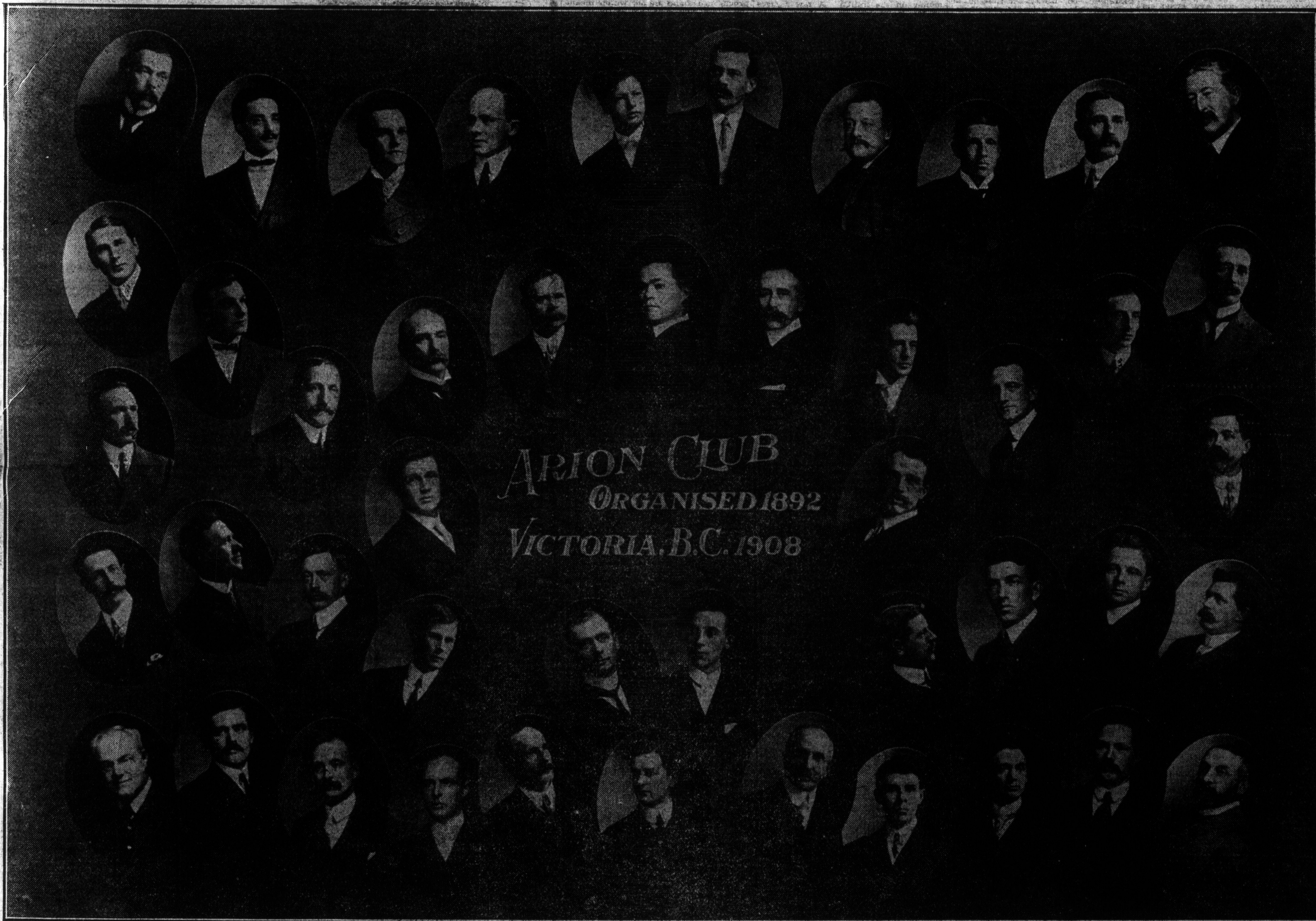
first asked the club to complete the number without him. At the time no one imagined that it would never be his lot to lead the Club again; but such was the fact. Mr. E. H. Russell stepped into the breach, and conducted the remainder of the programme, and by a touching co-incidence, the next number on the programme was Sir Arthur Sullivan's beautiful number "The Long Day Closes," ending with the appropriate words

"Thy book of toll is closed  
The long day closes."

His death, which was regarded as a public loss in Victoria, occurred in Rivermore, California, on October 23rd, 1899. The news was

in the City, and this standard has been rigidly maintained.

The Club gives three concerts each season, which are open to any one who desires to become an Associate member of the Club, by subscribing for the series, the fees being quite nominal, and all money used solely for providing the best possible concerts. No salaries are paid except for professional soloists and orchestral work, the members of the chorus and officers each and all subscribe regularly to the funds, besides devoting their time to carrying on the work. Having organized at the commencement of Victoria's darkest period, in a financial sense, the Club had to face many vicissitudes in its early years. A feature of



tified with the musical life and history of the city, that it will no doubt interest our readers to learn the origin and history of the Club.

On February 15th, 1893, the following letter was received by a number of Victoria's best male vocalists:

Dear Sir—In response to a widely expressed request, Messrs. Geo. Jay, Herbert Kent and the undersigned, as a provisional committee, have called a meeting of those likely to become active members, for the purpose of organizing a male voice Glee Club in this city. The meeting will be held at the office of Messrs. Yates, Jay and Russell, on Thursday next at 8 o'clock p.m., when a plan of organization and other details will be submitted by the committee. Should you be desirous of becoming an active member, you are cordially invited to attend. In any case, I would beg the favor of a reply, stating whether or not you would be willing to join, so that the committee may know exactly the number of probable members. I remain, yours faithfully,

WM. GREIG,  
Secy. pro. tem.

As a result, a meeting was held in the office of Yates & Jay, Bastion street, at which the chair was taken by Herbert Kent, the late Wm. Greig acting as secretary.

The following motion was moved by Geo. Jay, the present city magistrate, "That those present form themselves into a Club for the study of music for male voices," and being seconded by Godfrey Booth, the present manager of the local branch of the Northern Crown Bank, was carried; Messrs. Geo. Jay, P. Wol-

laston, which is in effect "Behold how good a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." The following gentlemen made the chorus:

First Tenors—J. C. M. Keith, K. J. Middleton, E. H. Russell, A. J. Thomas, E. Wolff, S. Y. Wootton.

Second Tenors—A. S. Aspland, J. S. Floyd, W. S. Goodwin, A. Hood, J. Kingham.

First Basses—E. A. Jacob, Herbert Kent, J. E. Martin, R. R. Munro, W. H. Peagram, F. Wollaston.

Second Basses—G. W. Booth, E. Grizzelle, Geo. Henwood, Geo. Jay, C. W. Rhodes and P. Wollaston.

Conductor—William Greig.

The Club was also assisted by Miss Heathfield, soprano; a name full of pleasant associations to those who attended concerts in those days. Of the gentlemen who participated in the concert, Messrs. J. C. M. Keith, E. H. Russell, B.A. (the present conductor), A. J. Thomas, S. Y. Wootton, W. S. Goodwin, Herbert Kent, G. W. Booth, G. Henwood, and P. Wollaston are still the valued veterans of the chorus. Messrs. J. S. Floyd, J. Kingham, E. A. Jacob, F. Wollaston and Geo. Jay, though not on the active list, are still valued members of the Club. K. J. Middleton has moved to Tacoma, where he has founded the "Orpheus Club," an organization identical to the Arion Club, and between whom there

the local militia) have passed into the "great beyond." It has been said that among those things which haunt the memory longest, and will most readily recall the past, melody has first place. Of the truth of this saying, strong proof is found in the fact that many familiar pieces of Club music are associated in the minds of the singers with those members whose voices (now, alas, silent), once joined them in well remembered chorus or solo, and the memory of those who are "no more," is yet green in the affections of their old comrades. Of all those connected with the "Arion Club," their first conductor, the late William Greig, did more to found and firmly establish it, than any other. A man of very considerable musical genius, poetic temperament, and great personal charm, he united the members in a profound love of music for itself; and to his great and unselfish work the "Arion Club" of the present day is a monument. His high personal character, and delightful wit, made of him a valued friend, and did much to cement the Club members together. He led the Club until the illness which preceded his death. On April 5th, 1899, during the performance of the second concert of the seventh season in the Institute Hall, he was overcome with faintness, which he pluckily fought off until the last number on the first half of the programme was almost completed, when feeling himself about to collapse, he hurriedly left the stage, having

received at a Club practice, and caused the most profound sorrow, the practice breaking up after singing Mendelssohn's "Forever blessed." An affecting tribute to his memory occurred on the occasion of the next concert. The Club sang Kreutzer's beautifully pathetic "Home" in his memory; this having been his favorite number. When the Club rose to sing, the audience, moved by one of those sudden and spontaneous impulses which occur at times, rose with the singers, and remained standing during the singing of the piece, which was received with the tribute of that most eloquent emotion, sympathetic silence.

By many it was feared that with the death of Mr. Greig, the "Arion Club" would pass out of existence, but chiefly owing to the able leadership of Mr. E. Howard Russell, B.A., who has conducted the Club ever since, they have marched steadily along the road of improvement each succeeding year.

The first concert was an invitation affair, the members themselves bearing all expenses personally. To this simple fact, the secret of the Club's long-continued success may safely be attributed. Many another organization with high sounding titles, and great ambitions have come and gone during the intervening years, but of them all the "Arion Club" remains, its fame and scope increasing with the passing years: it was not designed for the making of money; but to promote the love of good music

the concerts is the elaborate programmes, containing the words of the songs sung; and at one concert, there not being sufficient funds, it was proposed to curtail expenses by omitting the programmes. This was not to be stood, and the members of the chorus put their hands in their pockets and found the money required. On another occasion, there was no money for professional soloists which were required, and again the singing members "paid up"; at one time funds were so low that the members had to give a special concert to make up the deficit. This is the spirit that breeds success, and today the Club can afford to laugh at their earlier struggles; for having shared the hard times of Victoria's past, it now justly participates in her present progress and prosperity.

The greatest blow the Club sustained was at the commencement of last season, when it was found that the Institute Hall would no longer be available for their concerts. This meant engaging the Victoria theatre, which involved over quadruple expenditure. At the first blush it appeared an impossibility, but the Arion Club had faced reverses before, and nothing daunted faced the necessary preparations for the season's work, issuing an appeal for increased membership; and with such good will did Victorians respond to their call, that the list of Associate members was almost trebled, and the theatre packed to its capacity.

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