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This is the author’s unedited preprint version of this article.
Sitting in the Festival Theatre recently listening to the Adelaide Symphony’s faultless performance of Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique*, I was struck by how far they have come since the 1930s, when George Szell is supposed to have proclaimed, ‘Mr Moses, I must tell you that I cannot conduct in Adelaide. Between the best they can do and the least I can accept, there is an unbridgeable gulf!’ Martin Buzacott questions the accuracy of this ‘notorious’ legend, however, and overall Adelaide fares well in Australia’s musical history. Artur Rubenstein called it a ‘quiet distinguished city’; its ‘proud choral tradition’ ensured that the Adelaide Singers lasted longer than the other ABC choirs; and, of course, it was the seedbed for the irreplaceable institution that ABC-FM has become.

Buzacott has made a good job of a massive project, although he rarely attains the wit of his description of the unfortunate Eugene Goossen’s *Apocalypse* as ‘the most ambitious compositional project ever undertaken by a sane Australian-based musician’; this sanity immediately called into doubt by the occult bedroom redecoration the project involved, ‘to the discomfort of his wife, who took to sleeping in another room and, eventually, another country.’

This is the story of a cast of thousands – administrators, stars, and third flutes included. The Musicians’ Union is often cast as the villain of the piece: Buzacott sees no place for unquestioned tenure compromising artistic standards. Though the
symphony orchestras and their conductors are the focus, all aspects of the huge amount of musical activity which has flourished under the ABC’s wing are covered in this thoroughly researched account, from its beginnings to the present day, from the heyday of professional ABC choirs, military and dance bands to the recent devolution of the orchestras.