

Eric Ball
His Life and Music, 1903-1989

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By

Dennis Taylor

CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-4118-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4118-4

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I am indebted to Professor David Greer, who over a period of three years guided me on my research for the material of this book. His patience and interest in my subject kept me enthusiastic in the task to hand. Moreover, he helped me, through his eye for detail, to define the style and the contents of this book. Then to my wife who spent hours sitting at her computer typing out the draft of this work, in spite of her disability.

I am grateful to Peter Cooke who gave me material to use from his own collection of data used in his book published on the life of Eric Ball, published in 1991.

Various members of the Salvation Army Territorial Headquarters Music Department have been a great help, allowing me to view the records of published music readily made available to me for my research, also for the availability of music scores for me to study.

Also, I am indebted to the following music establishments and individuals:

Music Publishers: Boosey and Hawkes Ltd; Chester Music Ltd; Musikhaus Ruh, Switzerland; Novello and Co. Ltd; Salvationist, Publishing and Supplies, Ltd; R Smith and Co. Ltd; Wright and Round, Ltd.

British Library; Mechanical-Copyright Protection Society, Ltd; New Zealand Brass band Association; Salvation Army International Heritage Centre;

Salvation Army Officers as follows: Lieutenant Colonel Norman Bearcroft; Lieutenant Colonel Bridley Boon; Major Trevor Davis; Lieutenant Colonel Ray Steadman-Allen.

Other musicians: Geoffrey Brand; Mr. Roy Horabin; Mr. Ed Noble; Mr Derek Rawlinson.

FOREWORD

DAVID GREER

As a Junior Bandsman (euphonium) in the Salvation Army in the late 1940, I was well acquainted with the name of Eric Ball. And from the conversations of my elders- father (trombone), brother (trombone), Uncle Percy (trombone), Uncle Bill (bass trombone) - I gathered that he was regarded as the Beethoven, the Schubert, of the brass band music. Indeed, my first acquaintance with the music of the classical master was through Ball's arrangements and to this day, when I hear the opening bars of a particular orchestral work, my mind's eye is apt to present me with the memory of a row of tunicked bandsmen.

The basis for study of a composer's works is a list of his first compositions, with a reliable chronology. This Dennis Taylor has provided, with full accompanying details. More than that, he has given us an account of Eric Ball's life, including his strange on-off-on relationship with the Salvation Army. This amply demonstrates the enormous influence that Ball exerted, not only with the Salvation Army but upon the brass band movement as a whole.

Dennis Taylor is well qualified to undertake this task. As an experienced bandsman, conductor, teacher, and composer, he has extensive knowledge of the brass band world, both with the Salvation Army and beyond. His book is to be welcomed as a serious study of the work of an influential figure.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a number of leading figures in the brass band movement in the twentieth century, and Eric Ball has an important place in this gallery of musicians. As a composer he set new standards for brass band music, especially in the use of colour, because it is sometimes said that the brass bands lack colour variety due to the similarity of the instruments used. Ball, however, achieved a range of colours in the music which he composed, both within the Salvation Army and in the Secular Brass Band Movement.

As a conductor he helped to raise the standards of the performances of brass bands, this was achieved by his initial teaching and interpretation of the music during the practice sessions. Besides his talents for composing Ball had a flair for writing poetry, and writing articles concerning all aspects of brass band music. This proved particularly useful when he became the editor of the brass band periodical the *British Bandsman*, a post which he held for a number of years. In this capacity he produced articles on the interpretation of the music and practical hints on correcting intonation problems and other areas of performing the music, all of this helped raise the standards and the popularity of brass bands and their performances. For a short period in the 1950s he was the editor of *The Conductor*, the journal for the National Brass Band Conductors Association. Contests formed an important part of the brass band's function both at national and local level, and bands practised for these throughout the year. The adjudicator had a particular role in these contests, and Ball was in great demand as an adjudicator throughout his life. Ball's main contribution to the Salvation Army was his composing, in addition from the late 1940s his contribution of a large output for the Secular Brass Band Movement. His output was extensive which included a large repertoire of choral music, besides his large output for brass bands. He was a man who combined persuasive charm with strong Christian beliefs, and this opened up the way for a strong influence in every aspect of life in which he was concerned.

The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive study of his life and career, which includes to the best of the author's knowledge, a complete catalogue of all of his compositions, sacred and secular, instrumental and vocal. To put the catalogue in context I have provided

four chapters, giving a broad account of his life and a survey of his music. In my research I extracted the necessary biographical information from Peter Cooke's book, *Eric Ball (The Man and His Music)*.

The research in this book is a comprehensive account of Eric Ball's life, with additional material from sources not used in Cooke's book, which includes interviews and letters from people who knew the composer.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY DAYS AND INFLUENCES

Eric Walter John Ball was born in Kingswood, near Bristol, on October 31, 1903. To the best of our knowledge, Ball's grandparents were natives of the Bristol area, and their roots were in the poorer population who earned meagre wages in the local manufacturing industries of hat and shoe making. Grandfather Daniel Ball kept a smallholding of three or four acres, and grew vegetables to distribute to the local shopkeepers; he and his wife Esther had sixteen children. Eric Ball's father, John Daniel, was the eldest, and a grocer by trade. He met a young Salvation Army Officer, Mabel Lily Bryan, when she was appointed to Kingswood Corps in Bristol. She was born in the Aston district of Birmingham into a family of Baptists, and joined the Salvation Army along with some of her sisters and a brother, and was subsequently trained to become a Salvation Army Officer. After a period of courtship, John Daniel Ball and Mabel Bryan were married in St. George's Parish Church, Bristol on December 25, 1902, and they continued to be members of the Salvation Army.

It would be expedient at this stage to give brief details concerning the Salvation Army, a movement both evangelical and deeply involved in the social welfare of the population. The Salvation Army came into being when its founder, the Reverend William Booth, resigned from the Methodist New Connexion in 1862 upon accepting an invitation to lead a tent mission in the Whitechapel Road of East London, and the movement was formally established in 1865.

Eric Walter Ball was the eldest son of John and Mabel Ball and had two brothers; Harold, born in 1908, and Donald, born in 1919.

There were two important influences on the life of the young Eric which would prove to be important factors in him maturing into the musician he became. They came via two of Ball's uncles; firstly his mother's brother, Walter, who took Eric to concerts, thus giving the young boy his first introduction to classical music; and secondly Ball's father's brother, George, who made his living as a pianist by playing in the local public houses, where he excelled in improvising the varied popular songs of the day. It was Uncle George who therefore gave the young Ball his

first introduction to the piano, and as Eric matured in his music ability he developed the same skills in improvisation which he used to great effect in improvising gospel songs in Salvation Army meetings and festivals. Peter Cooke records in his book an illustration of Ball's improvisational prowess:

... At this time Eric would take a song and create a descriptive piece with it. One of the band's favourites was a fantasia, "Stilling the storm." Taking the song "A little ship ..." he would go through it, verse by verse, through the storm, and the calming of the sea. Throughout, the phrase "a little ship was on the sea" could be heard above the storm, and during the calm. This piece was sometimes rendered on the organ¹

These early days did not prove to be stable times for Ball, owing to the fact that his father could not settle in one place for long. Indeed, by the age of fourteen Ball and his family had moved fourteen times. Unfortunately, these years are not very well documented and it is difficult to give exact dates as far as the sojourns involved are concerned. However, we know that there was a move from Kingswood where Ball was born to Godalming in Surrey which occurred when Ball was about ten years of age, in the year 1913. It must have been about this time that he was unable to attend the Salvation Army as the family did not reside near a Corps, and he attended the local Methodist Church instead. It was while residing in this vicinity that a local Anglican Church organist and retired teacher, whose name is unknown, not only gave Ball piano lessons but taught him mathematics along with some harmony and counterpoint. This teacher inspired him with the desire to become a cathedral organist, and Ball once said in an interview that "as a youngster I wanted to be a cathedral organist, but the Lord intervened in another way, and my main career has been in brass bands, and in choral music."²

In a letter to his friend, Ball described his formative years:

... my formative years were variable, for my parents were often moving from here to there, so day-school work was sketchy. "Compositions" (essays) was my best subject I think, and I am always thankful for tonic sol-fa, which was the only music I experienced³

By the beginning of World War I, Eric's parents had moved nearer to London and the family were able to attend the Salvation Army once more. It was here that the young Ball played the cornet in the Young People's Band of the Salvation Army at Ealing Corps.⁴ The family moved again and Ball found himself living in Erith. Here he attended the Salvation Army and played the trombone in the Senior Band. It is recorded that whilst the

family lived in Erith, Ball continued his organ studies at the Holy Trinity Church in Dartford.

Leaving school at the age of fourteen in 1917, Ball acquired a job as an office boy at the Staines Linoleum Company. This meant that he would have to live in Southall and he took lodgings with his Uncle Thomas and Aunt Emily (relations on his mother's side of the family). He attended the Southall Corps, and joined the Senior Band, and it was here that his life became more stable. In fact, Southall became a very important place of development for Ball—both in his career and his private life. Ball took a very active part in Salvation Army Corps life at Southall and became the bandmaster, a position which he held right up until becoming a Salvation Army Officer.

The appointment of new commanding officers Adjutant and Mrs A. Bearcroft proved to be important for Ball. Their son Norman, who was six at the time, admired Ball and was greatly influenced by him—indeed, in later years they would become firm friends.

It is interesting to note how Ball used whatever time he could to improve his musical knowledge. For example, after finishing work at the Staines Linoleum Factory, he would make his way to St. Peter's Church, Staines, for organ and piano lessons. It was during this period that Ball studied the music of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, and centred his attention on Elgar's music, and he had a particular love for Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and the Cello Concerto.

Ball was very happy living with his relations at Southall, creating as it did a more settled environment for him and an opportunity to make friends and extend his musical activity. He also learned how to make money; he once recalled hiring a village hall to give a pianoforte recital and being thrilled when the country "society" turned up in their motors and traps to hear him. The most positive aspect of this episode, however, was the fact that after paying expenses there was a clear profit of ten shillings—all for himself.⁵

In the process of researching his life it transpired that Ball commenced composing in his teens; unfortunately, none of the works from this early period have survived.

After a few years working at the Linoleum factory, Eric Ball went to work at the Salvation Army Trade Store on Judd Street, Kings Cross, London, where he served on the counter selling brass instruments and music. However, he really wanted to work in the Editorial Department, and at the age of eighteen on the June 29, 1920 Ball took up his position in this important Salvation Army Department.

Before we look at Ball's involvement in this department, it is pertinent to give an account of the department itself and its formation.

The Salvation Army, Music Editorial Department

In its early days, the Salvation Army used varied groups of instruments to accompany the singing of songs or hymns; for example, a group composed of a valve trombone, violin and concertina.

Eventually brass instruments became the norm, and the first known combination was formed in Salisbury by the Fry family, a father and three sons, all of whom played brass instruments. The family became aware of William Booth's Salvation Army when they held meetings in the streets of Salisbury, and were so impressed with what they heard that they soon joined forces with the organisation and later accompanied William Booth on his evangelistic campaigns. After Booth left Methodism to become a freelance evangelist, many Methodist churches were closed to him. This led Booth to hire tents and theatres, or any available buildings, provided the rent was not too high for this kind of venue. However, for the unchurched semi-literate audience which flocked to hear him, music was an issue. If the music wasn't lively, the congregation would sit dumb; conversely, when they caught on, their singing would run ahead or lag behind uncontrollably. The Fry family and the first proper Salvation Army Band at Consett in County Durham helped to galvanise the congregation musically, a movement which was furthered by the brass bands that were formed all over the world in the early years of the Salvation Army. The drum would provide a strong beat, and the sound of brass would lend heart to the musically inept and faint hearted. William Booth was of the opinion that to meet its musical needs, his organisation required its own Music Department. This was finally established in 1883, at Clapton, East London, under the supervision of his son Commander Herbert Booth.⁶ The department was in need of someone with musical knowledge who could put Salvation Army music on a firm basis; such a person was found in Richard Slater, a violinist, lecturer and composer who had joined the Salvation Army in 1882. Thus began an association with William Booth that was to ripen into a deep and lasting affection, as well as with Herbert Booth that was to give the Salvation Army some of their finest songs, and with the Music Editorial Department that was never to be broken, even by retirement, until the father of Salvation Army music, Richard Slater wrote his last manuscript.

Eric Ball joined this department and became one of a line of composers who raised Salvation Army music-making to a high level of organisation

and artistry. In 1921, Ball submitted his first composition, a part-song for choir, *Joyful Hallelujahs* (B/1)⁷ to be sung by Songster Brigades (the name given to four-part choirs in the Salvation Army). “My joining the Music Editorial Department,” he confessed, “centred my interests in compositions and gave direction to my work. For my own delectation I have written sonatas, overtures, and even a symphony or two.”⁸ Unfortunately, there is no written evidence of these claims.

The joint editors of the department were two talented musicians, Major Frederick Hawkes and Major Arthur Goldsmith. Hawkes seems to have had the greater influence upon the young Ball, who said of him:

... One of the great lessons he taught me was to be, as he used to put it, mercilessly self-critical. He would not let anything pass, he had a happy knack of being able to spot something that we had missed in proof reading for instance without even searching for it ... He was in many ways the builder, the architect⁹

In the ensuing years, up to 1944, Ball composed about one hundred and seventy works, making him the most prolific composer for the organisation of this period. Ball’s first brass band composition, published in 1922, was the selection *Through Storms to Safety* (A/3).

During the research for my work it has become apparent that Ball felt inferior as far as his musical knowledge was concerned and made several references to this fact both in letters to friends and in conversation. Cooke quotes one such passage:

... While at Judd Street [a reference to the location of the Music Editorial Department], I also did a little private teaching of the piano, in order to help pay for theory lessons from a correspondence college in Nottingham. So I have not to my credit a full technical education at college or university level, but was to some extent self-taught. I sat for the ARCM diploma in about 1924 or 25, in theory of music, and scraped through¹⁰

In later years, talking to Lieut. Colonel Norman Bearcroft,¹¹ Ball said that “the Music Editorial Department had been his University.”

Before proceeding further it is necessary to explain the different headings and categories under which Salvation Army music is published. Brass band music is published quarterly in Journals. First of all there is the General/Ordinary Series Journal in which the music is scored for a full size brass band. Then there is the Triumph Series (formerly named Second Series) in which the music is scored for a lesser number of players. Later the Unity series was introduced for small bands. There was a Festival Series, written for a full-size band and normally music of a more elaborate

and extended character. This Festival Series was deemed unsuitable for meetings that were meant primarily for worship, so restrictions were laid down that permitted such music only to be used in music festivals (the Salvation Army term for concerts). However, in 2005 the Festival Series was withdrawn and its replacement was called the Judd Street Collection. This is published as single piece issues, and is music which is judged to be generally either too large in scale or too challenging (or both) for most Salvation Army bands. As far as vocal music is concerned, this is published quarterly in a journal called *The Musical Salvationist*.

Throughout the years, some pieces became more popular than others and were performed frequently, which led to the compilation of collections of favourite band pieces and vocal music. These appeared as *Favourite Journals* for brass band and *Gems for Songsters*. These bound books were published from the 1920s right up until the end of the twentieth century, for example, *Gems for Songsters* No. 1, 1920 to No. 8 which was published in 1979. As far as band music was concerned, *Favourite Triumph Series Band Journals* No. 1 was published in 1939, *Favourite Triumph Series* No. 2 in 1970, *Favourite General Series Band Journal* No. 1 in 1938, No. 2 in the 1950s, and No. 3 in 1970. There are two other collections of importance, *Vocal Solos* No. 1 published in 1938, and No. 2 in 1964. The latest collection is *Marches and Hymn Settings* (General Series), published in 1993. All Salvation Army music is expected to include material suitable for the spiritual needs of the congregation. This being the case, the songs and hymns utilised in congregational singing or songster brigades are used as a basis for brass band compositions, be they marches, selections, meditations, tone poems or air varie. By 1925, the Salvationist Publishing and Supplies Ltd.¹² had already published quite a large amount of Ball's music for bands and songster brigades.

CHAPTER TWO

MARRIAGE AND SALVATION ARMY INVOLVEMENT

In the Southall Citadel Corps of the Salvation Army in West London, there were two devoted stalwarts, Albert and Susan Dorsett, who had two daughters. The eldest, Olive, was born on March 29, 1902, followed by her younger sister Elsie in 1908. Olive was an active member of the Salvation Army Corps, and it was here that she came to the attention of Eric. Eric decided to ask her out on a date which led to the commencement of a courtship and their eventual marriage. Eric wrote a letter of proposal to Olive which makes interesting reading. He was obviously not a romantic:

... My dear,

When you read this, you will already have heard that which I have been intending to ask you for weeks past; and I shall have your answer.

Whatever that is, this letter will do no harm, so that I will give it to you in any case; because I wish to give you a thorough idea of my intentions and feelings in the matter I have brought to you this evening.

I can promise you nothing materially. You perfectly understand me, don't you? I can promise you no expensive presents, outings (which, by the way, don't seem to trouble you much); and I can promise you no definite end to our friendship—at least at present. What I can promise you is, long leisure hours in which you may be forced to make your own amusement, during which time my studies will hold me from you; and also I can promise you a lasting staunch friendship, and unfailing respect, and I will stand by you in everything as long as you may wish it. So that, you see, I have nothing material to offer you, but I have that—if you will take it—that will last through the ages, and will not leave anything for regret.

Will you make your final decision on this letter?

Eric¹



Figure 1. Salvation Army Officer

Eric and Olive were married on April 5, 1926, in the Southall Citadel. It is of interest that Olive was a musician of some worth; she was a pianist and had a mezzo soprano voice, and was often used as a soloist in the Southall Songster Brigade. She was also the Singing Company Leader (Salvation Army term for Junior Choir). After their wedding, the Balls had taken up residence with Olive's parents in Southall, but they soon made the decision to become Salvation Army Officers, leaving Southall to enter the Salvation Army Training College² in the August of 1927.

After being commissioned as officers in the Salvation Army, Eric was appointed to the Music Editorial Department to carry on the work he had been involved with prior to entering the college, while Olive looked after the home and continued to work hard in Southall Corps.

As a Salvation Army Officer, Ball found that many new avenues of music-making opened up for him, one of which was in the flourishing world of Salvation Army Brass Bands. Since 1895 there had been a band associated with the Trade Headquarters,³ but this was disbanded and was non-operational for a number of years. However, in 1928 General Bramwell Booth (son of the Salvation Army founder) gave his approval for Captain Eric Ball to reform the band and become its bandmaster. The initial purpose of the re-formed band was to demonstrate music that had been written for smaller bands, and to emphasize the usefulness of the new *Second Series Journal*, later renamed the *Triumph Series Journal*, which had been designed for bands with a limited number of players.

The S. P. & S. Band⁴ (as it was known), which had eighteen playing members under the leadership of Ball, became very proficient and was used extensively for the Salvation Army Evangelical Meetings. The band undertook a number of recording engagements and its fame spread around the Salvation Army world. As the band's standards improved, it soon lost its label as a band for *Triumph Series* only, and its repertoire began to include more complex works taken from the other journals. As the bandmaster, Ball developed his own expertise as a band-trainer and interpreter. This development and the experience of conducting the S. P. & S. Band proved to be a valuable experience for Ball, particularly in his later years when he entered the secular brass band movement.

Another of Ball's responsibilities during his period in the Music Editorial Department was as conductor of the National Orchestra, a capacity which he filled from 1935 right up to the commencement of World War II. The mention of an orchestra may come as a surprise to the reader, since it is taken for granted that Salvation Army music centres on brass bands. It would be expedient at this point to remember that in the early days of the Salvation Army, varied combinations of instruments were evident in the meetings. Consequently, orchestras can be seen as the result of the very early days of the Salvation Army when varied combinations of instruments were used in the worship. Many of the converts had been string musicians, so it was understandable that they would want to take part in music making through this medium. There are also examples of orchestras being used in a number of Salvation Army Corps; for example, Nuneaton maintained an orchestra right up until the outbreak of World War II. Interestingly enough, before the war Ball had formed an orchestra at the Southall Corps in which his wife played the cello. During an interview with the author, Bearcroft⁵ talked about a conversation he had with Ball in which he jokingly recounted, "it was a great exercise writing a part for the cello that used only the four notes of

the open strings.” However, when the servicemen returned after the war orchestras were no longer deemed to be part of Salvation Army music.

Another area of Ball’s musical activities involved taking on the responsibility of organist for the Salvation Singers (a group from the headquarters), which was an obvious choice seeing as Ball was an accomplished pianist and organist. He later became the conductor of this choir. In addition to these duties at the headquarters, Ball continued to be heavily involved at Southall Corps as the bandmaster, conductor of the string band, and organist for the Songster Brigade, as well as finding time to train the Upper Norwood Citadel band. By the 1930s, the Salvation Army’s musical activities were at their height. Cooke says of Ball’s involvement at this time:

...The Thirties were the years when Eric Ball was proving himself indispensable in so many directions: as a composer, conductor, soloist or accompanist at piano or organ (and sometimes all of these), as a reporter of stimulating articles, as a public speaker, and towards the end of the decade in 1937, as an international visitor at a Salvation Army camps in the United States of America⁶

During the period that Ball worked in the Musical Editorial Department, the Salvation Army had four generals: Bramwell Booth (1912–1929), Edward Higgins (1929–1934), Evangeline Booth (1934–1939) and George L. Carpenter (1939–1946). It was General Evangeline Booth, the gifted daughter of the Founder, who found a special place in Ball’s work of that time. She was in fact christened Eveline, but always referred to herself as Evangeline, hence the affectionate reference to her as “Eva.”

General Eva played an important part in Ball’s life as far as his career as a Salvation Army officer was concerned. Ball heard her speak before she became general, and confessed: “like so many of my generation, I came under the spell of the presence and oratory of ‘the Commander’ from the U.S.A.”⁷

Amongst General Evangeline Booth’s accomplishments was the writing of devotional songs (both words and music), and it was in connection with this that Ball was to be of assistance to her. Soon after arriving into London, Eva sent for Ball on a number of occasions to discuss her music, but regarding these meetings Ball was sworn to secrecy. Ball was never present at the first ideas stages of a new song, but Colonel Bramwell Coles, who had succeeded Colonel Frederick Hawkes as the Head of the Music Editorial Department, would bring back the sketches of new works and present them to Ball for editing. Coles said on one occasion, “The General does not want you to see how she first writes a

song. She says you would laugh at her.”⁸ However, Ball worked very closely with her in the preparation for the second (enlarged) edition of *Songs of the Evangel* (a collection of her own songs), published in 1936.

Usually, when he received a new sketch from Eva, Ball knew that he would soon be receiving a call from General Evangeline to go across to the headquarters to go through her work. One morning this led to what seemed a strange request: Ball received a telephone call from the International Headquarters giving him instructions to go to a telephone call-box and contact Lieutenant Commissioner Griffith, the General’s private secretary. Apparently it was designed that Ball should meet the General for a special meeting at 2 pm. Cooke records details of this visit as follows:

... The General graciously requested the use of the sitting-room in the caretaker’s small apartment at the top of the I.H.Q. building. There, hidden away, they would sit together at the piano. Eric would play her songs and they would discuss them, criticizing, amending. She would accept criticism readily, but also knew what she wanted.

”You don’t like that chord, do you, Ball?” she would say.

”No, General, I don’t.”

Smiling, her hand on his arm, she would say, “But I want you to like it.”

A couple of hours would pass by and then Eric would go home earlier than if he had been at his own desk⁹

It is interesting that later Evangeline took one of the songs, *Streams in the Desert*, as the subject matter for a band piece for the *Festival Series*. This was in fact the first tone poem published by the Salvation Army, and Ball played a large part in helping the General to put it together.

By the time Ball joined the Music Editorial Department, there were a number of composers producing music for the purposes of the Salvation Army. At this time, Lieutenant Colonel Goldsmith and Lieutenant Colonel Hawkes were sharing the duties of Head of the Department. It was Goldsmith who invited Ball to work in the department originally. Because of Ball’s position here, he was to come into contact with the composers providing music for publication. One special contact he made was with Lieutenant Colonel Slater, who was known as “The Father of Salvation Army Music.” Ball had the privilege of working with Slater when he was re-called from retirement to help in the department whilst Hawkes was away during the period of his illness. On working with Slater, Ball expressed: “I had the privilege of working with him, so I reckon I have close links with the Founder of Army music.”¹⁰

Another person who worked in the department at this time was Henry Hall. Hall later left the Salvation Army and became a household name as

the well-known dance bandleader in the 1930s. Ball also felt he had a special affinity with the Swedish composer Eric Leidzen whom he had met in the USA as a young man where Leidzen had established himself as a highly-respected professional musician, becoming a foremost composer and band arranger for Salvation Army music there. It is interesting that when the author searched through a box of Ball's manuscripts during the researching of this book, he found the full score of a symphony written by Leidzen.

Ball also came into contact with a number of Salvation Army composers, such as George Marshall, a bandmaster from South Shields who was crippled in a mining accident, and Philip Catelinet, who worked in the department at the same time as Ball became a very close friend. Catelinet was a musician of some standing, and was the first tuba player to perform Ralph Vaughan William's Tuba Concerto in F minor. Catelinet later became a Professor at the Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburg, where he remained until his retirement. Other composers with whom Ball had dealings with included Harry Kirk and Herbert Mountain, both Salvation Army bandmasters of repute, and Adjutant Albert Jakeway, who joined the department in 1926 and returned later in 1952 when he was promoted to colonel and took over as the head of the department.

During his years in the Music Editorial Department, Eric Ball had become a well-respected musician and was in great demand for his musical skills besides composing. Mrs. Major Olive Prince told the author of an interesting encounter with Ball during her time in the Salvation Army Training College in 1943. One day, she was summoned to the Assembly Hall and on arriving she found Ball sitting at the piano with the Training Principal and the Chief Side Officer looking over his shoulder. Olive, being an accomplished pianist, was asked to play over a manuscript that Ball had prepared, a work entitled "Yellow Braid," which referred to the colour of the braid used to identify the newly commissioned Lieutenants. On commissioning day, Ball walked with the women sergeants as they made their way to the dining hall, and in conversation said, "there are going to be some surprises today." It transpired that he knew that all of the sergeants were going to be commissioned with the rank of captain instead of lieutenant.

In April 1942 Ball was asked to take over as the conductor of the Salvation Army Assurance Society Ltd. Band,¹¹ but his term of office was short-lived, for a few months later he was appointed bandmaster of the International Staff Band. The I.S.B., as it is referred to now, was considered to be the premier band in the Salvation Army. The status of this band was, and is still today, very high, so this was an important step

forward for Ball. With the development of Salvation Army work in the 1880s and the setting up of International Headquarters at 101 Queen Victoria Street, London, officers and other employees at the movement's nerve centre were eager to utilise their interest in music-making in the best way possible.

The I.S.B. ., was formed in December 1891, when Staff-Captain Fred Fry became the first bandmaster. During Ball's time in the Editorial Department, Colonel George Fuller was the bandmaster and served in this capacity until his retirement in 1942. One of the band's duties was to play through new compositions submitted for publication. The band was noted for its high standard of deportment as well as musicianship. It was announced at the close of a Sunday afternoon programme that Colonel Fuller was to retire, and that he would be succeeded by Major Eric Ball. General Evangeline Booth had in fact used her influence to secure Ball's promotion to major before taking over the responsibility of the I.S.B. ., Salvation Army officer's ranks were based on lengths of service, and Ball received his promotion very early, a fact which no doubt caused some comment from fellow officers.

During the farewell meetings (arranged when an officer leaves to take a new appointment) of Colonel Fuller, Bandmaster Albert Munn of Kettering declared "that he had never heard the I.S.B. ., present a shoddy performance, no matter how untoward the circumstances." The bandmaster expressed the hope that the new leader would "blend the sparkle of the S. P & S. band with the broad tone and dignity of the I.S.B. .,"¹² The general membership of Salvationists expressed their approval of Ball being appointed but, as this research will later reveal, this appointment would be of only short duration. Another speaker at the same function said, "Thirty-eight years of age and looking considerably younger, Major Ball is one of God's special gifts to the Salvation Army."¹³ Ball said of himself on one occasion:

... The International Staff Bandmastership is not my highest ambition. I have another ambition. I have another ideal; it is to attain to Christ. Toward that I press forward. People have asked, "What now of the spiritual life of the band?" If God is to speak through music, He must have the best. All true art is the voice of God. It is coloured by our imperfections, but if God is to speak through us we must be as perfect as possible¹⁴

Ball's first engagement with the band was a broadcast over the BBC Forces Network, and thus began a new and promising era in the history of the I.S.B. ., By now World War II was at its height with bombings a frequent occurrence, which in turn meant a total blackout of houses.

Travelling was difficult as vehicle headlights had to be dimmed and shaded so that they stood less chance of being detected from the air, but in spite of this the I.S.B. continued campaigning.

A number of the bandsmen who were not Salvation Army Officers had been called up to military service. However, the bandsmen that were Salvation Army officers were classified as “Ministers of the Gospel” and were thus exempt from call-up, meaning that the band was able to find enough players to keep going. Although the war was at its peak, the I.S.B., under Ball’s leadership continued to lead many campaigns at varied venues in London and the provinces. One of Ball’s innovations was to introduce Male Voice singing into the band’s programme, because as a songwriter he had discovered that this was a medium that listeners appreciated. There is an interesting account of one of the band’s campaigns when the band journeyed to Dover where it gave concerts at a gunnery emplacement on a narrow “break-water” separated from the mainland by a stretch of sea. It was here that the band sang as a male chorus for the first time conducted by Ball, with an arrangement of the carol “Silent Night” arranged by himself. On another occasion, when the band was doing a programme in London at the Regent Hall, Oxford Street, Ball asked the audience, with respect to the band’s singing, to adjust “the wavelengths of your ears to the atmosphere of a drawing-room.”

Ball created a significant impression on people during his directorship of the I.S.B. One interested listener was Haydn Babb, who was then the conductor of the Parc and Dare Workmen’s Band, and wrote in a letter: “I had been looking forward to hearing *The King of Kings* (A/35) composed by Eric Ball, whose magnetic personality and artistic interpretation revealed new beauties in the art of brass band principles.”¹⁵ This performance was part of a programme at Cardiff Stuart Hall in 1944. Little did the bandsmen know that, as they followed the sensitive yet demanding baton of their conductor, this was to be the last time they would play under his leadership. Within days of their return to London the news was broken that Major Eric Ball had resigned from the Salvation Army as an officer, bringing to an end a very fruitful period in his life and career.

CHAPTER THREE

RESIGNATION FROM THE SALVATION ARMY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Ball's sudden resignation from the Salvation Army at the height of his career came as a shock to Salvationists and the brass band world alike. What brought this decision? Even to this day, the full story remains something of a mystery, but what is certain is that two factors played an important part: one was his interest in psychic phenomena; the other was the Army's perception that he was perhaps becoming too controversial. As far as the psychic phenomena are concerned, Peter Cooke writes:

... Yet his reason for going to a spiritualist meeting was, so he said, purely evangelical. He went to preach Christ. He once told a friend, "My faith lifts me to a plane that enables me to be in constant touch with the Holy Spirit. There is therefore no need and neither has there been a need, to interfere or take part in the practice of spiritualism. My work with these people was purely and simply gospel based and evangelical"¹

Cooke adds: "A close friend of Ball's from this period says that Eric commenced attending spiritualist meetings round about the time of Elsie Dorsett's (his sister-in-law) final illness."² It is interesting that the programme note in the score of his Tone Poem, "Resurgam" says, "dedicated to Elsa." Elsa is said to have helped Ball through a great crisis in his personal life, and perhaps her untimely death made him delve into spiritualism to try to discover the reason for her illness. People from Southall corps who knew Ball well say that he was deeply troubled by her death, and the reasons alleged for his attendance at spiritualist meetings become rather contradictory. The situation is further complicated by a letter he wrote to Colonel Brindley Boon in which he seems to give another version of the story:

... Looking back, one can feel that perhaps one's motives could have been somewhat mixed. In hindsight, whatever errors I made or anyone else may have made, I can see the guiding hand that never lets you down. I have always been interested in the idea of the angelic presences and certainly

warmed to Evangeline Booth's description of seeing her father looking down over the battlements of Glory shouting "Go on, Eva." I had heard first hand stories of healings by Colonel William Pearson, and was interested to hear William Booth Davey, Commandant Box, Hugh Redwood and others who were interested in this kind of thing.

I was also brought into touch with the London School of Mediumship. I never had any doubts about it. I never had any doubts about angelic presences. This all came naturally to me. So I began to read some literature and studied a little with this school of mediumship. They asked me to speak at one of their meetings, which I did. That was rather unwise I suppose, in view of my position as a Salvation Army officer.

The crunch came when it became known that I was studying these things and had become interested in mediumship—extra sensory perception it would be called now. It was not looked upon with favour. I don't blame anyone. I can see that I put the Army in a very awkward position. I had spoken at Caxton Hall, played the piano for these people, given one or two lectures on the spiritual basis of music—all without permission. This would have to stop, I was firmly informed. My attitude at that time was, if I was invited to speak anywhere—a communist meeting or anywhere else—if I was free to speak on the gospel as I understood it, I felt I should do so . . .

The outcome of the bigger issue was that I was told that I must not go on with my other field of activity. This resulted in an interview with my Commissioner at Judd Street, John Lewis, and then with General George Carpenter, who said he wished Mrs. Carpenter to see me. That interview was not a great success, although I must say that years later, when I was in Sydney, Australia and visited the Carpenters' retirement home, she put her arms around me and said all was forgiven. At last I received a phone call from the Chief of the Staff asking what I had decided. I repeated that I could not give my word to do this, that or the other. "Then you'll have to finish won't you?" was the Chief's reply. Acting upon instructions, Commissioner Lewis sent for me and asked simply, "How are we going to do this, Eric?" I said, "You mean you don't want to sack me." His reply was, "Then you'll have to resign." I did so.

I wish to make it clear that in all this I felt no bitterness. I could see that the Army was in a spot. I had had a good time—especially when Evangeline Booth was General, and I could not imagine what life there could possibly be for me away from headquarters. But I decided to go. The news got into the press. Reporters from one national daily came to see me at Judd Street and asked me for a photo. I decided to oblige, they then offered me money if I would cooperate. Again, I declined. They said they could get a photo from headquarters, "would I make a statement?" I refused to give any information to the papers [and] was quite shocked when news was published, somewhat distorted of course. My leaders made further attempts to resolve the problem, but I could not agree to let go the study of what I felt to be a further dimension of Christian