

This report was considered on 7 January 1895 when it was decided 'that no action be taken'. Alfred Hill was not present: 'After waiting some time for the conductor, who did not put in an appearance, the business was proceeded with'. The *Triad* report was pasted into the Minute Book. At the following meeting on 5 March 1895 'Mr A. F. Hill arrived late'. He did not attend the next two meetings on 29 April and 8 May 1895, where the Minute Books end, tantalisingly, before the final upheaval.

Another year of concerts passed. In 1896 Alfred Hill was writing his cantata on a Maori theme, *Hinemoa*, to a libretto by the writer and journalist Arthur Adams, for performance on the opening night of the Wellington Industrial Exhibition, 18 November 1896. At this point, the artist who was to act as catalyst in the drama arrived in Auckland on a world tour. He was the Chevalier de Kontski, 'Concert Pianist to the Emperor of Germany and the Only Living Pupil of Beethoven'.

De Kontski, now 79 and about to turn 80, had been a pupil in Moscow of John Field, the English composer whose Nocturnes were to inspire Chopin. When Beethoven died De Kontski was only ten.¹² His acquaintance with Beethoven, if his Manager's statements were true, was limited to one encounter, when the young boy played part of a Sonata in G to the deaf composer, who listened through an ingenious sounding board affixed to his head. 'Sometimes Beethoven would lay his head on the top of the piano that he might the better hear the sounds. When the sonata was finished the boy was told he had played well and that if he continued he would be a great master.'¹³ Besides publicity such as this which smacked of effrontery and charlatanism, de Kontski indulged in party tricks. He had a habit from time to time, of playing the piano from under a folded blanket. His actual playing is described as 'possessed of great delicacy of touch and brilliance of execution'¹⁴ but was marred overall, by a certain superficiality. His renowned war-horse 'Le Réveil du Lion' (op. 113) is labelled as being 'an epitome of Romantic exuberance to the point of being ludicrous'.¹⁵

The third protagonist in the drama about to ensue appeared in the person of Ovide Musin, now making a return visit to New Zealand. Both Musin and de Kontski wrote to the Wellington Orchestral Society seeking the use of the orchestra. It was decided to play one concert for de Kontski and three for Musin, there being no time to prepare more. When Musin, who was touring, heard of de Kontski's extravagant boasts of having been a pupil of Beethoven he felt outraged and wrote a letter to Alfred Hill, who read part of it to the Committee of the Wellington Orchestral Society. This letter has not been traced. A tremendous storm thereupon blew up in Wellington: 'Matters musical have been