



The Association of English Singers & Speakers

Honorary Presidents

Sir Thomas Allen CBE Michael Chance Sir Nicholas Hytner

Graham Johnson CBE Cleo Lane CBE Niven Miller

Patricia Routledge CBE Professor Robert Saxton

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www.aofess.org.uk

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2010

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I am delighted that 2009 was a year of country-wide recognition and significant achievement for the Association. Our membership continues to grow with our members more active in suggesting and attending events. Many, unable to attend for geographical reasons are happy to see their subscriptions used to further the educational aims of the Association, through the competitions and masterclasses which are held annually. This is most gratifying.

We were delighted to receive sponsorship from Courtney Kenny for a third competition. After discussions with our two sponsors and with the AESS committee, it was decided to aim this a little more towards students of members of the Association by requiring each entry to be proposed by an AESS member. The age range will be from 18-23 years. The preliminary rounds have been arranged at Whitgift School in Croydon and the Leeds College of Music on March 7th 2010, with the final at Tonbridge School, in Kent, (near Courtney's home) on March 14th. I am most grateful that all these venues have been agreed free-of-charge by those in authority at each institution. The running costs of all the competitions can be high. I have begged, borrowed and taken advantage of my friends for the last five years in order to cut costs, but I think that it is probably time that these professional actors and singers, even if they are happy to give their services as members, should at least be offered a fee for their work.

Talking of working without a fee, I would like to pay tribute to the AESS committee. There are so many strands to running the Association, now that it is much more active, that one cannot be a committee member without having to take responsibility for some aspect of our work. Competition and concert organisation, masterclasses, preparing the newsletter, sitting on preliminary-round panels, organising the Annual Dinner, publicity, plus the regular work of the Treasurer and Membership Secretary are all undertaken willingly and for minimal expenses by people with extremely busy lives of their own. Many of our Presidents, too, take an active interest in the Association, none more so than Patricia Routledge, who this year came to the AGM, as she does regularly; was Guest of Honour at our Dinner, and attended and presented the prizes at the final of the Senior Competition, which bears her name, at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

The final of the Catherine Lambert Junior Prize attracted an entry from all corners of the country. It was good to be given the use of St Paul's Girls' School for the final, from where last year's winner had come. Earlier in November, I had visited St Paul's to give a masterclass, on behalf of the Association, in accordance with the Junior Competition rules. Both these events are reviewed later in this newsletter.

In response to comments about 'speakers' not being given as much prominence recently as they deserve, I asked Giles Abbott to take a drama workshop for us. Unfortunately there was little response from participants and this idea needs reviewing. I hope that he will be able to take a workshop for us at the establishment which provides the winner of the Courtney Kenny Award later in 2010. We do, however, have a 'speaker' as our Guest of Honour at the AGM/Dinner on March 21st. This is Gabriel Woolf. I am delighted that he has agreed to come. The 'entertainment' that day between the AGM and the Dinner will also be given by actors and members Marilyn Cutts, Marian Lines and Rosamund Shelley. Please come.

Our next event will be a celebration of 'Unsung Hero' Armstrong Gibbs at the Budworth Hall in Ongar, Essex on Sunday February 7th at 3.00pm. Patricia Williams has spent much time organising this on behalf of the AESS and there will be participation from the Armstrong Gibbs Society. Many members are giving their time to sing, recite or conduct (there will be a youth choir) and I hope that this may be the first in a series of such concerts.

CONGRATULATIONS from the AESS MEMBERSHIP & COMMITTEE

We were delighted to hear that Nicholas Hytner, one of our Honorary Presidents, had been awarded a Knighthood in the 2010 New Year's Honours List, in recognition of his notable work as Artistic Director of the National Theatre.

PAST EVENTS

CATHERINE LAMBERT JUNIOR RECITAL PRIZE MASTERCLASS

Wednesday November 11th 2009 2.45pm -5.00pm

St. Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith.

In accordance with the rules of our Junior Prize, I gave a masterclass at St. Paul's Girls' School, where the winner of the 2008 prize, Mary Galloway, is studying. Six girls, including Mary, sang for me, all accompanied by John York, the Head of Piano Studies at the school and a renowned pianist. Heidi Pegler organised and introduced the afternoon and it was obviously that the girls had prepared their material well. All sang from memory and they had discussed the poetry and music with their teachers before performing.

The songs studied were 'Silent Noon' – Vaughan Williams, 'Spring Sorrow' – Ireland, 'Journey's End' – Holst, 'Sleep' – Warlock, 'Ophelia's Song' – Maconchy and 'O, had I Jubal's Lyre' – Handel. All the girls were most receptive and enjoyed looking at their work technically and poetically. The standard of singing was high and all communicated with the audience effectively.

Graham Trew

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THE CATHERINE LAMBERT JUNIOR SONG PRIZE

A VIEW FROM THE AUDIENCE

On a wet and blustery November Sunday afternoon it was good to be welcomed into the fine auditorium of St Paul's Girls' School in Brook Green, West London. The Junior Competition is run for the AESS by Carolyn Richards (our grateful thanks to her), and the venue had been organized, most kindly, by Heidi Pegler and Amanda Triccas of St Paul's music staff. The afternoon was introduced by Susan Field.

There were 8 contestants between the ages of 14 – 19 and I must say at once that the standard of preparation, presentation and performance was remarkably high throughout. In the past young entrants have often disappointed in the spoken part of their programme, but it was quite obvious that teachers and pupils have responded to our urging that they pay more attention to the spoken element of their presentation. – both in any introduction and in the prose or poetry. Words are now much more secure and expressive, however I found some of the verse too brief and the choices obvious: to present 4 or 5 songs, prepared in detail, and then offer 14 lines of verse seems rather unbalanced.

The results were:

1st THOMAS PAYNE *tenor* with his 'Seasons' programme, singing Moeran, Peel, Vaughan Williams and Quilter and speaking Shakespeare's Sonnet 18.

This was a most accomplished performer despite his youth; he had that rarest of qualities, the ability from the word go to connect with, and maintain his hold on, his audience. The natural warmth of his singing and speaking made songs and verse sound new-minted.

2nd MILLY FOREST *soprano* presented a programme of song and verse on the subject of 'Countryside & Nature' - music by Arne, Poston, Elgar and Lehmann, with spoken verse by Marlowe. A mature voice was coupled with an engaging personality shown to best advantage in 'Pleading' which she performed with great sympathy.

3rd JOSEPHINE GODDARD *soprano* aptly titled her programme '*Music to Enchant*' with which she proceeded to enchant us; her unaccompanied performance of '*The Singer*' was exceptional.

The substantial audience had a lovely afternoon and wished the competitors the best of musical futures.

Marian Lines

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VOCAL HIGHS REACHED IN A LOW COUNTY

At the height of last summer (oh, so long ago, now that the depths of winter are upon us) I visited the East Anglia Summer Music School at the invitation of its director, AESS member, Jeffrey Davies. I dipped into several of the open classes. Although it is not specifically an English Song course, there was a number of students getting to grips with the interpretation of their mother tongue. The course takes in singers of all abilities and I felt that those who were less advanced were able to learn from hearing their colleagues who had rather more technical expertise. It was also fascinating to compare the different approaches to presentation. Some were natural performers and others had to be cajoled into sharing their grasp of the material with the audience. We hear a lot about the current popularity of choral singing and the good it can do to one's health but this course has been going now for eighteen years and is as popular as ever. It reveals a thirst for performance in the amateur world of the more intimate art of song. The ages of the participants ranged from twenty-five to seventy-five. Not forgetting the art of accompanying, there was also a parallel course for pianists to hone their craft. Forty singers attended the course over two weekends and were in the very capable hands of esteemed veterans in the field of art song. Below are the details of the next course. It is all happening in Norfolk!

Stephen Miles

EAST ANGLIA SUMMER MUSIC SCHOOL 2010
Performance workshops, master-classes & individual tuition for

SOLO SINGERS & PIANO ACCOMPANISTS

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August 13th – 15th BETTY ROE SARAH LEONARD MARK WILDMAN
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Enquiries to: School Director, 7 Meadow Road, Costessey, Norwich, Norfolk, NR5 0NF Tel: 01603

744584 e-mail j.davies357@btinternet.com

FUTURE EVENTS

The Association of English Singers & Speakers Presents

"Unsung Heroes "

*Cecil Armstrong Gibbs and the poetry of Walter de la
Mare*

Sunday 7th February 2010 at 3.00pm

Budworth Hall, Ongar, Essex

Following the success of the Betty Roe Concert in September 2008, the AESS has conceived the idea of a series of events celebrating composers and poets who are unjustly neglected.

The first of these will take place at Budworth Hall, Ongar on the afternoon of **Sunday February 7th 2010 at 3.00pm** and will feature songs by Cecil Armstrong Gibbs and the poetry of Walter de La Mare with whom he had a close artistic relationship. On this occasion we will be collaborating with the Armstrong Gibbs Society and the Lea Valley ISM Centre.

Angela Aries, of the Armstrong Gibbs Society and Michael Pilkington are guest speakers and the following AESS and ISM members and their pupils will take part.

Margaret Cadney, Patricia Williams, Michael Hancock-Child, Rosemary Hancock-Child, Karen Harries, Michael Pilkington, Georgia Kemp, Carolyn Richards, Melanie Mehta, Stephen Miles, Graham Trew, Ione Chadwick, Marian Lines, Betty Roe, David Kirby Ashmore, Oliver Davies, and the Milton Keynes Youth Chorale.

Budworth Hall
High Street, Ongar, CM5 9JG
01277 363 888

Located on the A128, east of the M11 and north of the M25

For further information email williams.typhnigerror@tiscali.co.uk or visit <http://www.aofess.org.uk>

All are welcome to attend but please email williams.typhnigerror@tiscali.co.uk to reserve a place as seating is limited. Please feel free to forward this email to friends and colleagues.

There will be an opportunity to donate towards the work of the AESS & ISM at the end of the afternoon

Patricia Williams

The Courtney Kenny Award - Final at Tonbridge School on March 14th

- (details in 'A Note from the Chairman).

AGM/Dinner – March 21st – Royal Overseas League

Patricia Routledge National English Song Competition – RCM – May 12th

FROM MARILYN HILL SMITH

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

I was eighteen and had just joined the Guildhall School of Music. It was the first General Musicianship class of the Associateship course, and our tutor invited each student to formally introduce him/herself to the group, explaining where he/she hoped to specialize. Some wanted an operatic career, others yearned for the discipline of Early Music, yet others desired recitals of Lieder and oratorio. My turn came: "I'm Marilyn Smith* and I want to do musicals!" There was a barely audible gasp, followed by an astonished, "Really???"

Well, some forty years on, I'm delighted to report that my ambition is rewarded – I am playing Mother Abbess in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Sound of Music* – but in the meantime I have had the joy of participating in just about every other facet of vocal music.

While still a student, my first professional engagement was to sing the wonderful soprano solos in Bach's *St John Passion*. I adored that glorious music – perhaps oratorio would, after all, be my destiny. Then I joined a small touring group, run by Thomas Round and Donald Adams of D'Oyly Carte fame, and sang Gilbert and Sullivan all over the country. We also visited Australia and New Zealand, Canada and the USA. What a wonderful way to learn stage-craft and see the world, performing in Sydney Opera House and the Hollywood Bowl. The Savoy Operas have featured a great deal in my life, including performances with the New D'Oyly Carte, and I still enjoy regular G& S concerts all over the country.

I then came across the English Bach Festival Trust and was asked to sing for the legendary Lina Lalandi, who told me to, "Bring some Charpentier, darlink". I was very encouraged as I had just been studying 'Depuis le jour' from the opera *Louise*. I duly sang my audition piece, only to be deflated by Miss Lalandi's disdainful, "Not THAT Charpentier, darlink". Was there another? Certainly my association with EBF brought some memorable performances: Gluck's *Orphee* at the Alhambra Palace, Granada; Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* in the moonlight at Herodatticus amphitheatre in Athens; several operas at le Palais de Versailles; Handel's *Riccardo Primo* in an amphitheatre overlooking the very bay where the opera's historic meeting took place. Performances were executed with period movement, in costumes based on the original designs and with an orchestra of period instruments. This early music is so pure and elegant: I joyfully return to it regularly to rein in all the bad habits a singer can drift into through the years.

After a couple of fun seasons of pantomime in my early years (to which I returned for three further years recently) I was offered a place in the ensemble of Sondheim's *A little Night Music*,

with the chance of an understudy. I listened to the LP (an old vinyl record for those of you too young to remember!) and I'm afraid I didn't like the music at all, so I turned down the

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opportunity – oh, the folly of youth! I now adore the music of Stephen Sondheim and even took part in his 70th birthday concert at Drury Lane – but at that early stage in my career I chose to audition for the English National Opera.

By chance, one of my favourite audition pieces was Adele's Laughing Song from *Die Fledermaus* and ENO happened to be looking for a replacement Adele for their forthcoming tour. This was a role I felt Johann Strauss could have written especially for me: a real extrovert with two show-stopping arias. What more could any girl want?

After more than five wonderful years as principal soprano at ENO singing everything from Suzanna (*Marriage of Figaro*) to Chief of Police (*Le Grand Macabre*) I moved on, and enjoyed several operettas with New Sadler's Wells Opera including *Countess Maritza*, *Count of Luxemburg* and *Gipsy Princess*. Again, I adored every second – probably as near a musical as one can get without actually doing one. All the elements are there: acting with spoken dialogue, dance, and memorable tunes to sing.

The BBC Radio 2 programme *Friday Night is Music Night* was one of my favourite engagements. As a "star singer", I could sing a wonderfully varied repertoire within one programme and include material which might not be possible outside the recording studio. For me this might mean: 'One Fine Day' (*Madam Butterfly*), 'Summertime' (*Porgy and Bess*), a grand Sydney Torch arrangement, with choir, of *The Student Prince* and a popular ballad with a bottom G – easy now I'm older, but not a sound that carried when I was younger and singing a top E instead! The format of such a successful and popular programme, comprising a great variety of styles, gave me the idea of concert programmes which included opera, operetta, ballads and songs from shows. In this way one can, hopefully, please all of the people at least some of the time! Most recently I have included Music Hall into my repertoire, which I've found incredibly popular – audiences love to sing along with the numbers they know: 'Joshua, Joshua, nicer than lemon squash, you are!'

So here I am, on stage in a musical at last, after 40 years of enormous variety – and it certainly has been the spice of my thrilling professional life.

*The HILL had to be added when I joined Equity

M H L

NEW CD RELEASES

Schubert: Die Schöne Müllerin

James Gilchrist – tenor, Anna Tilbrook – piano

Orchid Classics ORC 100006

James Gilchrist and Anna Tilbrook are both members of the AESS and this new recording is a good addition to the many recordings of this cycle. James sings with impeccable diction, no need for the words in the booklet, and the playing is assured throughout. The accompanying booklet contains informative and interesting essays from James himself and Richard Morrison with translations by Richard Stokes.

The singing is full of variety and drama and the partnership works well throughout. James employs a youthful tone as befits the character and has control of an excellent legato line. The

balance between the voice and piano is not always ideal. The voice is recorded very closely, which gives an immediacy and urgency to the sound, although it also means that there are sometimes lighter vocal effects that might not be possible on the concert platform. It also means that, especially in some of the faster and louder songs, the sound of the piano is rather 'boxed-in' and the fine playing loses some resonance. 'Der Jager' is taken a little too fast for the voice to articulate all the words without sounding a touch late and because of the closeness of the recording to the voice, one can hear moments in some of the later songs, ('Die liebe Farbe' for instance), where one can hear that the voice is not quite focussed.

James Gilchrist has also just recorded, with the soprano Ailish Tynan and David Owen Norris, piano, a CD of songs by Muriel Herbert. (LINN CKD 335) There are some interesting settings here, although it is a CD to dip into rather than play at one sitting, as is often the case when one has seventy minutes of music by one neglected, albeit minor, composer. Herbert's setting of 'Lovliest of Trees' is probably the best-known song here and the range of her work moves from pastoral settings to more dramatic compositions, which, together with the change of voices on the disc, gives added interest and makes this a worthwhile enterprise.

Peter Warlock: Collected 78rpm recordings 1925 – 51.

Divine Art ddh27811 (2 CD's).

Many songs on this compilation were issued on cassette for the Warlock Society some years ago which contained other later recordings, including a fine set of songs from Alexander Young, whose nicely characterised version of 'Yarmouth Fair I always enjoy. This double CD has orchestral recordings on one disc and songs on the other. All come from the collection of John Bishop, who was of course a great supporter of the AESS. The accompanying booklet has a wealth of fascinating detail and brilliantly complements the recordings.

Often there are two or three versions of the same piece or song. Recording quality varies and much has been done to restore seemingly lost pieces. The three 'Corpus Christie' recordings are a case in point. I must say that, fine as they might be from an historical perspective, I did not enjoy trying to decipher faint soprano soloists and rather murky choirs, who mostly seemed to be lost in some thick fog. Three versions of the 'Capriol Suite' also seem rather excessive. The Constant Lambert recording is beautifully played and judged. Not so, the other orchestral recording and the version for violin and piano by Josef Szigeti and Nikita Magaloff is, to put it kindly, eccentric, with some playing that makes one wonder why the artists allowed it to be issued.

However, there are some very fine tracks which more than make up for the poorer ones. 'The Curlew' sung by Rene Soames for instance and many famous baritones: John Goss, Roy Henderson, Peter Dawson, John Armstrong, Cecil Cope and Oscar Natzke. The three versions of 'Sleep' are interesting. John Armstrong with a string quartet manages it in 2'12", Parry Jones (whose recordings are all rather strident) in 2'24" and Nancy Evans with Gerald Moore, sings with a beautiful legato, but comes in with a rather indulgent 2'58"! – fine breath control though. This is a very enjoyable issue, taken in small doses and the booklet adds much to the whole. Congratulations to Divine Art and the Warlock Society as well as to AESS member Michael Pilkington, who is thanked in the credits, for bringing such a valuable historic document to the public.

Graham Trew