



*The Association of English Singers & Speakers*

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## **NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2014**

### **A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN**

May I begin by wishing you all a very Happy New Year and thank all members and especially the committee for helping to make the Association's 'Centenary' such a success. Membership grew to well over 200 during the year, as a result of the marvellous 'Centenary Day' held at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and many other nationwide events linked to the AESS name. A new, ongoing, musical theatre competition was staged and the 'one-off' composition competition gave us new songs for inclusion in the final volumes of 'A Century of English Song', which are very near to publication. Also continuing for two more years is the AESS sponsorship of a class in ten British Federation Music Festivals. A trophy and £25 was given last year and £25 will again be the class prize with the trophy being retained by the Festival and presented to this year's winner.

The three classical song competitions go from strength to strength and are widely recognised in schools and colleges as promoting the importance of both spoken and sung communication. It was good to have some positive national press coverage last year, in the Daily Telegraph, for the Patricia Routledge National English Song Competition. Sponsorship is secure for several years to come in all three competitions and I would like to thank Patricia Routledge, Courtney Kenny, Catherine Lambert, Coral Gould, Graham Lines and the Toni Fell Trust for their continued support.

There is a nomination form included with this newsletter and an invitation to the AGM and Annual Dinner. Please consider coming to both. Several important decisions need to be made at the AGM and the Honorary Guest at our Dinner will be the irrepressible Roderick Swanston. With regard to the meeting, we need to find a new Secretary as Judy Hildesley has asked to step down, due to several new commitments, after many years of supporting me as Chairman since my appointment. Betty Roe also feels it is time to leave the committee that she has served so well for so many years.

I have discussed with the committee relinquishing the Chairmanship of the Association. I have enjoyed working to develop the AESS over the years and I think it is a good time for others with new ideas to continue to promote the Association. Also, I do not travel to London regularly now and I have a new local venture in Shropshire, an art gallery, which will take up more of my time.

The committee has asked that I stay as Chairman until the AGM in 2015 which will be the end of my 10<sup>th</sup> year, twice the time advised by the constitution! Thus we need nominations this year for a 'Chairman Elect' who would then have a year to assimilate what is required for the day-to-day running of the Association. So please put your thinking caps on and I look forward to a wealth of nominations for all the posts being decided upon in March.

**Graham Trew MVO**

## **NEWS FROM MEMBERS**

### **Gillian Humphreys**

Founder and Artistic Director of the Concordia Foundation was awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honours List 2014 for her services to music.

### **Norbert Meyn**

#### **SINGING A SONG IN A FOREIGN LAND, February 21-23, Royal College of Music**

Former AESS prize winner Norbert Meyn curates a Celebration of Émigré Musicians who fled Germany and Austria because of Nazi persecution and made valuable contributions to the musical life of their new country. The concerts feature several settings of English poetry by such composers, both for solo voices (February 21 at 7.30pm) and for chamber choir (February 22 at 7.30pm), reflecting the rich cultural synthesis that followed the massive movement of composers and performers during the 1930s.

There will also be a three-day international symposium (10am-5.30pm on February 21 and 22 and 10am-1.30pm on February 23) with guest speakers including Daniel Snowman, Leo Black, Joseph Horowitz, Anita Lasker Wallfisch and Sir John Tooley.

Booking is now open on the RCM website, please go to

<http://www.rcm.ac.uk/singingasong/>

or telephone the box office at +44(0)20 7591 4314, weekdays 10am - 4pm  
Royal College of Music, Prince Consort Road, London SW7 2BS

### **Patricia Williams**

#### **ADVANCE NOTICE: A DATE FOR YOUR DIARIES.**

AESS is to hold the second in its occasional series of 'Unsung Heroes' concerts shortly. This time the subject is composer **MICHAEL HEAD** and, as he was born in **EASTBOURNE**, we hope to hold it there, on the afternoon of **SUNDAY JUNE 1ST**, venue t.b.c.

As before, we invite members to volunteer to perform two or three songs themselves and/or invite adult pupils who are sufficiently advanced to take part. It would be particularly good to see some of our Sussex-based members and their pupils there but everyone else is also welcome.

In our Armstrong Gibbs Celebration, we included readings by his collaborator, Walter De La Mare. This time we might include poems by those whose words Michael Head set so our Speech and Drama based colleagues may like to offer a reading or two.

As Michael Head died in 1976, it is possible that some of you have personal recollections of him which could be included. I met him once but only to be introduced as we passed through a doorway in opposite directions!

Michael Head is perhaps best known for the charming Christmas song, *The Little Road to Bethlehem* but those of you who know *The Estuary*, *Dear Delight*, *Oh to be in England* and

many other songs and choral settings will surely want to prove that there is a great deal more to him than that!

It would be great to have early expressions of interest addressed to Patricia Williams at [williams.typhnigerror@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:williams.typhnigerror@tiscali.co.uk).

## COMPETITIONS

### **The John Kerr Award for English Song**

This exciting and unique event for singers combines the rich variety of the English Song genre with the historical keyboard instruments of the Finchcocks Collection. This international competition is presided over by a panel of distinguished judges and offers substantial prize money to a number of competitors.

The aim of the John Kerr Award is to promote the English song repertoire in the United Kingdom and other countries. In recent years, interest in English song has grown considerably after a long period of neglect; the success of the first competition in 2006 highlighted the great interest in this field.

The next competition will be held on **Sunday 26th October 2014** at Finchcocks Musical Museum, Goudhurst, Kent.

The following prizes will be awarded:

**First Prize** - £1,600 plus a £400 recital

**Second Prize** - £1,000

**The Smallfield Place Audience Prize** - £500

**The Raymond Brown Accompanist Prize** - £500

**The Charles Dibdin Song Prize** - £200

To find out more about the competition please visit our website: [www.johnkerraward.org.uk](http://www.johnkerraward.org.uk)

You can also contact the Competition Administrator by email or post at the following  
Addresses: **The Administrator: Maureen Lyle**, Clifton Coach House, Camden Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 5AA; Email: [johnkerraward@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:johnkerraward@yahoo.co.uk)

## **Courtney Kenny Award 2014**

Please see attached entry form and prospectus.

## IN MEMORIAM – RAE WOODLAND



I first heard Rae Woodland at the Nottingham Albert Hall in the mid-1960s when she sang the soprano solos at one of the Nottingham Harmonic Society's annual performances of Handel's *Messiah*. But it was in opera that she made her mark, notably at Glyndebourne, affectionately regarded as a home from home. She was a marvellous Queen of the Night, singing the role first at Sadler's Wells in 1957, then at Glyndebourne in 1960, and at the Aix-en-Provence Festival in 1961, the latter performances with such international stars of the time as Teresa Stich-Randall (Pamina), Luigi Alva (Tamino) and Erich Kunz (Papageno). At Sadler's Wells she was, according to the reviewers, "a starry Queen with a voice of authoritative size" and at Glyndebourne "she launched herself into the vocal equivalent of outer space without apparent qualms".

After *The Magic Flute* at Sadler's Wells came *Ariadne on Naxos* (Naiad), *Mefistofele* (Margherita) and *I Lombardi* (Giselda) – where her "soaring lyrical phrases and thrusting dramatic excellence" were noted. In *Idomeneo* (Elettra) her assured and musicianly singing and "an appropriately high level of emotional tension" marked her out for great things in the future.

For Scottish Opera she was Konstanze in Mozart's *Seraglio*, and at Sadler's Wells in 1963 Odabella in Verdi's early *Attila*. In *Macbeth* at Glyndebourne for the 1964 Shakespeare quatercentenary she "almost made a leading role of the Gentlewoman", and was Constantia of Navarre in the Handel Opera Society's production of *Richard I* in 1964. In *Sonnambula* at Covent Garden the following year her colleagues onstage included Joan Sutherland (for whom she often covered) and a young Luciano Pavarotti.

As Lady Billows in the Scottish Chamber Opera production of *Albert Herring* in 1966 "she sings the music more truly and musically than anyone since Joan Cross in the first production". The same year, Britten's own English Opera Group toured *The Rape of Lucretia* with Janet Baker as Lucretia and Woodland as the Female Chorus.

Early in 1967 she sang in Leslie Head's revival, for the Camden Arts Festival, of Donizetti's *Marino Faliero* – its first outing in England since May 1835!

Nicholas Maw's *The Rising of the Moon* (1970) gave her, as Lady Eugenie Jowler, "the most marvellous fun I've ever had on stage". Conducted by Raymond Leppard, the producer was Colin Graham, who gave his singers a great deal of freedom, in contrast to the deeper but more restrictive Peter Hall, who "wanted it just so". She created the role of Frau III in Gottfried von Einem's *The Visit of the Old Lady*, and Bliss's song cycle *Angels of the Mind* was written for her.

Rae Woodland was born at West Bridgford, Nottingham, where her parents were in the hotel business. Encouraged by her music master, the legendary Barton Hart, at the Mundella School, after the family moved to Yorkshire she took all the prizes at the Mexborough Festival, the adjudicator, Dr Heathcote Statham, suggesting she should get her voice properly trained and recommended the singer Harold Williams. Williams was about to return to his native Australia and instead suggested Roy Henderson, Kathleen Ferrier's teacher, who proved to be an inspired choice. "He was absolutely marvellous", Woodland later recalled. Henderson extended her range, and in due course sent her to Glyndebourne where she understudied Mattiwilda Dobbs as Queen of the Night and Konstanze, joining the chorus the following year. At their very first meeting, and seeing her potential, "Prof", as his pupils called him, also advised her on appearance and deportment, recommending a visit to Bond Street: "Look at the ladies, how they are walking, how they are dressing, how they do their hair; get some ideas, for I think you are a little bit provincial".

Returning to the north of England, she worked with the Yorkshire Symphony Orchestra and on the BBC, but in 1958 moved permanently to London. At Glyndebourne she worked with the likes of Peter Gellhorn, Martin Isepp, Carl Ebert ("We need to see the eye, the mirror of the soul") and Jani Strasser ("Too loud, dear; too loud!"), as well as star singers such as Sena Jurinac, Sesto Bruscantini and Kim Borg: "It was an eye-opener, really", she said.

After attending one of Lotte Lehmann's masterclasses in London, Woodland was offered a place at the London Opera School by Joan Cross, further extending her experience, and leading to work with Vilém Tauský and Colin Davis. Davis's performances of *The Magic Flute* in 1958 were to have been conducted by Beecham who actually auditioned her, in green silk pyjamas, one Sunday morning at his flat in Harley House.

Towards the end of her singing career Rae Woodland became vocal consultant to the Britten-Pears School; she was an adjudicator for the Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Prize in 1972, won by Linda Esther Gray, and an honorary professor at the Royal Academy of Music. Always warm and generous in her memories of colleagues and performances, and apparently unaffected by success, she declared that "Sadler's Wells made me, but Glyndebourne put the icing on the cake".

*Dorothea R. M. Woodland (Rae Woodland), soprano singer, teacher and adjudicator: born West Bridgford, Nottingham 9 April 1922; married 1950 Denis C. Stanley (died 4 June 2011, no children); died Ipswich 12 December 2013.*

Reprinted with the kind permission of **GARRY HUMPHREYS**. This obituary appeared in *The Independent* on 16 January 2014.

## OTHER NEWS



Bradley Travis, Simon Lepper and Ancel Newton

**Bradley Travis** won 3<sup>rd</sup> prize in the 2013 Patricia Routledge National English Song Competition. Last year he and the accompanist, Simon Lepper, were contacted by the English composer, Ancel Newton who had composed a song cycle based around World War I poetry about 10 years ago, including texts by such poets as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Thomas Hardy.

It is a cycle of nine songs written for baritone and Mr Newton was quite keen to have them recorded professionally so he could send some disks to a charity in the United States as a gift because this charity had helped his own father in the Great War. Bradley says, " Simon and I agreed to work on the cycle and really enjoyed learning, recording and performing the songs. It is a fantastic cycle, driven by the text and is hugely emotional, particularly in this centenary year for WWI. The charity in question is the Croix Rouge Farm Memorial Foundation and they have now been sent 500 copies of our CD which they will possibly sell or use for promotional material."

Simon and Bradley are very keen to perform this cycle again, so if any AESS members know of any concerts that you feel it might fit into this year, they would be delighted to hear about them, as previous participants in the AESS competitions.

### **SEPARATE ATTACHMENTS TO NEWSLETTER:**

AESS invitation to annual dinner and AGM

AESS nomination form

AESS Courtney Kenny competition application form and prospectus