

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to this 'bumper' edition of the newsletter. Many thanks to Marian Lines and her team for producing and distributing it. The Association is growing with membership approaching 180. Please encourage friends and colleagues to join and to support the many events that are being organised. If you have specific ideas about ways in which our educational work can be furthered please let me know. The website - www.aofess.org.uk - is kept up to date as often as time allows. More could go on- especially past history etcetera but it needs an enthusiastic webmaster with some spare time!

Please do look at the site for future events.

The AGM and Dinner will be held in March - please try to attend- it is a chance to air your views and also to meet socially of course. This year for the first time there will be a short recital at 6.00pm given by two finalists from the Junior Recital Prize.

Please consider whether you could serve on the committee - a proposal form is included with the newsletter. Several members have served for many years and would like a rest - we have no fixed term -something that might be discussed at the AGM. With more events and more members we need enthusiastic volunteers to take responsibility for a specific area. With only two or three meetings every year at the Royal Academy committee members also need to be instantly contacted for decisions and email is becoming essential. I will be talking to the AGM about allowing for a Vice-Chairman to be put in place as it is not possible for me to oversee everything and to attend every event. I have run out of space! and need to leave the computer occasionally in order to earn a living.

PAST EVENTS – 2006

FARJEONALIA

Sunday July 16th at 3.30, Lauderdale House, Highgate

With: Anne Harvey, Stefan Bednarczyk, Richard Furstenheim & Tom Durham

Eleanor Farjeon and her brothers Harry, Bertie and Joe were a family of talented, eccentric, witty and whimsical writers and composers working together in the first part of the 20th Century, whose lives and work were vividly celebrated in Farjeonalia. The programme was devised by Anne Harvey (Trustee for the Farjeon Estate) with music arranged by Richard Furstenheim and was the latest in a series of Farjeon programmes and talks presented by Anne in many parts of the world.

Although largely overlooked now, the Farjeons were something of a phenomenon in the beginning of the last century and as well known in their time as Noel Coward. The story of their creative lives in the unfettered Hampsted nursery years – free of governesses, tutors or schools - was unfolded before us through letters, diaries, plays and poetry richly illustrating their intensely lived fantasy-worlds and their un-childlike application to their writing, performing and composing encapsulated in their mantra 'We are Harry-Nellie-Jo-and-Bertie. We are US'.

Following the development of talent, early expressed and stimulated by close collaboration is always fascinating and one was reminded of another greatly gifted family who grew up in similarly cloistered nursery in a rectory in Haworth – although the Brontes' emergence into the literary world was very different from the Farjeons'.

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Once the Farjeons ‘grew up’ they stepped out in different directions, journalism, music, poetry and literature and business. Eleanor had the widest range of interests and gifts, writing poetry, children’s books, songs, plays, music, essays and collaborating with Harry in many hugely successful West End revues. Several of their numbers are still widely known – though often attributed to Coward – one of which is ‘I Danced with a Man Who Danced with a Girl Who Danced with The Prince of Wales’.

The afternoon’s event was much enjoyed by a fairly substantial audience – our collective minds being diverted from one of the hottest days of a hot year by this most entertaining and sprightly performance, finely spoken by Anne, Tom and Stefan, with Stefan rendering the light, tuneful songs with wit and artistry, and most ably accompanied by Richard: an altogether unexpected and delightful afternoon.

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC

The first event on the AESS autumn calendar, an evening masterclass with Graham Johnson at the Royal College of Music on October 26th, took as its theme *Night Songs and Serenades*. Each of the five major music colleges were invited to send a duo. The Royal Academy of Music was unable to send anyone due to an opera production, but the Guildhall fielded an additional pair of young artists. There were upwards of forty people in the hall and it was good to see a number of music students there who were not taking part in the class.

The masterclass started with one of Shakespeare’s most famous serenades, *O Mistress Mine*, music by Gerald Finzi, and performed by Lukas Kargl, baritone and Jennie-Helen Moston, post-graduates at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Graham began by praising Lukas’s English diction - particularly to be admired as he is a native of Austria, but went on to point out that he could afford to relax into some of the syllables which would help to convey the mood of suggestive seduction that was apparent in the way Finzi had set the poetry. He observed that students today should be aware of which words and syllables can be “thrown away”. As one might expect, it was Graham’s advice to the pianists throughout the evening that resulted in the most dramatic changes for both the singer and the listeners. He praised Jennie-Helen’s agile fingers but noted that the perky and cheeky elegance of their first performance was more suggestive of Stravinsky than Finzi! He went on to demonstrate how a slightly slower tempi and a less dry account of the staccati could bring out the inherent melancholy of the music. Another clue to the pastoral seduction was in Finzi’s use of syncopation which both performers were able to use in an imaginative way.

In Benjamin Britten’s boyhood setting of Walter de la Mare’s poem, *Silver*, the song gained more immediacy when Lukas was advised to create a sense of forward motion by keeping the rhyming couplets alive. We were treated to the most famous *Silver* of all - the setting by Cecil Armstrong-Gibbs, performed by the silvery soprano, Lucy Mervik, with Lara Dodds-Eden at the piano - two more Guildhall post-graduates. Graham praised Lara’s lovely range of colours at the piano, but thought that the song would be more effective if there were less drama in her realization. On repetition, Lara succeeded in creating a beautiful hypnotic effect by doing less. Graham observed that in bringing a song to life the singer must be stage director, lighting and costume designer all rolled into

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one. If the singer cannot see the picture, what hope for the audience to share the vision? Lucy's second performance was much more vivid and less effortful. Lucy and Lara then gave us Dominic Argento's setting of Ben Jonson's *Hymn*. Once again, the singer needed to have a more fully visualized picture of the song. Graham congratulated Lucy for beginning to get to grips with this demanding setting and thanked them for offering the opportunity to hear this less well-known setting than the one by Britten in his *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*.

Two representatives of the Royal College of Music, the mezzo-soprano, Madeleine Pierard and the pianist James Southall continued the nocturnal theme with Roger Quilter's *Dream Valley*, a setting of one of William Blake's *Poetical Sketches*. The stiffness of the initial performance melted away when the performers adopted Graham's view of the need for greater flexibility in the phrasing, which he likened to improvised "sighing". James was able to incorporate Graham's suggestions immediately and Madeleine responded well to the new, more relaxed style. The duo's second offering was Britten's *Nocturne*, from his cycle, *On This Island*. The text comes from the W.H. Auden's play, *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. Graham suggested that to fully understand the *Nocturne* one needed to know Auden's poem and to understand something of the relationship between Britten and Auden. Once again Graham encouraged the singer to really see in her imagination what was being described in the words and music.

The baritone, Rhydian Roberts from Birmingham Conservatoire and his accompanist, Colin Scott, had prepared Finzi's setting of Thomas Hardy's poem *Channel Firing* and gave an exciting account of the dead being wakened from their sleep, mistaking the gunfire of yet another war for the sound of the last trumpet on the Day of Judgement. Nevertheless the audience was appreciative of Graham's recitation of the poem before he began to make his recommendations to the performers. Small adjustments to the tempi once again yielded big bonuses for the performers and listeners alike and Graham was also able to show where and how the accompanist could play so as to allow the singer's voice to cut through the piano part without losing any of the excitement.

Graham Trew kindly concluded this report for me. The final duo for the evening, this time from Trinity College of Music treated us again to the words of Thomas Hardy. The tenor, Sam Boden and his accompanist, Tarek Al-Shubbak del Castillo had prepared *Midnight on the Great Western* from Britten's cycle *Winter Words*. In this particular song everything depends on getting the correct speeds of the train and Graham spent a lot of time with the pianist to achieve this; he also demonstrated how the tempo and rhythms could be disguised by the pianist to allow the singer more freedom for the melismas. The duo's second song was a Finzi setting of a very difficult Hardy poem *At a Lunar Eclipse*. Graham believed that very few in any audience would understand it fully on first hearing and he took the time to explain the poem, before it was performed. Sam sang the piece very quietly, with a good legato and good tempo and their performance ended the evening very nicely. The audience was generous with their applause and Graham was duly thanked and presented with a bottle of champagne. Grateful thanks were also bestowed along with another bottle on Sarah Leonard who had organized the class so successfully.

Judy Hildesley

(a full copy of this abridged report can be obtained on request)

FINAL of the AESS JUNIOR SONG COMPETITION

The afternoon of music and words presented by AESS on Sunday November 11th 2006, was a splendid example of the work which experienced performers and teachers should be doing to help our young people achieve the highest possible standards in performance. At a time when our wonderful English language is so often “mangled” – (there really is no other word) and when singers spend a great deal of time and energy perfecting foreign languages but little on their own, what a delight it is to have an event like this! The afternoon was for me much more than a celebration of English Song than a competition, and on these occasions every member of the audience is an adjudicator! Nevertheless Life – and certainly our profession – is highly competitive, stirring us to do our best, and these young people presented and delivered their songs in a very professional manner.

In the younger group the voices were less capable of producing great variety of quality although the intention was always there. This is a difficult area – but a most exciting and challenging one – when the matur sounds are just emerging and need to be gently but firmly encourages. Among the older singers there were several good performers, and great care had been taken to match the interpretation in speech and singing. I felt that a great deal of success depended on the choice of theme and the realisation that, however one would wish to “bend” the words to one’s own desire, the composer “got there first!!” and one must let him/her have “their say”!

What a wonderful venue is Taggs Yard! Great thanks must go to Judy and Mike Hildesley for their generous hospitality... and to the adjudicators – Mary Mogil, Jonathan Courage and Graham Trew, the last having just returned from “up North”.

First Prize ALEX KNOX (Baritone) - theme “Nature”, singing:
 ‘The Lark in the Clear Air’ - Sir Samuel Ferguson. ‘ My Own Country’ -
 Peter Warlock. ‘Love’s Philosophy’ - Roger Quilter

Second Prize HARRIET EYLEY (Soprano) - theme “Flowers”, singing:
 ‘No Flower that Blows’ - Thomas Linley. ‘The Flowers’ -
 Williamson. ‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud’ - Eric Thiman

I am certain Patricia Routledge would have been delighted and gratified to have her generosity so well repaid.

Mollie Petrie

FUTURE EVENTS

A WEEKEND OF SONG 3rd and 4th of February

Graham Johnson will be giving a weekend of master classes on German lieder, French mélodies and English songs on the 3rd and 4th of February 2007 at Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Twelve duos, drawn from the Guildhall, Royal Academy, Royal College, Trinity College of Music, and Royal Northern College of Music, have

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been selected by audition before a panel of professional musicians to take part. Those who attended the English Song master class last October will have another opportunity to hear the tenor, Sam Boden in the Britten and Schumann classes and the baritone, Lukas Kargl singing Butterworth and Wolf.

The classes will be as follows:

Saturday, 3rd February

10 am – 1pm, Songs of Hugo Wolf

2 – 5 pm, Songs of Franz Schubert

6 – 8 pm, Songs of Benjamin Britten

Sunday, 4th February

10am – 1 pm, French Song

2 – 5 pm, Schuman, Brahms, Wagner

6 – 8 pm, Grieg, Butterworth, Finzi

Admission is by programme which will be available at the door; places may also be reserved in advance. There is a charge of £5 per session. There are no concessions but programmes for the whole day may be purchased for £12 or £20 for the entire weekend. There will be a refreshment break in the morning and afternoon sessions when complimentary tea, coffee, squash and biscuits will be served.

For more information or to make a reservation please telephone the Project Coordinator, Judy Hildesley on 020 8876 0321 or e-mail her at songmakers@btinternet.com

The masterclasses are the second stage of The Young Songmakers Project, which is generously supported by the Tillet Trust. After the weekend some of duos will be selected to perform a programme specially designed for them by Graham Johnson in a concert at St. John's, Smith Square on the 27th of March at 7.30. Tickets for the concert will be available from St. John's in the usual way.

MERIBETH DAYME WORKSHOP Sunday, the 25th of February

The AESS will be hosting a Workshop on Presence in Performance with Meribeth Dayme, the acclaimed author of *The Performer's Voice*, who is well known for her work in developing communication skills. Meribeth will work with up to twelve individuals on stage presence in singing and speaking. The master class will be open to the public and your work will be videoed and made available to participants so that they will also have an opportunity to see the transformation that Meribeth will facilitate.

The workshop will take place at the Music Room in Tagg's Yard on Sunday, the 25th of February at 2.30 pm. (This is the same venue which hosted the London Semi-Final and Final of the Junior Competition.) There will be a short interval for tea and the afternoon will finish no later than 6.00 pm. Every one who took part in the semi-finals has been invited to take part. Nine singers have already registered their interest, which means that there are only three places remaining. These will be allocated on a first come first served basis. It will be possible for singers to take part without an accompanist on this occasion. 10 places have been filled as of the 11th January. If you have a student that you would like to have included in the workshop, please e-mail the AESS Secretary,

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judyhildesley@btinternet.com , or telephone 020 8876 0321 as soon as possible to reserve a place.

The workshop is open to the public. There will be no charge to those participating, but anyone else attending will be requested to make a fixed donation to the AESS.

£7.50 for AESS members; £10.00 non-members.

AESS AGM & ANNUAL DINNER Sunday March 18th

See enclosed sheet for details. Committee nomination slip on last page.

MASTERCLASS Saturday March 24th

Graham Trew is giving a masterclass to students of the Junior Conservatoire at Trinity College of Music as part of the AESS Junior Recital Prize 2006 won by Alexander Knox.

MASTERCLASS July 1st or 8th

Stephen Varcoe has kindly offered to hold a masterclass for advanced students of AESS members - date and venue still to be finalised.

The Final of the AESS PATRICIA ROUTLEDGE NATIONAL ENGLISH SONG COMPETITION May 16th - 6.00pm - Trinity College of Music

MEMBERS' BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES

MOLLIE PETRIE

How did I get into this profession? It just “sort-of-happened”, a combination of genes, upbringing, Fate, “slog” and the guidance of some wonderful people. The only child of a Scottish mother and a Geordie father, I was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne and grew up in the Depression when my father, a shipbuilding draughtsman -in common with most of the North-East – was unemployed for five years. On both sides of my family Church featured hugely: everyone played piano and organ, and I cannot recall a time when I could not read music – both staff notation and sol-fah! On Sunday evenings when I was very small, sitting in a circle, the Bible would be passed round and I would “read my verse”; then followed scores of “Messiah”, “Elijah” etc... and I just read that too! There was no money for music lessons until I became a Tax Officer and could afford them with a wonderful woman called Elsie Downing, and then it was winning cups in Music Festivals and through all that gradually getting engagements in oratorio and recitals all over Northumberland, Durham and the Lake District. My mother was an elocutionist, an excellent actress and a specialist in Robert Burns, and she was in great demand so I went with her and began singing solos in her concerts. My mother constantly quoted

everyone – Burns, Shakespeare, Byron... especially in our air-raid shelter during a raid! After I married we moved to Yorkshire and I worked with a wonderful accompanist in Lieder recitals; then we came down to the Bristol area, and I became immediately involved with the BBC, giving regular broadcasts as a soloist and as a member of the member of a newly-formed group of 10 singers. I also worked for the BBC Drama Department on TV and in sound. I stage-directed the Bristol University Opera Society in numerous operas and later wrote libretti for Musical, Revue and solo-recital, all of which I directed and in which I performed. Words and Music had at last come together, and now I hugely enjoy teaching both!

JAMES ROOSE-EVANS (New member)

Founder member of the Hampstead Theatre and of the Bleddfa Centre for the Creative Spirit, he is directing a new play, *The Bargain*, by Ian Curteis for the West End, as well as Penelope Keith in a new play about Mrs Patrick Campbell. He has won awards on both sides of the Atlantic for his adaptation and production of Helene Hanff's *84 Charing Cross Road*. He is also acknowledged a fine reader, 'a voice endowed with concealed fires' wrote one critic, while *The Sunday Times* wrote, 'He speaks poetry magnificently'. James has given recitals all over America (where he was invited by Robert Frost to read at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference) and in the UK. He frequently quotes Frost's remark to him 'how can you know a particular poem by heart, and then you hear it spoken by an actor, with a particular tone of voice, and whole new dimensions of the poem is opened up for you.' James' passion is for the melody of the words, and he regularly teaches courses on the speaking of poetry. He feels very strongly that words today are too easily treated as mere information, whereas it is the tone of voice used, rhythm and dynamics, that bring the words to life. Not surprisingly some of his most outstanding productions have been those associated with language, from Hugh Whitmore's *The Best of Friends*, to Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood*, *84 Charing Cross Road*, *Cider with Rosie* (which he also adapted for the stage).

He is author of a large number of books, including Directing a Play, and his classic Experimental Theatre and One Foot On The Stage, the biography of the actor Richard Wilson.

ANTHONY DAWSON (New member)

I am a singing teacher and choral conductor and am lucky to be able to choose the repertoire which my choirs sing, and often what my pupils learn. Currently I'm enjoying rehearsing Finzi's *Seven Motets* and have also included his *Dies Natalis*, sung by up-and-coming soprano, Emily Ward, in the Sackville Singers' next concert. The other major work is Stanford's *Magnificat* for unaccompanied double choir, Op. 164, which is challenging and exciting. This repertoire is so special and yet so neglected.

At Sevenoaks School, where I'm Head of Singing, we're producing Britten's *THE LITTLE SWEEP* on Saturday 9 December. What a thrill it is to work on this! Britten was brilliant at writing for children and the score is such great fun.

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My early musical experiences were as a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral under the inspirational Allan Wicks. Taking part in Noye's Fludde in the Chapter House was an unforgettable experience and it was a joy to conduct it in Sevenoaks with my own three children in the cast and dear friend Richard Suart singing Noye. At Canterbury I was surrounded by wonderful musicians, some now household names like Stephen Varcoe, Mark Elder, Harry Christophers and Stephen Barlow, and we grew up with music and performance as our daily bread. It was a wonderful life and I try to recreate it each summer when I take the Knole Singers to be choir-in-residence at one of our glorious cathedrals: last year York Minster, this year Wells, next year Southwark

SETTING MUSIC TO WORDS –

by Betty Roe

I was surprised and somewhat in awe when Marian Lines suggested I might write down some thoughts on how I “set words to music”, or in my case, how I “set music to words”. Before I try to do so, I must confess that I’ve not ever considered myself to be a fluent enough wordsmith to write about anything at all. However, the idea tickled my fancy, and soon enough something surfaced, making me conscious of how I do what I do.

Before I embark on the nitty-gritty, I need to give you a bit of background which will help you understand why, a large part of the time, I “allow” things to happen. I was blessed from birth with a fine pair of sharp ears. While there may not be a lot going on between them, they have led me to create a stream of song settings without a great deal of effort for more than 60 years. I haven’t had to think about how to do them, and now I find myself put on the spot and I find I have strong feelings about the way it should be done.

I had the good fortune to spend the war years as a Junior Exhibitor at the RAM. Once a week we had a theory class, short but productive, on which I thrived. From a very early age and before any music lessons, I was able to pick up tunes and play the piano by ear, and have fun with popular classics and popular songs of the day - when permitted - because “playing by ear” was not acceptable. But the harmony classes welcomed this ability, although perhaps not the repertoire – (eg: the opening of Mozart’s famous Sonata in C with the L.H in C#) – and later, as a senior student, Professors encouraged me with the words “Trust your Ear”. Much later, when in my 30s, I was able to have a few lessons in composition from Lennox Berkley who concentrated on my writing instrumental music, never at any time wanting me to change the songs, always enthusing. “Follow your instincts” said he, so I did, and I still do.

In the late 40s and early 50s I was lucky enough to meet, and work with a writer who was producing topical, witty lyrics to go into the popular entertainment of that time – Intimate Revue. I composed in a way that would allow the lyrics to have their natural rise and fall, peak-points and let-downs, making towards a carefully timed punch line. We were alongside Flanders & Swann at that time, our numbers went into Summer Shows, end-of-the-pier revues and such. Alongside, I was playing the organ regularly on Sundays where extemporising was the mainstay of the music – filling the gaps. The timing of the sentiments were similar to the revue requirements, and I can still thrill at being able to time that final, perfect cadence and resolution just at the point when the Vicar, having finished the washing-up, places the cloth over the chalice... Mmmmm! All of this experience must have made me very alert to effective timing with the natural rhythm of the words.

So – here goes: I am normally writing to meet a commission and must satisfy the customer, usually by identifying which piece of mine they have heard and liked, so I can compose in a similar style. I encourage them – when appropriate – to have the words specially written., preferably by my regular writing partner. Otherwise I suggest I set a poem of their choice. Once we have settled on the words, the forces – eg. Song with piano and/or other instrument(s) – I settle to read the poem with a pencil in my hand, and usually can jot down a rough rhythmic sketch straight away. I read the poem many times, hoping I thoroughly understand it - 98% I do. Occasionally I can be in some doubt, but whatever the end product I will have good reason for it. Usually the first rhythmic sketch I make will be The One. I start at the keyboard and let my fingers free to roam. The rhythm inevitably leads to the melody – which comes with a harmony – so I have the material and am ready to cut the cloth. Following the natural word emphasis, we

know nothing is black or white. I recently had to set the poem “Sea Fever” which turned out to be an interesting exercise, already knowing the Ireland setting. Immediately my opening emphasis was different from his which is “I must go down to the seas again” with the emphasis on “I” rather than anybody else. My shaping is “I must go down to the seas again” – reason? because I have clearly been there before. So each of us will have our own ideas, what we must have is a reason for our decision.

Punctuation must be noted and considered. Remember our old favourite, “Slowly, silently, now the moon,” - “NOW THE MOON” what? I cry... After many years somebody has removed the comma so at last the moon will walk the night:

“Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night...”

Another famous one:

“So fold my dearest thou and slip”

then a long gap

“into my bosom...” Even famous 20th Century English song writers had their problems.

For me, the piano writing is all important, for the song is only valid when the music enhances the words. The vocal melodic line must preside. So I hope to avoid doubling the tune in the right hand, this means the singer can hear themselves in an uncluttered situation – so no hand-holding. In the case of writing for small children this is important and means that the singer has to know the melody very well indeed. As an examiner and adjudicator, my heart has gone out to the little mite singing her/his heart out to a hefty right hand playing the melody in the same octave as the voice – by a loving parent or well meaning teacher – thus making the child inaudible. If it is necessary to play the tune, put it an octave higher. Whilst on this subject, when choosing solo songs for small people, avoid songs set “for unison voices”! A solo song is something different...

This article is getting too lengthy, so I will put the simple remainder in a nutshell. Whatever the choice of accompaniment, it must support the singer without clutter, allowing room for the natural word emphasis to preside. It can develop the musical idea - or not, as it befits – and endorse and predict what the singer has said and will say, and complement their personal interpretation within the musical framework. Also it can act as a reminder to the listener, (BR examples “I Know a Bank where the Wild Thyme Blows” and “The Music Tree”). I hope I bear out most of the above! All in all, setting music to words is a pure joy to me and a task from which I will never tire or retire.