

## DR. ROY BUDDEN (1914-2009): CHAMPION OF AMATEUR MUSIC-MAKING

We are very sad to announce the death on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2009 of our founder, Dr Roy Budden, at the age of 95.

Roy never married, and in later life had few relatives. The absence of documentation or anecdote about his early life compels us to treat this obituary as a working document, which we shall be pleased to add to or correct as more details come to light. What we have discovered so far is that, after school, he lived with an aunt in Bridport until he came into some money and was suddenly able to pursue his lifelong love of music. He enrolled at the Guildhall School of Music, not for the oboe which had always been his instrument, but on a conducting course. Many years later, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate, and was an Honorary Member of the Academy of Saint Cecilia.

The earliest record I have come across of Roy as a conductor is a programme dating from June 1946 of a concert with the Hendon String Orchestra, of which he was the founder-conductor. A cellist from those days recalls wartime rehearsals with Roy in black ARP uniform (he was a conscientious objector and lifelong pacifist). He remained their conductor virtually to the end of his life, and I had the clear impression that of all the groups with which he was associated, Hendon was the most precious to him.

Shortly after he graduated (with merit) in 1949, he founded the Capriol Orchestra, of which he remained in charge for more than 30 years (I have been unable to trace its later history). Thereafter he rapidly became in demand as a conductor for many music societies and orchestras (one record mentions six different amateur groups in the 1950s and 60s). He enhanced his value to them (and others) by building up a huge private library of orchestral scores, which he was very generous in lending out to his own projects as well as hiring commercially. One of these groups was the Welwyn Garden City Music Society, with whom he served as MD for twenty years from 1951 to 1971. He also took the Capriol Orchestra to Suffolk, where, from 1967 to 1976, he was Music Director of the Ipswich Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, conducting the first UK amateur performances of musicals such as Camelot, My Fair Lady and Fiddler on the Roof. In February 1970, in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the orchestra gave the first performance under Roy's direction of Geoffrey Burgon's *Alleluia Nativitas*.

The hallmark of his long life was the boundless energy he dedicated to assembling and maintaining groups of amateur musicians in large orchestras, chamber groups and latterly opera companies, often in association with adult education institutes. On the website of the Mornington Sinfonia at the Working Men's Club in Camden Town, for instance, there is a picture of Roy conducting, with a sentence to say that 'we're in the process of rediscovering the history of our orchestra. It has been in existence for many years, and Roy Budden was its conductor for most of these'. He had an equally long association with the Crowndale Orchestra which operated both at the Working Men's Club and at the Hampstead Garden Institute, where it became HGO's original orchestra.

One of the lynchpins of Roy's musical life was the Youth Music Centre in Hampstead Garden Suburb, a Saturday morning school set up in 1967 by Kay Hurwitz, Bernd Wynyard, Joyce Riddell and Roy Budden to provide a range of musical, and particularly orchestral, opportunities

for children of all abilities. Many of today's finest orchestral musicians, particularly string players, were graduates of YMC. As a sideline, Roy also conducted the Parents' Orchestra, composed of the parents of musical children, who were encouraged to return to long-abandoned instruments while waiting for their infant prodigies to finish their classes and rehearsals. Roy's habit was to bring a bundle of music each week from his compendious library, and browbeat the parents into sight-reading their way through whatever he stuck on their stands. My own role in this band was as 'in-fill pianist' – attempting to put in the missing instruments (since it was a matter of chance whether we had, say, four clarinets and two horns or none). Every now and then Roy would throw a Mozart or Beethoven concerto at me without warning, which could be fun but a bit hard on the other parents. Long after our daughters had left YMC and home, Roy coaxed me back into what had almost become the Grandparents' Orchestra, which finally packed up only in the 1990s. From time to time he also used to invite me to play concertante works with some of his other orchestras.

As far as I can tell, Roy came to opera relatively late in his career, starting with Brent Opera, which he joined as MD sometime in the 1980s. Brent, like HGO, started life as an evening class (as far back as 1921) and, also like HGO, has now become a charity. During Roy's tenure at Brent, a number of singers who longed to have a go at the great Mozart roles, approached him to ask if he would create a local company with Mozart as its primary focus. Roy's typically positive response led to the creation of Hampstead Garden Opera in 1990, as an evening class at the Hampstead Garden Institute with the Crowndale Orchestra as its resident band. He roped me in from the very beginning as rehearsal (and orchestral/continuo) pianist, a role I played till my fingers started to give up in 2006. As an opera-lover for more than 30 years who had accompanied singers, but had never had the opportunity to work on live opera, I found this very exciting. Roy – then in his mid 70s – organised everything with the help of a small committee: the rehearsals, the producer, the publicity, the orchestra, the ticket sales - and often funded the expenses out of his own pocket. The early productions were truly amateur, and the source of many stories, both funny and embarrassing: but the ambition to improve was always there, though it has accelerated since our move to Upstairs at the Gatehouse in 2001.

Sadly, Roy was not able to follow us all the way on the long, and at times far from straightforward, journey towards the independent semi-pro company we have grown into. By 1996, age had begun to take its toll on his beat, and the Committee of the time asked him to stand down after a run of *Die Fledermaus*. Despite his obvious hurt, Roy never lost touch with us, and, to my recollection, never missed a production at the Gatehouse until *Venus & Dido* last month, always making a point to come to both casts. Latterly, he often expressed amazement at the standards we had achieved, and the quality of the singers whom we were able to attract, though to the last, his acerbic wit was never far away.

Perhaps a celestial cast and orchestra will be able to satisfy Roy's one unfulfilled operatic dream – to conduct a performance of *Der Rosenkavalier*. But he can be mightily proud of what he achieved on earth. There must be hundreds, if not thousands, of amateur musicians around the country, who, like me, are everlastingly grateful to Roy for offering them musical opportunities, challenges and experiences that would never have come their way but for him. And the jewel in his crown is HGO.

*Alastair Macgeorge – December 2009*