

## SOUTHAMPTON YOUTH ORCHESTRA

### The first decade

To initiate and then to witness the birth of an organisation is exciting, but to nurture the early development is both a challenge and a privilege.

At the time of my appointment as the first City Music Adviser in December 1964, fifteen part-time instrumental staff provided tuition in the grammar schools and a handful of primary and secondary schools. In the Spring of 1965, as part of a strategy to avoid this fragmentation, it was recommended that a highly qualified team of full-time instrumental teachers be appointed. Dr Jack Dempster, the Chief Education Officer, endorsed the proposal, as did his successor Peter Browning, and approval was given by the Education Committee. This was the key factor in the rapid development of instrumental music in the city over the next decade, culminating in 1971 with 7% of the school population between the ages of 8 and 18 receiving tuition - an achievement rarely sustained by any Local Education Authority.

So the first Saturday morning rehearsal of the Southampton Youth Orchestra on 15th May, 1965, and the subsequent performance at the Instrumental Festival on 17th July, was the initial link in the chain that was soon to embrace a Junior Orchestra, Schools' Wind Orchestra, the 120 strong Youth Choir and the Youth Brass Band. The favourable press comment spoke of the "rhythmically precise and musically sensitive performances of the young people", and a familiar pattern of public appearances emerged: annual Guildhall concert in April and participation in the Instrumental Festival and the Schools' Music Association's Christmas concerts.

The first residential course was held in 1967, and from Easter 1970, this became an extended stay at a venue outside the city: Lairthwaite School, Cumberland (1970) and Coleg y Fro, S.Wales (1971). Additional concerts were given during each course and the Education Committee commissioned music from Alun Hoddinott in 1970 (Suite No.1 Op.72) and Andrzej Panufnik in 1972 (Invocation for Peace). The first appearance in Winchester Cathedral in 1971, prompted R.J.O.W. to write in the Hampshire Chronicle:

"not that youth or inexperience were the predominant characteristics of this concert, for I cannot recall a better one in Winchester in recent years. The programme was not only interesting and the standard of performance incredibly high, but platform discipline and manners were impeccable."

From 1971, the BBC recorded all the orchestra's concerts in the Guildhall and it was the year that saw the formation of the "Friends" (25 years in 1996!).

The 'leap' forward came in 1972, when at the invitation of the Dutch Ministry of Education and Culture and the British Council, the orchestra embarked on its first venture into Europe: the first to perform since the Treaty of Accession was signed. In Scheveningen, there were three standing ovations and one Dutch critic commented:

"It was extraordinary to note the way in which the orchestra paid attention to every nuance and phrase."

de ROTTERDAMMER

In the succeeding two years, the orchestra visited Berlin (1973) and Hamburg (1974), performing a wide selection of British music (Rawsthorne, Vaughan Williams, Holst, Mathias and the Violoncello Concerto of Elgar) in the principal concert halls.

"The musical efficiency and harmony within the orchestra has already reached a remarkable standard.

The fact that the orchestra, under the direction of Peter Davies, is competent to sustain a lengthy work was best shown by the Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis-Vaughan Williams. The full-bodied sound of the strings and their smooth expression aroused admiration."

BERLINER MORGENPOST

During the visit of Her Majesty the Queen to Southampton on 6th December, 1974, the orchestra was invited to perform in the Guildhall during the Luncheon. Being presented to Her Majesty was a great honour, and in a letter to the Mayor the following day, her Private Secretary wrote:

"She has asked me to send a particular word of congratulations to the Southampton Youth Orchestra, whose high standards under their conductor, Mr Davies, she much admired."

This achievement must be attributed to an enlightened Local Education Authority; a highly professional team of teachers; committed young players; supportive parents and schools; the Schools' Music Association and the Friends of Southampton Youth Orchestras. It was a winning team!

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