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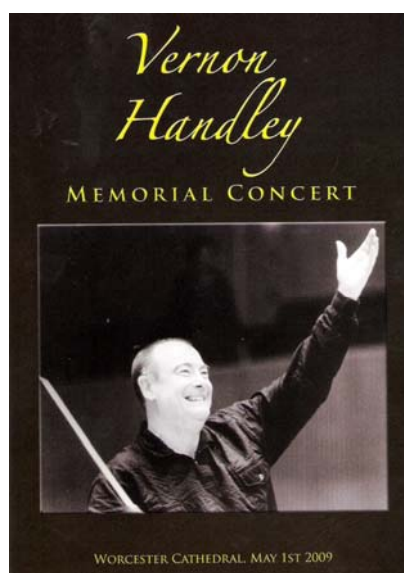
## NEWSLETTER

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### TRIBUTE TO DR VERNON HANDLEY CBE

We were very sad to receive the news that our President, Dr Vernon Handley, died in September 2008. He was 77. As readers will know, Dr ("Tod") Handley was a champion of British composers, chief among them were Arnold, Bantock, Bax, Elgar, Simpson and Vaughan Williams, and during his life had recorded over 150 works. He became our President in 1989 following his involvement in the recording of the Boughton *Symphony No 3 in B minor* and *Oboe Concerto No 1* issued by Hyperion Records.



I attended a wonderful memorial concert for him in May 2009 at Worcester Cathedral organised by the English Symphony Orchestra (he became their conductor following the departure of William Boughton) and members of Tod's family. There was an introductory talk by Andrew Neill,



former Chairman of the Elgar Society, followed by a programme of music of Bliss (*Fanfare for a Dignified Occasion*); Walton (*Spitfire Prelude*); Howells arr. Griffin (*All My Hope on God is Founded* – which was sung by all those present); Elgar (*Overture "Cockaigne"*); Finzi (*Let us Garlands Bring*, sung by the baritone Michael George) and Vaughan Williams (*Job – A Masque for Dancing* - which I believe was Dr Handley's favourite RVW work. I was surprised there was no Bax or Bantock, two composers that he much admired. It was a very moving occasion, enhanced by an Elgar lifetime achievement award for Tod received by his eldest son, Graham, and a souvenir programme that had contributions from many of his family, friends and musical contacts. The event concluded with a few minutes standing ovation. Apparently, Tod had remarked that when he was abroad and asked to conduct Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Brahms, Beethoven or Berlioz he would promise his British audience that after a few bars he could make them all sound like Vaughan Williams.....



Vernon Handley with Ian Boughton (left) and Roderick Williams (centre) in 2006

It was evident during the Dutton recording of the Boughton "Oliver Cromwell" Symphony that I and Paul Rooke attended in 2006 that Dr Handley's health had deteriorated, but he managed to keep his composure and retain complete authority throughout the sessions and has left our Trust a marvellous legacy. He will be sorely missed.

® IAN BOUGHTON  
Trustee, Administrator & Librarian of the Trust  
Editor, Newsletter



## THE IMMORTAL HOUR - LIVES OF TWO ACTORS



**ARTHUR CRANMER**

&



**W JOHNSTONE-DOUGLAS**

Perhaps the most celebrated actor of *The Immortal Hour* was Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies who captivated many an audience in her role as Etain. But we must not forget those who made the choral-drama the success it became and in this Newsletter we look at the lives of Arthur Cranmer, who created the role of Dalua, and William Johnstone-Douglas, who sang the role of Euchaidh.

The following article on the life of Arthur Cranmer has been compiled by John Smith at the Birmingham Conservatoire whom we thank for allowing it to be published in this Newsletter.

### **Arthur Henry Cranmer (1885 – 1954)** **Bass-Baritone**

Arthur Henry Cranmer was born in Birmingham on 5 May, 1885, the son of Frank Cranmer of the firm of Walters and Cranmer, Bingley Hall, who acted as secretaries of the Birmingham Cattle Show. Like his father, he was a chorister as boy and man at Christ Church, Summerfield, Rotton Park. He then lived in Selwyn Road, but later moved to Olton and Acocks Green. He was educated at King Edward's Grammar School. Until the age of 30, music was a spare-time occupation; he worked in an insurance office, but gave music lessons and sang.

He commenced his training at Birmingham School of Music with George Breeden. He sang bass in the Students' Choir at a Students' Choral Concert given in the BMI Large Lecture Theatre on Saturday 9 April 1904.



He later studied with Frederic Erle, who used to visit Birmingham once a week.

His professional career began at Birmingham Repertory Theatre in Sir Barry Jackson's earliest ventures in opera. He appeared as the old cynic in *Così fan tutte* and sang the part of Dalua, the Shadow-God, in Rutland Boughton's *The Immortal Hour* in Birmingham conducted by Appleby Matthews, who had assembled an excellent orchestra which had many of his London players, including Leon Goossens and Alfred Brain. He later reprised the role at the Regent Theatre (formerly the Euston Music Hall), King's Cross, London, in 1922 when he played the part in 500 performances. In the Birmingham Gazette of 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1922 SG wrote that his Dalua "has developed into strong, stern, pathetic, and consistent individuality", the Birmingham Post of 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1922 said that he sang and played "with ability", SRL in Pall Mall of 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1922 reported that Cranmer "was good at every point, both in the power of his presence and in his singing. He held the house breathless all through the long and (to those who do not know the play) puzzling first scene" and the Morning Post of 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1922 said he "declaimed his elemental recitatives with dignity". In The Illustrated London News of 21<sup>st</sup> October, 1922 E J Dent wrote that he "combines a fine voice with a very dramatic power of declamation" and the Star of 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1922 said his performance deserved praise for the clearness of his diction. (The cast also included Herbert Simmonds as The Old Bard and some performances were conducted by Alfred Reynolds).

On Good Friday 1918 he was one of the soloists at a concert given in Birmingham Town Hall by the Midland Musical Society; in June 1918 he sang the Father in six performances of *Hansel and Gretel* at Birmingham Repertory Theatre in aid of charities; on 16 October 1918 he was in the cast of the Festival Choral Society's performance of Berlioz *Faust* conducted by Thomas Beecham at the Central Hall; in March 1919 he sang Valentine in a concert recital in Birmingham Town Hall of Gounod's opera *Faust* with Birmingham Choral Union conducted by Mr A J Cotton, the conductor of the Midland Musical Society, deputising for the indisposed Richard Wassell; on 17 January 1920 he sang in The Messiah given by Birmingham Choral Society under Richard Wassell.

In the 1920s he appeared at the Petersfield Music Festival which had as its driving force Adrian Boult and Stuart Wilson.

He was advertised as one of the soloists in the first concert performance of Boughton's *Bethlehem* in Birmingham Town Hall on Monday 28 November, 1921 with the City of Birmingham Choir and the City of Birmingham Orchestra conducted by Appleby Matthews. For some reason, he did not sing on the night.



He appeared as Tristram in Rutland Boughton's *The Queen of Cornwall* in August/September, 1925 at the Glastonbury Festival and as Dalua in the 78rpm recording of Boughton's *The Immortal Hour* with Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Etain, Bruce Flegg as Midir and William Johnstone-Douglas as Eochaidh. The conductor was Ernest Irving.

In 1927 he sang Don Alfonso in a three-week season of opera at the Theatre Royal, Bristol when the CBO played in the pit conducted by Adrian Boult.

He made his debut in the role of Gurnemanz in *Parsifal* on Good Friday, 1929 with the British National Opera Company. An early experience in a concert version of the opera was an unfortunate one for him. He was to sing the Amfortas Prayer in a concert conducted by Sir Henry Wood at the Queen's Hall, London, and was given wrong directions for his entry on to the platform – and, instead fell down thirty steps. Although he was able to get through the concert successfully, he was "invalided" for two weeks afterwards.

On 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1929, with Dorothy Silk, Margaret Balfour and Steuart Wilson, he sang the part of Christus in two performances of a then rare masterpiece, Bach's St Matthew Passion, under Adrian Boult and the CBO in Birmingham Town Hall. Boult had engaged Wanda Landowska to play the harpsichord continuo but she was ill. The Times described the soloists as "the best solo singers possible. The great merit of this performance was its consistency, a quality obtainable only where orchestra and choir are permanently under the same conductor, so that players and singers are equally alive to his methods". One of the performances was broadcast. Later there were annual performances in York Minster and with the Bach Choir in the Queen's Hall, London. For the most part his fellow soloists were Dorothy Silk, Margaret Balfour and Steuart Wilson, with Adrian Boult or Reginald Jacques as conductors.

He sang the aria Make thee clean, my heart, from sin from Bach's St Matthew Passion with the City of Birmingham Orchestra under Leslie Heward in Birmingham Town Hall on 28 October, 1934. The programme also included *Why so pale and wan?* (Hubert Parry), *As ever I saw* (Peter Warlock), *The Water Mill* (Vaughan Williams) and *Where go the boats?* (Michael Mullinar). (Mullinar was the regular accompanist for CBO Sunday Concerts and in later life he was one of those (along with Roy Douglas) who helped the ageing Vaughan Williams with things like preparing vocal scores of his choral works etc).

His gift for conveying a sense of mystery made him particularly successful in Stanford's *The Travelling Companion*, at Bristol and Sadler's Wells, and he played Dr Bartolo in *The Barber of Seville* and Don Alphonso in *Così fan Tutte*.



He took an important part in the Bristol opera festivals organized by Philip Napier Miles, excelling as the Visitor in Miles's *Markheim*. (Mr Miles composed several operas, many songs and orchestral works, including a symphony)

Arthur was a fine oratorio singer and he performed regularly at The Three Choirs Festival and at Promenade Concerts. His many performances included annual appearances under Vaughan Williams at Dorking, Surrey. He made singing tours of Holland, Germany and Canada.

He was invited to sing in Westminster Abbey choir at the Coronation of Elizabeth II and George VI and was well-known in Birmingham as a music tutor and an adjudicator at festivals throughout the country. He regularly coached and gave lecture demonstrations on The Art of Singing at Downe House, near Newbury with his son Philip.

He broadcast frequently from the earliest days of radio and went on to sing more than 1,000 times on the air.

He was a keen sportsman: an athlete, he played football, golf, tennis, cricket - he captained the musicians in their annual cricket fixtures with the "Stage"- and hockey. Sometime he was captain of Olton cricket and hockey and he once played for England in an International hockey match.

Mrs Cranmer, an amateur musician, was a native of Somerset and, when it was known that she had married a singer, a concert was arranged in a village near Exmoor. On arrival Arthur was greeted in rather a chilly manner, but, after the concert, an old farmer came to Mrs Cranmer and said: "He baint much to look at, but there's more in him than we thought".

His son, Peter, who had been a soloist in the Oxford Cathedral choir, was a Rugby international and Warwickshire cricketer and his second son, Philip, who had composed a Funeral March at the age of seven, became Secretary of the Associated Board and a member of the BSM staff for a short period in 1949/50.

Arthur died on 20 August, 1954, aged 69, while giving the last planned music lecture of a series at the Summer Music School, Coleg Harlech, North Wales. A memorial service was held at Christ Church, Summerfield, Rotton Park.

His name is in The Musicians' Book of Remembrance in the Musicians' Chapel of the National Musicians' Church, St Sepulchre-without-Newgate, in London.

® John Smith



**Walter (William) Johnstone-Douglas (1886 – 1972)**  
**Baritone**

In August 2008, I had the good fortune to meet the niece of W Johnstone-Douglas, Mrs Belle Wybergh, at her home in Cumbria where she had recently celebrated her 96th birthday. I was introduced to her by friend Joy Maynard and daughter Sheila. Though not in great health, Belle was sprightly and more than able to share with me a little information about her uncle and recalled seeing his performances in *The Immortal Hour* in London in the early 1930s. She also spoke about her own life as chorister with Glyndebourne Opera and showed me paintings by her aunt Sholto. Her gift to me of two books written by her mother (Nina) and sister (Daisy) of their explorations to India and Far East will take pride of place on the bookshelf.

W Johnstone-Douglas was the tenth child of Arthur and Jane Johnston-Douglas of Comlongon Castle, Dumfriesshire, and cousin of then Marquess of Queensberry. His father was a land agent principally for Lord Mansfield's estates in the country of which Comlongon Castle was part of his property. His mother's family, the Stewarts of Physgill in Wigtownshire, were as long-established as the Johnstone-Douglas family of Locherbie.

Mr Johnstone-Douglas became associated with Boughton's Glastonbury Festivals in 1919 where he appeared in productions of "The Sumida River" and "The Round Table". He became noted for his performances in the role of Eochaidh in the London productions of *The Immortal Hour* with the Birmingham Repertory Company under Barry Jackson. He went on to the play the role for over 200 times.

For three years W Johnstone-Douglas performed in music comedy and when he was just 19, became secretary and accompanist to the famous Edouard de Reszke at his opera school in Paris. In 1914, he joined the Lanarkshire Yeomanry and served in Gallipoli and France before returning to the UK to rekindle his singing and acting career having rejected the possibility of going into engineering. Mr Johnstone-Douglas later became founder and joint Director with Amherst Webber of the Webber Douglas School of Singing and Dramatic Art in London.

Following the last performance of the "Hour" at the London's Kingsway Theatre in 1926, Noel Harris reported that "W Johnstone-Douglas, representing the worldly and physical element in the legend, gives full value to the dramatic side of the character and the beautiful singing of the chorus reflects infinite credit on themselves and their producer".

® **Ian Boughton**



## ANIMATION OF "THE IMMORTAL HOUR"

Bristol artist Ralph Juergen Colmar has completed an abridged adaptation of *The Immortal Hour* on DVD. His 20-minute animation has been achieved by using musical extracts from the Hyperion recording of the music to a back-drop of moving cartoon images of the principal characters. Mr Colmar's objective is to use it at world-wide festivals to help promote the work and the composer. Its first appearance was at the Glastonbury Festival in June 2009.

For further information, contact Ralph Colmar at 9 St Matthew's Road, Cotham, Bristol BS6 5TS.

## Future events

### **20 October 2009**

Redbridge Music Society. Presentation by Ian Boughton on the life and music of Rutland Boughton. Details: Contact Mrs Esther Solomons, Hon Secretary, 43 Ingleby Road, Ilford, Essex IG1 4RX

### **2010: The Year of Rutland Boughton**

An announcement of concerts and events to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of Rutland Boughton (which falls in January 2010) will be announced in a special Newsletter later this year.

\*\*\*\*\* A small plea! \*\*\*\*\*

We would appreciate any help readers are willing to make to encourage local musicians and musical societies to include Boughton's music in their programme in 2010. In addition, a letter or email to the BBC and Classic FM requesting his music be played would be helpful. Alternatively, you could raise a petition with your local society? The more encouragement, the better the chances of success!!! Thank you.

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**The Rutland Boughton Music Trust** was established in 1978 as a registered charity to encourage performances and more particularly sponsor recordings of Boughton's finest works. The Trust's financial resources depend mainly on royalties generated from performances and broadcasts and donations from third parties. If you would like to make a contribution, please contact the Trust at the following address: 25 Bearton Green, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1UN, UK. Tel: 01462 434318. Email: [Boughtontrust@aol.com](mailto:Boughtontrust@aol.com) [www.rutlandboughtonmusictrust.org.uk](http://www.rutlandboughtonmusictrust.org.uk) Charity No: 276012/ACL

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