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THOUGHTS and FACTS

on

FRANK MERRICK, ESQ., M.MUS., F.R.A.M., Hon.F.T.C.L.

Frank Merrick was born at Clifton, Bristol, on the 30th April 1886. He was one of three children, having a sister and a brother. His father, Dr. Frank Merrick, and his grandfather both came from Clifton. His mother, Phoebe O'Carroll, the daughter of a Protestant Clergyman, was Irish coming from the centre of Ireland and his recollections of his childhood are extremely happy in a united and secure family background.

His father was a professional musician. Frank received no formal schooling and the task of educating the family was shared by his governess and his parents. He recalls that the governess taught the family French and she said that French was a very musical language, quite unlike German but, in fact, after Frank's stay in Vienna during his childhood where he heard the Wagnerian operas, he formed a contrary view which he has held to this day. His father taught them mathematics and he was introduced to Euclid at a comparatively young age. This was the background in which the young musician had his early upbringing.

His first music lesson he received at about the age of 5 and this was given to him by his mother. She showed him middle C and then left him and after about three-quarters of an hour, by luck or good judgment, he eventually managed to satisfy her that he knew roughly where middle C was to be found. It is astonishing to think that some 3 years later he gave his first public recital at the Small Victoria Rooms, Clifton, in aid of Dr. Barnado's Homes which produced a profit of £20. A well-known songwriter of the period, Joseph Roedel (whose brother was a friend of Wagner) wrote for the occasion the Barnado March which Frank duly played. He cannot now recall other details of the programme except the opening item was the Arabesque by Schumann.

His grandfather was a builder and the young Frank Merrick composed his first piece entitled "On Grandpapa's Swing". Grandpapa was a very keen listener to his grandson. His father had very definite ideas on the way Frank should compose and urged him in later life to discard any music that did not satisfy him but Frank had a different view. He preferred the philosophy of Mendelssohn that he should never put down a note unless he was absolutely certain that it was the right one. That absolute conviction comes through Frank's character time and time again when you are talking to him about all kinds of events whether they be musical or other aspects of his very long and full life.

The picture of a caring family is further emphasised because his mother when Frank was 12 years of age took him to Vienna to study under Leschetizky who, on hearing him play, offered to give him lessons free providing his mother went home. His mother didn't go home and so the Merricks had to pay, although he thinks it was rather less than the full fees normally charged. It is interesting to note that Frank was sent to Vienna on the advice of Paderewski.

There was in Clifton at this time a man called Crighton who ran a music shop and was also a concert agent. Crighton had arranged a concert for Paderewski and after the concert Frank Merrick was taken to a hotel where Paderewski was staying which he says was somewhere near the Suspension Bridge, to play for him. Paderewski was sufficiently impressed to urge that Merrick should be taken to Vienna to study under his former teacher, Leschetizky.

His stay in Vienna was one of happiness and he particularly enjoyed walks around its many monuments and famous places and the introduction to the great Wagnerian operas under the direction of Mahler.

The pupils Leschetizky prepared numbered the glittering musical greats of future generations and, amongst these were Richard Buhlig, who subsequently went to America and he and Merrick used to criticise each other's playing. Frank would point out the wrong notes that Buhlig made and Buhlig would criticise Frank for his lack of expression and interpretation! Buhlig was the first recitalist to play Debussy in London and Frank Merrick was the first recitalist to play Debussy in Australasia.

Frank felt that the most musical contemporary of his at this particular time was Schnabel and he retained an enormous admiration for Schnabel and particularly his performances of Schubert, although he feels that the Beethoven did not have nearly the heroic interpretation that the music required and deserved.

Senior pupils or former pupils at this time were Mark Hambourg and Moiseivitch. Whilst in Vienna he did not make any public performances but wherever he went, especially with the English community, he was always pressed to play. He was introduced to Johann Strauss, the great waltz king, and showed Strauss a waltz he had written and to which Strauss humorously and good-naturedly said, "I see I have a rival". He also composed other pieces whilst in Vienna, including a Tarantella which he dedicated to his master. His father would come to visit the family from time to time and he, having taken up photography, was the first person to photograph the title page of the Eroica Symphony by Beethoven upon which Beethoven deleted the name of Napoleon. He made numerous friends in Vienna, particularly the Curator of the Music Museum, Eusebius Mandycewski, but it was another 20 years before Frank realised that Mandycewski was the copyist for Brahms.

After three years, Frank returned to England and he had a few further lessons with Herbert Parsons but he started to build his own repertoire and impose his own self-discipline, only returning for a short spell of revision to Leschetizky some four years later.

Frank Merrick came to London and moved to Regent's Square near Euston Station where he lived in digs. He got to know The Times critic of the day, Fuller Maitland and he was asked, at about this time, to give a lecture on Russian music which took him to the British Museum to do some research and, as a result, he got to know the Head of the Music Department, Barclay Squire and they became great friends. Squire was the critic of one of the London evening papers. It was as a result of these connections that Frank got into London musical society.

An early acquaintance of Frank Merrick was Dame Clara Butt and he toured extensively with her as a solo pianist both in the provinces in England and also

to Australasia. This association continued until her death.

In 1903, at the then Bechstein Hall (now the Wigmore Hall), he made his London debut. He remembers performing Bach, Beethoven and Liszt and The Times critic of the day complained that his Liszt was "bedizened with octaves". His 21st birthday was spent in Australia and it was in that continent that Frank introduced Debussy and played "Jardins sous la pluie". This proved too much for one Australian critic who described the work as "odd rather than interesting". This insensitivity was too much for Frank who proceeded to play Debussy constantly throughout the tour of Australasia and many years later when he was making a broadcast to Australasia, he had his revenge by bringing to their attention remarks of one of their critics when Debussy was first played in that continent.

In 1910 Frank's life changed dramatically because he accepted the Professorship of Piano at the Royal Manchester College of Music, which establishment had been founded by Sir Charles Hallé and Frank succeeded Egon Petri as Chief Professor of Pianoforte. It was shortly before this appointment in 1910 that he went to St. Petersburg (Leningrad) to compete in the Rubenstein competition which was held every five years in one of the great European cities. The jury was presided over by Glazonow and Frank Merrick came away with a Diploma of Honour. The other effect of taking a Professorship was that it enabled Frank to earn sufficient to support a wife and he promptly married Miss Hope Squire who was herself a musician of considerable talent and two of whose songs we shall hear this evening. This period of Frank's life was one of great happiness and he recalls his marriage with very great and deep affection.

She died in 1936.

About this time, Frank was invited to perform Brahms D Minor Concerto (No. 1) with the Hallé Orchestra, conducted by Müller-Reuter, who had conducted a performance of this work by Brahms as the soloist and he encouraged Frank to play the Slow Movement with even more "passionate climaxes" as Brahms had done. Frank again failed to please the local critic but he seems to have the same certain and tranquil philosophy towards critics as in every other aspect of his life.

Frank and Hope had long been interested in women's suffrage and emancipation and the general argument about individual rights and when the First World War clouds came, two events impressed Frank. They were both meetings held in Manchester. First he heard a talk by Mrs. Clare Stobart concerning a hospital in the Balkans and secondly a talk by Miss Christobel Pankhurst at the Manchester Free Trade Hall when she encouraged all the male listeners in the audience to join the Forces. This to Frank was completely inconsistent with everything that he had believed about the Suffragette Movement, one of whose fundamental principles was the sanctity of human life and these two events crystalised into a period of deep philosophical doubt as to the correctness of the war and as far as he was concerned his doubts were resolved by becoming a conscientious objector. This deeply held conviction cost him his freedom because he was imprisoned at Wormwood Scrubs and later at Wandsworth and he spent a total of 22 months in prison for his beliefs.

One great problem was the insistence upon total silence. He and his fellow prisoners were not allowed to communicate to one another even upon exercise and he felt impelled on at least one occasion, and he thinks now that there were probably others, to protest against the barbarity of such a rule which protest, and others, cost him a number of sessions in the punishment cells on bread and water.

He was allowed, apart from the bible, some "entertaining reading" and to this end he was given Buckle's History of Civilisation! He cannot recall why, but he says that the book was subsequently taken away from him as a punishment. This was followed by a visit from the Padre who suggested that he might care to apply himself to serious study and so he elected, in order to get some reading matter, either to study architecture or latin grammar. However, the Padre returned with the news that all the latin grammars were out on loan and he offered a book on Esperanto which he avidly devoured and so came to an aspect of his life which has remained one of great joy to this very day. We shall hear some songs which he has written in Esperanto this evening and he has written a fair amount of music in that language, including settings of two of the psalms.

He tells us that he had been to the Scrubs on one previous occasion to have tea because his uncle was at that time the Padre! He was transferred together with a number of other prisoners, many of whom also were conscientious objectors, in chains to Wandsworth Prison and the prisoners made a great clatter with their chains. He considers that his introduction to Esperanto was a sufficient consolation for the time he spent in prison and it is quite clear that nothing that has happened since in any way changes his deeply held belief that the course he adopted then was the right course. He was not able to get at a piano in prison and he used to sit down and keep his fingers exercised by playing imaginary pieces. He constantly rehearsed and disciplined himself by playing music in his head.

A considerable impact was felt when Winston Churchill's regulations, which alleviated the silence rule for the suffragettes, was extended to the prisoners so that they were allowed two sessions each day to communicate to one another; the effect on so many of the prisoners was quite dramatic.

He was not entirely without any music in prison because after a while he was asked to play the organ on a Sunday for the Quakers. In April 1919 he was released from prison and returned to his Professorship in Manchester and almost immediately gave a recital in the Memorial Hall. He had to endure the usual insults from the opponents of conscientious objection.

Another aspect of his life came shortly after his release from prison because his wife, Hope Squire, had a brother who was an executive of the R.S.P.C.A. and who wanted to demonstrate a new humane killer in the Manchester area. Hope Squire decided that she would try and get the local butchers to attend a demonstration but all her encouragement for them to leave their shops and their cash-tills for the demonstration failed and so incensed were the Merricks by this callous disregard for the suffering of animals that they promptly, by way of protest, became and remained vegetarians. It is quite clear that Frank Merrick is not a person who is easily led and this is another example of his strength of character and his firm belief in doing what he considers to be right. He is not, however, a religious person and Sybil Merrick says that she thinks that Frank gets

more irreligious as he grows older but who can define religion?

Frank is a lifelong teetotaler and he has never smoked. He says that with their conscientious belief, coupled with their vegetarianism, their total abstinence and their non smoking habits, he and Hope Squire were thought by many to be cranks! This he finds extremely amusing and to those who know him well, all that can be said is that it is a great pity that the world is not completely full of such cranks.

Another aspect of his life began to dawn at this period for it was still the very early pioneering days of broadcasting and he rapidly achieved a reputation as a broadcaster, not only to English audiences but to overseas audiences and he must be one of the longest serving broadcasters for his next interview goes out in September on BBC3 based on his memories of the Wigmore Hall (formerly the Bechstein Hall).

Among his pupils in Manchester was no less a musician than Alan Rawsthorne who dedicated some of his music to Frank Merrick, just as he had dedicated some of his earlier compositions to Leschetizky. Gordon Green was another of his pupils. He is Professor of Pianoforte at the Royal Academy of Music but unfortunately he has written to say that he will not be able to be with us tonight owing to a previous engagement.

When asked about Manchester, he says that his wife Hope hated it and he did not "actually admire it" but he was very satisfied and happy in the work he was doing in Manchester.

In 1928 the Columbia Gramophone Company announced an international competition for the completion of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. He decided to enter, and his Scherzo & Finale won first prize in the British zone and he received a handsome cash prize, together with a recording contract. This, together possibly with a remark attributed to the late Hubert Parry (d.1918), namely that he had his eye on Frank Merrick, probably went a long way to ensuring that in 1929 when he decided to come to London and to apply for a Professorship at the Royal College of Music, he was appointed by Sir Hugh Allen.

The next 20 years saw him carrying out a considerable amount of broadcasting and about this time he formed a friendship with the eminent Danish violinist, Henry Holst, and as a duo they made many public appearances.

His domestic life divides into two distinct parts, because in 1937 he married Sybil Case. They have three children, namely a son and two daughters and now the pleasure of five grandchildren. Undoubtedly, Frank's work has been helped beyond measure by the devotion and loving care which Sybil has given to him and the joy of a young family when many men might have been thinking of retirement - not a word you find in Frank's vocabulary! The Second World War duly came and the family evacuated to Salisbury and he became the conductor of the Salisbury Orchestra and also founded the Salisbury Chamber Music Society and both of these organisations continue to this day. He was in constant demand as a broadcaster/recitalist/teacher/lecturer and the period of the 30's and 40's saw him fully occupied. In 1956 he retired from the Royal College of Music and was immediately offered the Professorship of Pianoforte at Trinity College of Music, London. Owing to a rule relating to retirement which was brought into force after his appointment, he reluctantly had to retire in 1975.

In 1957 he went to Malta for a lengthy stay on behalf of the Associated Board and a few years later went to Central Africa for the purposes of examining, adjudicating and generally making music.

In 1968, Bristol University inaugurated a new degree, namely Master of Music and the University chose him as the first distinguished person to receive this coveted award. This coincided with both Sybil and Celia, the youngest child, achieving their degrees in the same year. There is some family rivalry as whether the honorary degree bestowed by Bristol is worth as much as the two degrees which were fought for in the examination room! It is obvious, however, to anyone speaking to the family, that they are all intensely proud of each other's attainments, howsoever achieved! The next great landmark in his distinguished career was in 1973 when at the Wigmore Hall he gave a recital to celebrate the 70th anniversary of his first London debut. Those who attended will not only

recall the great scope of the programme from very early music to modern music but also the glittering array of musical luminaries who attended to hear a respected professional colleague. At the conclusion of the recital, the Bechstein Company presented to him a model of a Bechstein Grand which plays a little tune (The Dance of the Hours) and which bears an appropriate inscription. He has always been very keen on the Bechstein piano and in a way, perhaps, this was the method by which Bechstein showed their appreciation for his devotion to their product and its enhancement every time that he used it for a recital.

In 1966, he was elected President of the Incorporated Society of Musicians and thus added his name to a list of illustrious forebears.

When talking to him about composers, it is apparent that he has the widest appreciation of composers from pre-Elizabethan to the present. He has been conspicuous in promoting modern composers and even the avant-garde. He has favourites and particularly he is associated with the works of Prokofiev. He has played almost entirely all the first performances in this country of the Piano Sonatas of Prokofiev. He said to Merrick on one occasion, "If you play my sixth Sonata, you really must like my music". On another occasion, Merrick was complaining to Prokofiev that Prokofiev's playing during numerous broadcasts was very "inexpressive", to which Prokofiev replied that he didn't want people to think that he was playing in a "sentimental way". He has also devoted much attention to the works of Arnold Bax and on one copy of a piano sonata, Bax wrote that Frank Merrick was his greatest musical friend. He has always been a champion of lesser known music as well as the greats and in contrast to his appreciation and encouragement of contemporary composers there was an occasion when in a recital many years ago he was playing a pre-Elizabethan set of variations 'Jhon Come Kisse Me Now' and the Times critic reported that it was probably the first time that the piece had ever been performed at a concert in the world.

He has edited for Novello many of the major works of Chopin and has edited for the Associated Board a number of Schubert's piano works and all the concertos of John Field, three of which were published by Musica Britannica.

It was typical of Frank Merrick that when Montagu Cleeve (a colleague at Trinity) founded the Viola d'Amore Society, he immediately and unsolicited, wrote a piece for the instrument and sent it to Montagu Cleeve for the Society. This was the beginning of a very long and happy friendship which has brought great joy to all those who have been privileged to be associated with him in the Society of which he is President.

He has composed much music and the British Esperanto Association, of which he is still a devoted follower, has in its archives a number of songs written in that language and Sybil Michelow, whom we shall hear tonight, has recorded a number of them. He has been Honorary President of the London Esperanto Club (founded 1903) for more than 20 years and is co-author of "Esperanto Musical Vocabulary". Apart from songs, he has written two piano concertos, a cello and piano sonata, two piano sonatas, a piano trio etc. One of the pieces we shall hear tonight is a delightful Epiphany Carol, the words of which were written by Lord Maybray-King, formerly Horace King, Speaker of the House of Commons. He invited Frank Merrick to set the words to music when they were together at an Incorporated Society of Musicians Dinner when Frank Merrick was President. This carol has been performed on Rhodesian Radio and in St. Paul's Cathedral and, at the other end of the scale, was given at the Christmas concert of Clerical, Medical & General Life Assurance Society in December 1975. There are other works by him but they are too numerous to particularise.

These short notes and thoughts were contributed from a couple of interviews with Frank Merrick and it is impossible to express in a few pages the totality of this industrious, interesting and humane person and his glittering career. When talking to you he is likely to pass some remark such as "When I was a young man I went to Queens Hall to see Greig and bumped into Percy Grainger" - it is impossible to follow that or to capture in a few pages all his great experiences or to record all the petals he has touched to make them blossom.

The Musical Times of 1st May, 1903, is worth quoting, "A pianoforte recital given on March 25 at Bechstein Hall by Mr. Frank Merrick, a native of Clifton and pupil of Professor Leschetitzky, deserves special mention. His interpretations of Beethoven's Sonata in A flat (Op. 26) and other classics justify the most sanguine expectations of his future, and the expression of the opinion that, intellectually and executively, young Mr. Merrick has in him the makings of a great artist. His future career will be watched with unusual interest."

We are very grateful indeed for the work of Frank Merrick and it is a privilege to be in any way associated with him.

JONATHAN FRANK was born in 1933 and has lived all his life in the Croydon area.

After a period at preparatory school, he went to Whitgift School, Croydon. He comes from a family where music was a recreational activity and although his parents were both able musicians, they were not professional musicians. After leaving Whitgift he entered the Guildhall School of Music and Drama for further studies and after obtaining his diploma he joined the army for National Service and was posted as a musician with the band of the Royal Engineers. He gave his first public recital at Croydon in 1956. He left the army in 1957 and did freelance work for the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden and after about a year he joined the Carl Rosa Opera Company until that Company ceased to exist, whereupon he rejoined the staff of the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden where he has been continuously employed ever since on the musical staff.

He often tours with the Company and has only just returned from a two month visit to the United States. In 1973 he toured Brazil and in 1975 Japan. Apart from his day-to-day professional work with the Royal Ballet, he combines the work of a musical journalist, having written a number of articles for Musical Opinion and is a frequent lecturer/recitalist.

Jonathan's interest and knowledge of Frank Merrick started in 1954, although he knew of his reputation prior to that date. Jonathan met Frank Merrick at a piano course at Matlock in Derbyshire in 1954, which he was attending as a student. Thereafter they met from time to time at concerts and other musical functions. In 1954, he was asked by Montagu Cleeve to conduct an orchestra formed by Mr. Cleeve (both had studied conducting under Aylmer Buesst) and from time to time thereafter and to the present day, Jonathan remains the conductor of the Viola d'Amore Society orchestra.

As first Chairman of the Viola d'Amore Society, Jonathan saw more of its illustrious President, Frank Merrick, and therefore their paths increasingly came together and when Jonathan ventilated the idea that he would like to honour Frank's 90th birthday in some way, this evening's recital was born and with the generosity

of Clerical, Medical & General Life Assurance Society in giving the facilities of its Board Room, the original idea has blossomed to the recital we are to hear this evening. The Board Room is where Frank Merrick gave a recital on the 25th November 1971 at which some of those present this evening were also present.

Jonathan was a close friend of the late York Bowen who has written music for the Viola d'Amore Society and who composed a partita for piano which he dedicated to Jonathan Frank in 1960.

His recreations are walking (particularly in the West Country) and literature and an interest in Japanese studies. He is a teetotaller and a non-smoker but he regards the imbibing of Sake as an essential part of his Japanese studies!

SYBIL MICHELOW has born in South Africa where she studied piano. After settling in England she became a contralto and is well-known as a singer on radio and television. She has appeared at the last night of the Proms, has toured extensively at home and abroad and has just returned from Israel. Some years ago she recorded Frank Merrick's Esperanto songs and it is some of these we shall hear this evening.