

NORTH OF THE BORDER

HADDO HOUSE is a beautiful historic house, built in 1732 on the site of an old one and designed by William Adam.

In its grounds is a large hall, built 100 years ago by my husband's grandparents, John and Ishbel, First Marquess and Marchioness of Aberdeen, as a Community Centre for the work people of the then very large estate. Acoustically excellent, because it is built entirely of wood, it contained a full sized tennis court, which was never used. In 1945, my husband altered it to comprise a large adaptable stage suitable either for Oratorio, Opera Plays, and with additions, a Globe stage for the works of Shakespeare.

To those who live South of Watford and think music in Scotland is confined to the Edinburgh Festival, it comes as quite a shock to find that music and the arts also flourish in the far North and the Islands. Haddo has been called the "Glyndebourne of the North", a name we both dislike for the only similarity is a large and beautiful country house which is a home for music. Frank Howes, a former Times music critic, knowing my dislike of the title wrote to me saying "I am writing to you from the Haddo of the South!!"

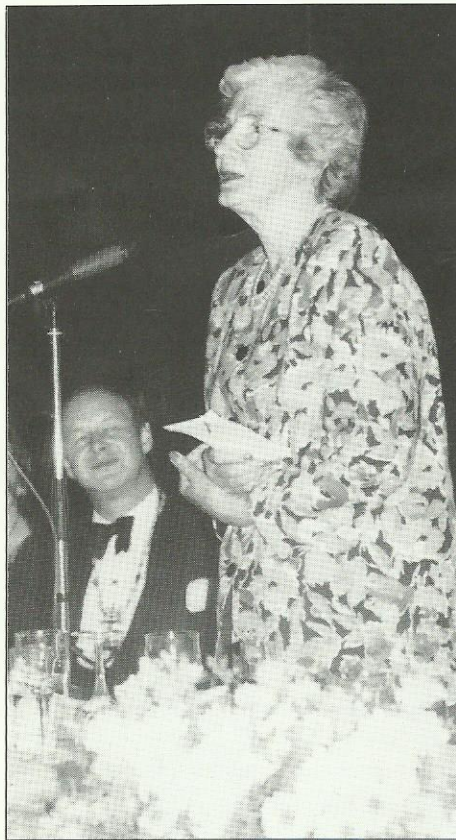
Adaptable

The Hall itself is very adaptable, seating between 300 and 400 - the seating has just been refurbished in Gordon tartan - becoming at times a Chinese Palace for "Turandot" - Aldeburgh for "Peter Grimes" and in addition to the Shakespeare Globe, a country house for "The Importance of being Earnest" and other classics. It also serves duty, as a dance hall and for country fairs and exhibitions.

Oratorio at Haddo has always had leading soloists, which are an inspiration to the amateur choir. We have been fortunate in having such great artistes supporting us, as in the early days Elsie Suddaby and Eric Greene, later Janet Baker, Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten. Vaughan Williams came to conduct Parry's "Blest Pair of Sirens" but would not conduct his own "Sea Symphony". However, he gave me wonderful help and encouragement and left me with a full score, full of totally illegible writing.

Opera started with Gilbert and Sullivan, a good training ground. Then we had a marvellous band of amateur singers, so that it became a happy repertory company.

We progressed through various operet-



Lady Aberdeen, guest speaker at our Summer Banquet

tas, "Fledermaus" and "Veronique" to "Carmen" still with our amateur team. Thereafter ambition soared.

Most of the big oratorios and operas have been performed, in the latter case provided it has lots of chorus - because our amateur chorus is an essential part - not all the Society do the operas, but those that do are very hard working and intensely loyal. We have explored the early Verdi operas, "Ernani", "Attila", and "Nabucco" (including the horse). In the teeth of opposition from Peter Pears we have performed "Peter Grimes." He said "your choir can't do it, and you can't conduct it." He was right about the second but not the first.

Developments

Over the years we have built up a splendid team, an orchestra which works harder than most, led by either Peter Mountain or Richard Deakin. The professional group includes a Producer, Lighting Expert and Stage Designer. I have been lucky enough to conduct so many wonderful works, but it is difficult if you have a title to convince people that you are an established musician. My professional name is June

Gordon, and the title only used when I am out with my begging bowl asking for money. I have been lucky also in having wonderful people to help me in the orchestra, such as Leon Goossens, Archie Camden, Bernard Brown.

The orchestra sent me to Clarence Raybould to learn the basics and I have had wonderful lessons particularly on Elgar from beloved Sir Adrian Boult, right up to the end of his life. There was also a never to be forgotten lesson from Sir Malcolm Sargent on Walton's "Belshazzar's Feast".

Finance

We are now beginning our 46th season and there are many headaches. As with every other musical project finance is a problem. Trusts, Businesses and Oil Companies are very good but at the end of each season there is a yawning gap. People run a mile from me - no-one is safe but it has to be done.

This year the Scottish Arts Council failed to give us a grant for the Opera. The reason - it was that "Carmen" was considered too popular. No amount of pleading that we were using young professionals on the way up made any difference. But it did make a difference to our budget and how!

Convincing our audience that it is worth coming to something they don't know is very difficult. In May we performed Elgar's "Apostles" and "Kingdom" together on successive days - a rare opportunity to hear them together. The "Apostles" was only half full in contrast to the "Kingdom" which is of course performed frequently.

The future

I am now so old that before I "fall off my perch" we must ensure that it will continue. To this end we have formed the Haddo Arts Trust which includes the Haddo House Choral and Operatic Society, the Junior Choir, Youth Theatre.

Improvements are being made to the seating and lighting. Above all, our objective remains, "the Pursuit of Excellence" - to do the very best we can for years to come.

I hope you too will come to Haddo some day and experience what our young Royal Patron of the Arts Trust, Prince Edward, calls "the magic of Haddo" for it is a beautiful place and the beauty of the music links us all together and makes us one.