

WALTER WILLSON COBBETT MEDAL

So they sent me to Zurich and then to Paris for two years. Zurich was great but Paris was a musical desert.

And then the years rolled on – as they tend to! Back in London, Salomon Orchestra, Chelsea Opera Group, quartets all over the place, concert going in the greatest city for making music in the world. Marriage, children, responsibility. And then gradually, children grow up, start their own music lessons, work gets more demanding. There is less time.

So you were doing less and less?

Yes, but a whole new dimension was about to start, none of which could have happened without what went before. Certain threads and characters from the past were about to make their impact on my life and take it in totally unforeseen directions.

Marshall Marcus wandered back into view after BBC Symphony Orchestra and a sojourn in the Caracas Symphony in Venezuela. With a group of chums who all played for John Eliot Gardiner, Chris Hogwood, Roger Norrington, Trevor Pinnock et al, they had decided to set up an orchestra where they themselves decided the repertoire and who conducted. That was the good news – the bad news was that all concerts lost money and could I come and talk to them about it – being a banker as I was. The orchestra in question was The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. In no time at all I went on the Board and got stuck in to helping them go forward. At one stage of the early parlous days, the orchestra's office was in our kitchen in Blackheath! Looking back over the 11 years or so since then much has happened and with great success – the associations with Simon Rattle, Glyndebourne, Franz Bruggen, Gustav Leonhardt and now Roger Norrington. Extraordinary concert performances of opera with Rattle – Mozart – and with Mark Elder – Rossini, Verdi and Donizetti. Dozens of recordings. Associate Orchestra of the South Bank Centre. But the players have done it and there is this still strong sense of ownership and that they are doing the concerts and the repertoire they really want to do.

So you gave up banking?

Certainly not! Something had to pay the mortgage. But there came the fateful day in 1993 when a very long standing friend and client handed me the advertisement for the post of Managing Director of the London Philharmonic and said to me, "Chris, this is what you should really be doing."

Three months later, having survived the interview process I was about to go to Henry Wood Hall to sign the contract when I received a phone call from David Marcou the interim Managing Director. "Chris, you may wish to reconsider, the Arts Council, has just announced a review of orchestral funding in London. I have just come back from the meeting and I have to tell you that if we fail the LPO could disappear. The Philharmonia, RPO and us are in a fight to the death." I



The Master presenting the Walter Willson Cobbett Medal to David Takeno at Cutlers' Hall.

desperately tried to get hold of my wife Judith to discuss it with her but she was out at meetings. The LPO urgently needed to know whether it had new MD or not. It was a life defining moment. I went to Henry Wood, asked for some minor changes to recognise the downside risks and signed.

It was like defending a company that is the subject of a hostile bid and we received tremendous support from our Trustees and from the South Bank where the orchestra was resident. I also realised very early on that it was important for the three orchestras to collaborate if we were to overturn the process. The relationships with both David Whelton at the Philharmonia and Paul Findlay at the RPO made a huge difference. We did stop the whole miserable, sorry process in its tracks and all three orchestras continue to exist and enhance London's deserved reputation as the music capital of the world despite the continuing pernicious process of "benign" neglect reflected in the funding for the arts in general.

So we lived to fight on. Support came from all sides and most significantly and magnificently from the Musicians Union. The highlights of running the orchestra are the subject of another piece, some other time. Nevertheless, for me, being part of the opening of the new house at Glyndebourne was very special. We watched it being built, were very much part of the pit design and, if I, may say so, Figaro could not have happened without us!

Life with the LPO was never dull but the greatest challenge was that of funding – as it continues to be across the arts. Ultimately, it was over a funding issue that, to my immense regret, we parted company. Lord Young, the new Chairman of the Trustees became convinced that the RPO and the LPO

could be run by one management team releasing substantial savings which could be used to improve the conditions for the members of the two orchestras. A bold and imaginative idea but one which I was convinced would not work in practice and also carried with it the great danger that one of the two orchestras would end up in a subsidiary role and might even disappear over time. We differed and thus parted. The irony was that KPMG, the management consultants brought in to advise agreed with me and the plan was never, thank goodness, enacted.

It was during this time that a friend and former colleague from my time at Rothschilds, Robin Harper, a past Master of the Ironmongers, said to me that the time had come to take life a bit more seriously and give something back by becoming a member of a Livery Company. So it was that I was introduced to Sir Vivian Dunn and the process started that ended with my being admitted to the Livery in April 1996. It is an astonishing thing to be admitted to membership of a company that goes back almost 500 years. To be described as a Musician is something that gives me pride, great satisfaction and a personal recognition that I could not and would not want really to be anything else. The creative curiosity and companionship of music making is reflected in its practitioners. We have a language in common that knows no barriers, is accessible to all – whoever and wherever they may be. To be a Musician is as much a privilege as it is a gift and how wonderful to be a part of something whose major purpose is to promote, protect and celebrate this great art form.

I am looking forward to the next chapters of my life in music!