

LET'S CELEBRATE!

By Liveryman Alison Pearce

THIS IS THE SEASON OF THE YEAR WHEN THE TEMPTATIONS TO THE ARTISTIC PALATE ARE ENORMOUS. For music lovers there are many fascinating choices and, in London alone, one can attend the end of term operas and musicals at the music conservatoires, outdoor concerts by the major orchestras and soloists in venues such as Kenwood and Crystal Palace; the Promenade Concert season; the three tenors etc., etc. as well as the prize winners' recitals of several major competitions for young artists, one of which is the Musicians' Company - Maisie Lewis concert series.

How does one choose what to attend and why? I want to use the next few words to put forward some ideas concerning what young artists may need at the beginning of their career and how we can help them and, also, what the audience require to make them want to attend the Maisie Lewis prize winners' recitals above all other choices.

As 'new girl' in the Company I had better introduce myself. Here are some of the highlights from my CV:

I have an enjoyable and successful international career as a soprano soloist, including recent performances of Bach and Penderecki in London, Elgar and Bruckner at the Three Choirs Festival and four leading operatic roles for the BBC in their 20th Century British composers series. This year I have also sung in France, Italy, Norway, Holland and Spain in recitals and performances of opera and oratorio.

I trained at Dartington, at the Guildhall School and later with Pierre Bernac and Gerhard Hüsck on the continent. I am now Professor in the Vocal Department at the Royal Academy of Music and give master classes and teach regularly at summer schools in Europe.

So - what do I think young prize winners need at the start of their career? They have, possibly, recently left one of the music colleges where they have been rightly encouraged and supported during their training. As performers in the outside world, they will need to have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, personally and professionally, as well as a considerable ability for positive and disciplined thought, before they can communicate their love of music through their talent with a good stage presence to an audience.

They may be "big fish" by the time they leave college and they have won competitions, such as the Maisie Lewis Young Artists, and feel very good. This is one of their first steps into the outside world, showing that, under pressure in a competitive situation, they can perform to a high standard. In itself, that fact is important, because they will always need to possess a competitive element to succeed in a crowded profession, although, unfortunately, this achievement is not always conducive to the highest spiritual level of performance.

The Young artists are probably apprehensive of their future. Questions such as, "Will I make a successful career in music?", "Which direction should I go: e.g. for singing, opera, oratorio,



The clothing ceremony, Alison Pearce with William Munro (L) and Peter Stickley (R). Photo: Peter Holland.

recital, soloist, chorus, session work?" Few of them understand at this point how they will need to (a) search throughout the whole of their career to develop further, there is never an end of perfection in sight for a performer (b) to earn a living (c) to give most of their spiritual, mental and physical energy to achieve personal and worldly success in the western competitive world. A real artist must be of this world but also apart from it.

I seem to have strayed into personal philosophy, so let me return to the real world with two statements.

- A. *A performer must possess strength, physically, mentally and emotionally. In performance, these elements should be well balanced, or it is immediately apparent to the audience and projects a weak interpretation overall.*
- B. *To succeed in the music profession, a performer needs three things: Talent, Luck and Business Sense.*

Now we have our winners, how do we, the Musicians Company, promote them? From my point of view, the Wigmore Hall is a splendid venue, with excellent acoustics, but is it the best place for the Worshipful Company of Musicians - Maisie Lewis recitals? Perhaps not.

Since reopening, the Wigmore Hall has projected a very different image than before its closure, when it was primarily used for debut recitals. Now it has many international concert series and themed packages of music that are all wonderful, but this may not be place for a young artist to stand out.

Why don't we use the City of London? Dare I liken it to the Royal Family; accessible, but with a certain air of mystique. I am sure a regular series of concerts somewhere like the Mansion House (with the Lord Mayor's blessing) would hold huge cachet, for both artists and audience. A reason for this is that it is not available to attend in the same way as the Wigmore Hall. Maybe one of the many reasons Glyndebourne is so popular might be the difficulty in obtaining tickets!!

Let's now consider our audience who, as I said previously, have so much music to choose from. How do we woo them to 'fight for a ticket' to attend our concerts?

Let's celebrate. I think we need a reception before the concerts, when we invite VIPs, City people and potential sponsors of other events, promoters of concerts, other guilds, all greeted by our Master and, hopefully, the Lord Mayor.

Let's relax before the concert so we are in the best mood to enjoy the evening. After a concert, many people begin thinking about their travel home and the pressures of the new day.

Now we have, Artists, Venue, Celebration. What about timing? Why choose the summer when so much else is happening? It may be lighter in the evening, but there is no guarantee of a hot, balmy night, so why not celebrate on April 23rd, St. George's Day! What could be better?

Many of the practicalities are now sorted out, so how can we best help our prize winners in the long term.

They have given of their best in the recital and we have enjoyed their performances. Could we not nurture them a little more.

Perhaps we more mature artists could help them if they need advice or just someone to talk through their ideas with. This may seem irrelevant, but sometimes it can be a very cold and lonely climb up the ladder and someone impersonal, but caring, who understands the music profession might be a lifeline to a talented artist.

Young artists have a long way to travel and possibly do not yet know how much they have to give out to achieve an inspired performance. They have usually been taking and learning from others up until this moment and their performances often, understandably, reflect a somewhat self-centred personality.

A truly great artist can transcend the ego to be a vehicle for the music. This needs time to develop. If young artists need us, let's support and nurture them along their chosen road.