

Hammarbak. Erik had run out of time. Could they see my score, please?

It was incomplete, I warned them, but yes, they could have it. Within days the word was back. There would be fourteen performances, staged in Odense, sung by artists of the Royal Danish Opera, if I would finish the work.

This had never seemed possible; but the thing was too miraculously serendipitous to refuse. I had never for a moment expected to have my score produced after all. So I set to. And it came together so easily that I know the composer would forgive what has been described, often enough, as my cheek. There was a memorable morning, I remember, when I seemed to have struck an impossible snag. I closed the book and went for my train. Passing through Stevenage at a hundred miles an hour the solution came. A small voice saying "try it on the flugelhorn - it will work, I promise you!" I am quite sure that oddball genius was on my side all the time.

It was great fun at Odense. A simple, cheap production which told the story well and a group of gifted military musicians who expressed heartfelt thanks to me for giving them something other than Alford and Blankenburg to play. Then on to Gothenburg and less complicated things, a concert performance. We travelled it, to loud (though astonished) applause all over Sweden; a land less musically inhibited than ours, where Brass Band Mozart is something to be heard first and evaluated afterwards. Swedish Radio broadcast our concert. Finnish Radio relayed it. There was a discussion programme on their Radio 3 equivalent, where the musical morality of BB Mozart was warmly debated and hotly defended. It was all great fun.

Among the surprises of this occasion was the attendance in Gothenburg of Leighton Rich, in charge of brass teaching in Hampshire, and conductor of the Hampshire County Youth Brass Band. Leighton is a Welshman. The Welsh only play if they are not allowed to sing, and to Leighton a brass band opera represented the ultimate delight. He announced his intention of doing the thing at home if the voices could be found. Needless to say nothing but the best would do.

The Education people at the Royal Opera House thought they could help. With the aid of the Swedish tape the voices were easily persuaded. All was announced. Then the budget collapsed. Leighton would not be deterred. How he persuaded his County to pay for the thing I will never know. I think he did it first and accounted afterwards. We need more like him.

## THE BARRETT GUESTS



At the Mansion House for the Annual Banquet of the Worshipful Company of Scientific Instrument Makers of which he is a Pastmaster, Stephen Barrett and his wife with their special guests, the Master Gardener E.M. Upward and wife on their left, Immediate Pastmaster Musician John Iles and wife on their right and two friends. Owing to the date coinciding with that of our Midsummer Banquet on this first occasion, the Master, Tony Pool, was unable to attend.

*Photo: Gerald Sharp Photographers.*

Those performances were among the most moving performing experiences of my life. Not that they were perfect - of course the score is basically too difficult for young players - but the response of those talented youngsters to Mozart was revelatory. The purely band preparation was uphill work, naturally. Three months of Mozart without voices? Hard to take for energetic young brass players used to lots of notes and tunes they can play. Then came the magic day when the first voice arrived. With the Queen of the Night's first phrase twenty bodies sat up, twenty faces lit up, and the quality of playing went through the roof.

Equally rewarding was the response of the singers to the band. They quickly became chums, a mutual admiration club. I will never forget the afternoon in Portsmouth Guildhall when, because we were late for rehearsal, five quite well-known international names helped to put up the band's music-stands; nor the amazing discipline of the band which kept on playing, straight faced, when Papageno whistled in the wrong bar. It is quite difficult to play a brass instrument and laugh at the same time, but it was done. The singer, of course, nearly died laughing.

The players' reaction was summed

up for me in a scribbled note from a young man who wrote that he had "never played anything so nice, nor played so good before".

Well, are we to get a first-rate British performance? Hardly, I think. Those who can sing the work here have their orchestras, and in a polite way they have their noses turned slightly up, too. And the many bands who wish to play the piece cannot cast it. The Flute cast can never be cheap. L'Elisir, as my friends at Covent Garden keep telling me, would have been better economics. Then again, who in his right mind would have given years of leisure to scoring Donizetti for brass? Not I.

What we need, I think, is a charity performance for the Mortimer Trust Fund. Any one of the top five bands would give themselves to it. Only the voices are needed.

I live in hope of a Black Dyke or Grimethorpe performance of the score. But perhaps that must wait for forty years, until the arranger is kicking up daisies, as did Denis Wright's marvellous Messiah score, broadcast for the first time under Harry Mortimer three years ago. I wonder, do you know about Denis Wright's brass band Handel...?