



Preserve Harmony

THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF MUSICIANS

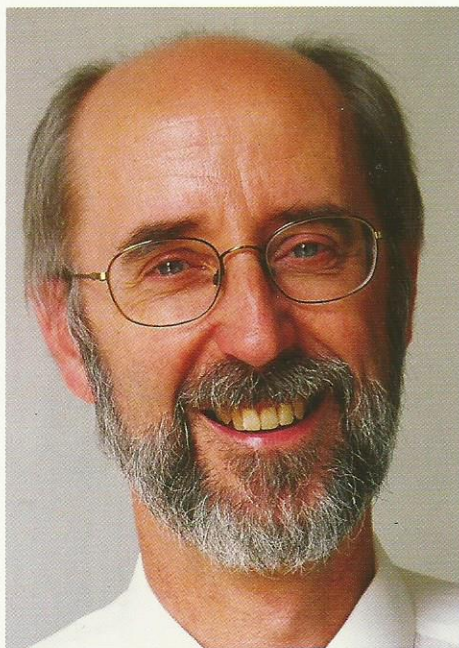
Tradition and Innovation

Variations on a theme from the new Master, Leslie East

As a music historian, entering the Livery in 1988 was for me a joy. Having spent 12 years working as Director of Music at the City's own conservatoire, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, I was very aware of the significance of the only city livery company dedicated to a performing art. Working at the GSMD inevitably brought me into contact with numerous City organisations, including several livery companies, but it was entering our livery that brought home the value of the Musicians' Company. The presence of the Jack Westrup Library as the focal point of the GSMD's reference section emphasised very forcibly the great connections of the Company as well as its generosity.

In organising an event called the City Music Trail during successive City of London Festivals in the late 1970s and the 1980s, I constantly came across references to the Company through its long history and I became intrigued by the Company's role. When I left GSMD in 1987, my destination was a new career as a music publisher with Novello and Company. Even there I discovered Musicians' Company links. Herbert Howells, a distinguished contributor to the Novello catalogue, was one of the few composer Masters (in 1959/60). Looking further back, Frederick Bridge and John Stainer (of *Crucifixion* fame), both published by Novello, were Masters twice each between 1892 and 1900. Also prominent was the name of Alfred Henry Littleton, Chairman of Novello's from 1889, Master in 1910/11 and an important (if occasionally fickle) supporter of Britain's greatest composer Edward Elgar. The original manuscript of Elgar's *Elegy*, written in 1909, published by Novellos and still played every year at the Company Evensong in St Paul's, is one of our most precious possessions.

So, when the call came in 1999 to join the Court, I overcame my initial astonishment and embraced the honour. Becoming a Court Assistant was, for me, intimidating at



Leslie East

first. But one's level of involvement can develop over time. It was clearly important to take time to see how the Court and its supporting committees work. In ideal circumstances one should have at least ten years to learn the ropes. Sadly, in my case, three predecessors – John Hosier, Philip Jones and Terry Pamplin, all good friends and excellent role models – left us in tragic circumstances before they could reach the pinnacle of the Master's chair. A certain amount of 'leap-frogging' by sympathetic colleagues Peter Fowler and Andreas Prindl has given me just enough space to ensure that becoming Master would be compatible with continuing a full-time directorship at The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

Three things struck me as I developed an understanding of how the Company works and is managed. First, it works (and works best) as a collective. Decisions are taken collectively by a group of people with a vast range of experience, both of the Company

and of the outside world. Each year a small group steers these decisions and for one year one person gets to have his/her own way on many things. But nothing happens without that collective, the Court, being behind it. New and potential Court Assistants need to recognise this. Personally, I've always preferred working in an environment in which one is required to justify one's ideas, policies and strategies so that everyone else comes along with you.

Second, it is important that the Company extends this spirit of working collectively to collaborations with other organisations. There are plenty of examples of the Musicians doing this but, rightly, the Company also takes pride in doing things its own way. My own philosophy is that we stand to be more effective if we combine with like-minded partners when appropriate. Hence last year's PMAP Debate was the result of a happy collaboration with the Association of British Orchestras, and this autumn's debate came about through close links with Jazz Services Limited. I'm hoping that three projects in the coming year will reflect the strength of collaborative working. In January, as reported elsewhere in *Preserve Harmony*, the vocal group Voces8 will initiate a series of choral workshops in schools in Hackney, Southwark and Tower Hamlets, with Musicians' Company funding enabling the project to raise matching money and provide a legacy of involvement for students and teachers in those boroughs. Next June I hope the City of London Festival will encompass a project led by Tim Garland, Guildhall alumnus and Company medal-winner, Freeman and Jazz Committee member. And towards the end of my year my great ambition is to convert the 2008 PMAP debate into a conference on the living composer, an idea that has been enthusiastically welcomed by the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters and the South Bank Centre. There is still much work to do on this but if successful it

Photo: Malcolm Crowthers