

DISCHORD

The Company's particular approach to Music has tended to confine us to the more 'serious' and enduring aspects of it. Yet it was those purveyors of popular music, the Minstrels, who were our predecessors and founders. With the approach of our Quincentenary and the declared aim to help young musicians at the start of their careers, is there any reason why those, having been properly trained and, perhaps, even received a Company Medal, should not be considered if they choose a career in popular music?

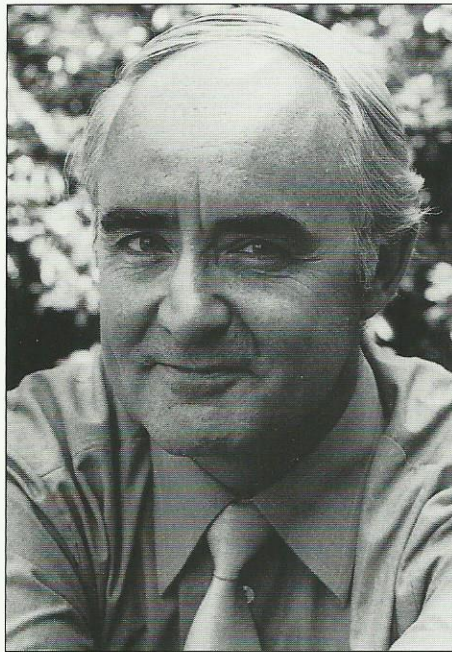
This century we have spread our wings to encompass certain types which would have been unheard of until recently. Is not the turn of the century a time to reconsider our roots? In spite of the shallow and flippant sides to some of the modern musical scene, probably not much different to the more critical ear of yesteryear, can we embrace it?

STRENGTH OF THE LIVERY

Following lengthy discussion, the Court has decided that the Livery should be limited to 350. However, up to a further 25 Members may be clothed in special circumstances at the discretion of the Court.

Without quarterage, it has become extremely difficult to keep trace of some Liverymen. There are still 11 Members on the Livery List without addresses. Letters have been sent to last known addresses, in some cases to Canada and Australia. Appeals in Preserve Harmony and efforts in the Company Office have not been successful in overcoming this problem. In our Charter, a Liveryman is for life, resignation is not possible.

"A benefactor recalled" -



The Author

Photo: Sophie Baker

by Thomas Hemsley

In 1950, at the suggestion of my singing teacher, Lucie Manen, who was his neighbour in Hampstead, and together with the conductor Bernard Keefe, at that time also a professional baritone, I paid a visit to the nonagenarian John Mewburn Levien, who turned out to be an extremely lively old man, both mentally and physically. He talked to us at length about singing, listened most courteously to our questions, and gave us simple and most valuable advice. At the end he stood up to his full height (he was a very small man) and sang the first phrase of Verdi's baritone aria "Eri tu" in a clear, vigorous and absolutely steady voice. We were very aware that we were hearing something which had a direct connection with the golden age of singing.

After some time at Oxford, and at Cambridge, where Levien led the 2nd violins in the CUMS orchestra under Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, he had decided to devote himself to singing. Although his stature, and the rather limited natural strength and sonority of his voice precluded a solo singing career, he clearly had learned to sing well, and had become a considerable expert on the classical singing tradition. In an address he gave to the Annual Conference of the Incorporated Society of Musicians in 1948, on the subject "Singing Methods Old and New" he described his own training with some of the greatest teachers of the time, and roundly condemned the modern tendency for people to

set themselves up as teachers of singing who had never themselves been able to sing. (What he would say today, when such teachers seem to be even more common, I hate to think!)

He was befriended and encouraged by the great English baritone Sir Charles Santley, who said that he would "make him that much needed person, a good singing teacher". Santley sent him to his friend H.C. Deacon (a distinguished teacher, and author of the article on singing in the first edition of Groves' Dictionary), and after Deacon's death he went to the famous teacher Manuel Garcia the younger, son of Rossini's tenor, and brother of Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot. Garcia gave him five lessons and then dismissed him as a pupil, saying that he had "learnt the art of singing". But he remained an intimate of the Garcia family, taking part in domestic operetta performances, coached by Garcia, aged 100! He clearly had the greatest love and respect for his old master, but this stopped short of idolatry. He admitted to my teacher Lucie Manen and, in passing, to us, that although he considered him to be a very great vocal coach and a wise teacher, Garcia seemed to have little success with young beginners, who tended to be confused by some of his "Scientific" explanations (some of which were in fact distinctly misleading).

He remained a close friend of Santley until the latter's death in 1922. I, remember Bernard Keefe asking him: "What did Santley's voice sound like at close quarters?" Levien thought for a moment, and said "Imagine a sack full of small pebbles being shaken in a large cave". A wonderful description of a large resonant voice possessing a rich spectrum of high harmonics.

Levien wrote a number of short monographs about "The Garcia Family", "Sir Charles Santley", "The Singing of John Braham", "Six Sovereigns of Song", "Beethoven and the Royal Philharmonic Society", and perhaps most interesting, "The Decline of Singing" - a valuable collection of letters to "Musical Opinion" on a subject about which he had not only great knowledge, but also the strongest views. Also "Letters on singing" - similar letters written to the "Musical Times". He was indeed an enthusiastic and prolific writer of letters to the press.

In addition to his activities as a teacher of singing (he was for many years a professor at the Guildhall