

Banking on music

Gillian Chimes, Head of Sponsorship and Events at Coutts & Co, writes about the bank's past and present support for music and musicians.

As one of the UK's oldest private banks, Coutts & Co is an institution steeped in history and tradition. Music and the arts have always been a venerable part of this tradition and Coutts throughout its history has managed the finances of a number of famous clients, including composers Fryderyk Chopin and Hector Berlioz.

Chopin, who opened his Coutts account in 1848, is just one of many high profile musical connections the bank can boast of in its archives. Even acclaimed British librettist W S Gilbert, who came to Coutts in 1866, gave the bank an early taste of eminence in the popular comic opera *The Gondoliers*, with the line, 'The aristocrat who hunts and shoots/The aristocrat who banks with Coutts...'

In addition to handling the finances of such artists, Coutts was also entrusted with a number of valuable musical instruments in its dealings with clients. Today a number of rare musical artefacts can be found in the bank's archives, having never been collected by the wealthy clients who once deposited them in the strong room for safe keeping. These include an 18th century flute in a case made by Potters of London, the best flute makers in

Europe at the time, and a 200 year old guitar made by Louis Pons, which belonged to composer Mauro Giuliani.

It was around this time, nearly 200 years ago, that Coutts became one of the first banks to effectively become a 'corporate sponsor' of the arts in the way we are so familiar with



The Louis Pons guitar

today. From the early 18th Century, Thomas Coutts and his second wife Harriot, herself a former actress, provided support to some of London's major theatres by becoming shareholders. The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, which has played host to famous musicals such as *Miss Saigon* and *The Pirates of Penzance* and still has a strong presence in London's West End, would not be around today if it were not for their generosity.

Harriot also took great interest in music as an art form, having been in part raised by a stepfather who was a violinist by trade, at the Drury Lane Theatre. She paid for a life subscription to the Royal Society of Musicians in the early 19th Century, becoming an honorary life member of the charity, which gave musicians a port of call if they were ever in grave need.

In the new millennium, this tradition of assisting arts organisations and artists in need has continued. This is not only through managing the finances of many of today's top writers and musicians, but also through the bank's arts sponsorship programme, which has an annual commitment exceeding £1m. Its support of opera also makes Coutts one of the largest corporate sponsors of this in the

A tenor of high renown

Elizabeth Muir-Lewis, a new Freeman of the Company, was the wife of the celebrated tenor, the late Richard Lewis. Arrangements were recently approved by the Court to link the Company's John Christie Award with the Richard Lewis/Jean Shanks Trust; therefore, thanks to the Trustees' generosity, the high profile of the new joint award will be significantly enhanced for the long term future.

Elizabeth writes:

When pondering how best to set down this contribution, I decided to angle it from my point of view - that of Richard's wife - recalling my time with him at Glyndebourne and reflecting on what I have achieved since his death.

I entered his life when I joined the Glyndebourne company in 1959, and he had already been singing at the Festival for ten years. Every summer, if there was a role for him, he would choose to sing there, a place he loved more than any other; it was his operatic home and a respite from the travelling that is the lot of any international singer. His loyalty to the Glyndebourne company endured because of all that it gave him. It was where his operatic career began after the Second World War, where he learned his stage-craft and where he was given the opportunity to sing new roles. The host of operas in which he performed there included *Idomeneo*, *The Rake's Progress*, *Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*,

