

# RECOLLECTIONS

by Pastmaster Anthony Rubinstein

I HADN'T A CHANCE! Before I was born it had been determined that my "Godparents" would be Benno Moiseiwitsch (hence my name "Benno"); Myra Hess; Irene Scharrer, who was always affectionately called "Auntie Raspberry", as whenever as children we visited her at her home at Woldingham she always had raspberries for tea; (her greater success from a recording point of view was part of a Litolff Concerto symphonique); and last but not least the Medical Superintendent of a Mental Hospital at Bexley Heath! I might add that Solomon was a constant visitor and was an adopted "Godparent".

The scene had been set even before my appearance. My grandfather J.S. Rubinstein had been the solicitor to the promoters who built the Queen's Hall, and before the opening of the Hall my grandmother was about to have a baby – the opening was postponed until after the birth!

As my father had seats at the Queen's Hall in perpetuity my early years were spent at concerts and recitals until it was destroyed – Yehudi Menuhin as an infant prodigy and all "the greats". This musical upbringing was interspersed with Malcolm Sargent's Children's Concerts – musical At Homes given by my parents – but as a small child it really was too much!

And then my father S.J. Rubinstein, a Pastmaster of the Company, decided that my musical education would not be complete without Wagner, so at the age of seven it was off to Sadler's Wells for The Mastersingers – hard seats and agonising minutes – and I couldn't face the opera for another seventeen years.

I've jumped to the age of six; my "Godfather" Benno decided that I should be taught the piano by him – it did not work, and whilst I continued with piano lessons until I was ten I regret, and it is a real regret, I'm a listener rather than a performer.

Prior to the 1939-1945 war, musical At Homes were still in vogue and I can vividly remember being brought downstairs by my governess to see... or to be seen? Henry Wood, Muriel Brunskill, Tommy Beecham, Elena Danieli, George Baker, Olive Groves, Rachmaninov – the list goes on but I have to finish the article. At school no more than the school choir and learning to bugle.

In 1940 my late father brought to life the Henry Wood Prom Circle, and I decided, as at that time I had only a few girl friends, I would form the Henry Wood Junior Prom Circle – I finished up with twenty two girls and two men – and we played records!

The war years, and apart from squatting at the National Gallery Concerts, and sitting in Lady Jessie Wood's box at the Albert Hall for the Proms – it must have been the influence of the uniform – music for me was

sparse.

I escaped from the Marines in 1946 and became a solicitor – my father in 1946 became the solicitor to the Royal Opera House when it ceased being a Dance Hall, and rather than the "classical side" of music, I found myself apprenticed to what was then called "pop" as the Rubinstein practice was extremely catholic in its musical activities. But that's another story.

In 1952 I commenced my activities with both Sadler's Wells and the Royal Opera House, and for the next forty years advised both; the former when it "gave birth" to ENO, and then ENO after the birth. I found myself getting to know Harriet Cohen, with her one-handed playing – I even delved into other art, Ballet, and at one time acted for Nureyev when he made his first leap to the West. Later I found myself as the legal representative of the Australian Ballet. But opera was, and is, my joy and in 1949 I returned to hear Geraint Evans in The Magic Flute and later I came to know him well; what a delightful and kind person. But having said that the Rubinstein's were catholic, I recall the visit to the Folies-Bergère in Paris and my telephoning my bank for a currency allowance which at that time was £25 per visit.

Question: *Why do you want £150?*

Answer: *To visit the Folies-Bergère in Paris...*

Response: *Mr. Rubinstein, we know you have a sense of humour, but...*

More of the other greats: Gwyneth Jones who had had all her jewellery and watches seized by the customs at Heathrow when she had arrived for three days rehearsals at the Opera House, and came to see me with only an alarm clock to remind her of the time; Mirella Freni who had all her jewellery stolen; Gorkinsky, who brought over the Italian Opera which appeared at the Stoll, but the opera promoter ran out of money before their last performance – he never did offer me one of his cigars! Eva Turner who kept me enraptured with her anecdotes and her prodigious memory; for some years Madame Prokofiev, who had been sent East during the Stalin era due to her outspoken behaviour at a reception in Moscow; Rostropovich, who arrived with Lubimov and acted as the latter's interpreter, and before leaving hugged me in true Russian style, but kissed my lady assistant. When I remonstrated with him he commented "In Russia first the meat and then the sweet".

And now with friends like Harrison Birtwistle I am content if Moiseiwitsch couldn't succeed – I'll be an "appreciator"!

*"The Launch of a unique Research Fellowship in Jewish Music at City University in memory of Liveryman Joe Loss."*



Mrs. M. Loss (right) with Mrs. G. Auerbach, (Chairman, Jewish Music Heritage Trust) and Professor and Assistant, Malcolm Troup. Photo: Sidney Harris