

# THE MASTER ELECT

(continued from front page)

grandly-named Home Fleet Symphony Orchestra, formed another dance band and ached to take over the conducting from the Fleet Bandmaster. As Pastmaster Sir Vivian Dunn will appreciate - for he more than anyone introduced professional musical standards in the conventional sense to the Royal Marines - a war-time orchestra of players many of whom were formerly in the major British orchestras used to Toscanini, Boult, and Barbirolli did not take kindly to the bandmaster's quarter-deck beat.

Commissioned, he spent two years as a 'Paymaster' in administration on the naval staff in Gibraltar. In reality, he spent most of that time conducting an orchestra from the Mediterranean Fleet whenever it was in port and playing piano in the Yacht Club for dancing in the evenings.

Returning to Cambridge after the war to complete the music degree, his sole ambition was to be a conductor. Having got through the academic work entirely by using his ears, he graduated to a London full of ambitious conductors with nothing to conduct. It is true to say that his only other determination was not to teach. He returned to administration with a job in Paris for the British Council, trying to promote British music amongst the chauvinistic French. Again he managed to conduct an orchestra, this time of Conservatoire students, and to inveigle an organisation into performing 'Dido and Aeneas' on the grounds that our great Henry Purcell had learnt his business from the French.

The Council made all their specialist officers abroad redundant more or less overnight in 1950. To his horror the would-be conductor had to become a schoolmaster. After a year of purgatory teaching piano at Halleybury, leavened only by writing and playing for a school revue and refereeing occasional rugby games for the nth fifteen, he re-met an artist who went to give a clavichord lecture-recital to the Music Club. The artist was Thurston Dart, later to become a distinguished performer and scholar with a great interest in the Musicians' Company, and a Cobbett Medallist. Through him, the Master-Elect returned to Cambridge, first as an administrator in the Music Faculty, then Director of Music at Homerton (where he actually found he enjoyed teaching in training others to teach), supervising undergraduates in several university colleges ... and conducting. Conducting numerous college choirs and orchestras, combined 'village choir' jamborees, the short-lived

Cambridgeshire Opera Company and eventually CUMS (the University Musical Society), in which he succeeded his conducting mentor Boris Ord. His ambition to become a professional conductor became in a sense satisfied, particularly as his jobs allowed him to play continuo as a freelance with orchestras and ensembles in London and on tour, and to have the odd job with any orchestra in the world who would risk an unknown English conductor. The British Council was very helpful to its old employee and if you think - rightly - that the Workers Symphony Orchestra in Plovdiv was no great shakes for a still budding Beecham, nevertheless the dual career of academic/practical performer was immensely satisfying.

In an ideal marriage - to Rachel, a former dancer who wrote and presented the BBC Schools Music and Movement broadcasts twice a week for ten years - the couple enjoyed musical society in Cambridge and London and, through their individual yet joint careers, made acquaintances all over the world. But by the early 60's, academic politics in Cambridge and the 'pull' of professional music-making were in considerable conflict. Out of the blue came the perfect job: the newly-created post of Director of Music Studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

## Confessed

The Chairman of the Corporation's Music Committee who appointed Percival later confessed - when he was Lord Mayor - that he thought the City was appointing an efficient administrator but did not realise the new Director was a musician. The Guildhall School was equally suspicious when he arrived. Some thought 'an academic' shouldn't be running conservatoire music; some in Cambridge were relieved that a man who was 'really a performer' had left the field to real researchers and lecturers. Such, the Master-Elect maintains, was the divide in the early 60's.

It took about a year at the Guildhall for the staff to accept their Director of Studies as a musician. During that year, the new administrator conducted concerts with the chamber orchestra and symphony orchestra, and two operas, whilst planning the new music courses. In this planning he was given a totally free hand by the enlightened Principal, Gordon Thorne, who was a first-class administrator. On Thorne's premature death from cancer, Percival was appointed Principal: the rest is summarised in the official Centenary

history of the Guildhall School.

Allen Percival joined the Company in 1967. His interest in the City's musical history makes him well aware of his privilege in being elected Master. He resigned from the Guildhall School in the year after seeing it into the Barbican. He felt he had done all he could and if he were to stay there until normal retirement age he would have been Principal for 25 years: 'what a prospect', he wrote, 'for any progressive institution'.

Becoming Executive Chairman of the music publishers Stainer & Bell, he also proposed to return to freelance work, but the post became all-consuming after he finished a three-year stint as Gresham Professor of Music. This most ancient chair of music in Britain, is now allied to the City University, which honoured him as its first Doctor of Music.

The first real tragedy of his life was the death from cancer of his wife Rachel. He considers himself 'saved' at that time by John Hosier, then Principal of Guildhall. Hosier accepted the Directorship of the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts provided that they would appoint Percival as 'caretaker' Director until he could leave the Guildhall. The G.P. returned to academic administration, commuting in term-time from Stainer & Bell. The only thing missing was performing ... and a wife.

So, says the Master-Elect, "along came the impossible." He re-met a musician he had known as a child in Bradford, long married with children and grandchildren, in her second career as a Music Therapist, who had become Head of Music Therapy at the Guildhall after his time there.

They married in 1990 and, for him, 'the fairytale continues'. Settled idyllically in a Dorset village where they have been welcomed as performing musicians, they are both now officially retired but still commute to a London flat for their various charitable activities. Margaret is shortly to be clothed with the Livery herself and, as the Master-Elect's wife, will undoubtedly put all her talents, too, into service with the Company during the coming year and, they hope, for many years to come.

