

Constant Lambert Blue Plaque

by Liveryman, the late Ivor Mairants

The reason I wanted to witness the commemoration of the English Heritage Blue Plaque, to Constant Lambert, is simply that somehow I felt an affinity for his ideas about music after I had read his book 'Music Ho'.

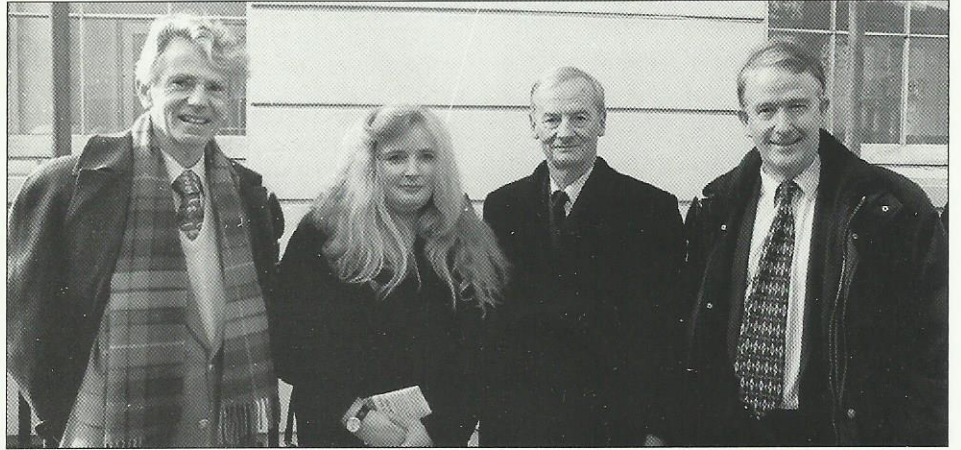
Constant Lambert's interest in music encompassed both jazz and contemporary music of the rhythmic kind partly epitomised in his composition Rio Grande. By incorporating elements of both types, he pioneered the type of music commonly termed as "crossover".

Other composers before him such as Rachmaninov and Debussy, to mention but two, quite apart from Stravinsky, were very much appreciated by jazz musicians. But it was as a passing phenomena rather than a positive accented medium that these great pioneers paused to permit the non-classical musician into their more so-called enlightened ambience, rather than be considered a lower form of musical entity than their own more lofty musical sphere.

"Us" and "Them". "Us" of the popular lower orders and "Them" of the superior class; "Us" are made to feel rather like a lower form of animal. Because we non-academically trained musicians harboured even this slight feeling of division and inferiority and because Constant Lambert by his actions and words removed and legitimised our cause, because he removed the tainted description of decadence from jazz and popular music, I wished to go out of my way in paying homage to him.

In the Preface to the third edition of 'Music Ho' which appeared in 1949, 15 years after it was written, Constant Lambert called his book a "period prose". Now, after a lapse of even a longer period, it seems to me to have become more than that and to have become a modern classic, outstanding in its field.

It is certainly time that this gap between "serious" music and



Outside Constant Lambert's Albany Street home, from left: Assistant Philip Jones who played with Lambert; Helen Basset, a local resident who campaigned for the plaque; Pastmaster Anthony Burnett-Brown who, as Master, unveiled the plaque, and Pastmaster Francis Carnwath who is Chairman of the English Heritage Blue Plaque Committee.

"popular" music - high brow or low brow, call it what you will - which has been widening with ever-increasing rapidity during the twentieth century, was the thing that above all others Lambert deplored and the expression of it inspired some of the most vivid and violent passages in the book.

In 1946 Edward Dent, then Professor of Music at Cambridge, who in the opinion of Angus Morrison, a close friend of Constant Lambert and writer of the preface to 'Music Ho', was "one of the most erudite musical scholars of the times", when reviewing Constant Lambert's conducting of the ballet "The Symphonic Variations" and how he thought the tempos were completely correct, wrote:

"Constant is always right in these things. He is the best all-round musician we have in this country. It is a really great thing in our own musical life that we have a man who is always unquestionably safe in scholarship, style, interpretation, sensitive, understanding and ample professional accomplishment in whatever he undertakes.

I suppose most people would use the word "safe" in a disparaging sense, but that is not at all what I mean - perhaps I should have said "secure"."

Such praise from a highly regarded musician such as Edward Dent for young Constant Lambert, coming as it does to me -

a non-academic player of the guitar - are words that have made a deep impression on my musical confidence. Despite my lack of formal musical training, the words have provided me with faith in following my musical instincts. It was possibly reading 'Music Ho' that spurred me on to undertake additional compositions for the guitar such as those jazz sonatas in memory of Joe Pass, Laurindo Almedia and Jimmy Raney, now published together with a CD in a style termed "crossover". If it is both of a serious and popular nature, so why not?

Apart from the unveiling of the Constant Lambert plaque, which is placed in an almost inaccessible position, a convivial time was had by the thirty Lambert supporters who converged on a restaurant for a most enjoyable lunch. We were meeting to honour a fine musician, free of bias and to thank the Musicians Company for their involvement and support.

THE CONSTANT AND KIT LAMBERT FUND

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