

[Later, Sir Jack Westrup, Master 1971-1972.] I lent Westrup the book and my transcriptions, which he kept for the best part of a term then returned with a fierce glint in his eye. "Page 27," he rapped. "A mistake!"

I could not then have known that Maurice Bowra, Warden of Wadham, had written to his friend Patrick Hadley, Professor of Music at Cambridge, that [Westrup was] *not at all clever and not, apparently, interested in music. He likes to know how music was printed in the 17th century, how many boys there were in a choir, what pay the choirmaster got. I don't think he will cause trouble, but he will hardly advance the cause.* [Eric Wetherell, *Paddy*, Thames 1997, page 68].

As Bowra hinted, JAW didn't cause trouble – not at first, at any rate.

I decided to study for a PhD, and asked Westrup to supervise my dissertation. Every week he managed to be away in the provinces, picking up picayune pennies for examining theory candidates. I therefore took to studying on my own, and buried myself cosily in the Bodleian.

John Griffith, Junior Dean of Jesus, took his Leica down to Christ Church Library and made useful microfilms; Dom Anselm Hughes invited me to tea at Nashdom; the intervening time was given up to playing viola in a quartet led by Peter Gibbs, with whom we explored chamber music by Mozart, Haydn, late Beethoven and Ravel. As a sop to me, they added music from Bach's *Art of Fugue*.

Enter sub-plot ...

At the time, I served as treasurer of the OU Opera Club, which used to meet for

gramophone evenings. At one session I mentioned that in the 1920s the OUOC actually produced opera.

Casting a jaundiced eye in my direction, someone asked how much was in the kitty. Fourteen pounds, three shillings and ten pence. But I maintained that if we announced a production, the public would support it.

Primary tasks included finding a producer, a conductor and an opera. I brought in Anthony Besch, who had done sterling work with the OUDS. I then said that Westrup had been active all those years before, and might wish to help.

Boldly I rang him up and received a "Harrumph", which I took to be positive.

He chose *Idomeneo*, and our quartet led the string sections. We all helped put the parts in order, and gathered about us an excellent wind and brass section.

The curtains went up, the London critics came down, and the general opinion seemed encouraging. They were hearing a fledgling Philharmonia, and many of us joined it, or the LSO, on going down.

I left on a ski-ing holiday to finish my dissertation. But I had little luck skiing, and none at all with the PhD. Anthony Lewis joined Westrup for the *viva*, and my transcription was rejected by JAW as insufficient in *musica ficta*.

Undeterred, I contributed much to the then new BBC Third Programme. One day the telephone rang, and Frank Howes, *The*

Times' senior music critic, explained that a new series of national music was being launched: its provisional title was *Musica Britannica*. Would I let them have my then unpublished transcription of the Mulliner Book [a 16th-century keyboard manuscript in the British Museum], which he had heard about from Professor Anthony Lewis?

In acquiescing, I pointed out that it had been referred back to me. But a few weeks after sending it off I heard of its acceptance, and a year later it was published as Volume 1, with a Royal dedication.

It is still in print, nearly 50 years later, and still selling. As for the doctorate, I was awarded an honorary one in Humane Letters at an American university.

Some time afterwards, at the Garrick, I found myself seated next to a

lawyer who said that he remembered Westrup as a stringer on the *Daily Telegraph*. Apparently Sir Malcolm Sargent, annoyed by repeated sniping, had a solicitor write to say that next time a bad review appeared there would be trouble.

There were no subsequent reviews.

Later still, I again met that vindictive man at a congress in Venice. Bearing down on me somewhere near the Riva degli Schiavoni, he harrumphed: "I thought you were dead."

Side-stepping neatly, I thought of the title of an old Ealing comedy film "I'm all right, Jack!" quoth I, on my way to Santa Lucia.



Unforgettable Savoyard: principal bass Darrell Fancourt was with D'Oyly Carte for more than 30 years from 1920

listening to a 78rpm recording of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* sung by Heddle Nash.

There was no television to distract from the sound with audience and conductor antics. Everything was simple. But now there are very few people who even remember the programmes, let alone the artists.

At the age of 16 two names came out of the woodwork to bite me with an infection that I

have never been able to find a cure for: Gilbert and Sullivan. It started with a concert performance of *Trial by Jury* in the school library, when I was so smitten that I learned every part of the opera by heart.

The normal pressures of school life took over again, contact with fine minds helping to put flesh and blood on the bones of Shakespeare, Matthew Arnold, Dorothy L Sayers and Gogol. Rugby and cross-country running too, over the voluptuous hills of Dorset.

Later, National Service posted me to Oxford, where the theatre would host D'Oyly Carte. In those days the company would tour nine or 10 operas, and I think that I saw every one over a period of two weeks.

I was hooked. If it was humanly possible, I had to try and audition for the company and be involved in that magical world. It was not a case of being stage-struck; I was captivated by Gilbert and Sullivan.

I was lucky in that, when finally I got my audition, it was a time of general change at D'Oyly Carte. Martyn Green, Margaret Mitchell, Ella Halman, Radley Flynn and a host of others were moving on to better things (if that were possible), but I did spend five years with one of the great Savoyards, Darrell Fancourt, who had made the Mikado's

rasping laugh in *My Object all Sublime* a bit of business that all amateurs copied.

I have to say that one of my principal memories from those days is the way in which those great Victorians managed to create something timeless.

Princess Ida was created to mock the start of education for women. But the sentiments come back to us again as women are found at the top of most professions.

Iolanthe was specifically aimed at the Victorian movement to reform the House of Lords, and Private Willis's song at the opening of Act 2 has found recognition through countless governments, not to speak of their lordships being forced to gain entry by "competitive examination".

There are of course many more references that can be made, and I find it sad that support cannot be found for a touring company to present this heritage of wit and spectacle, which has such a following among amateur theatrical groups nationwide.

At a time when the nearest we get to Sullivan's music is a Proms performance of *The Lost Chord*, it is a shame to have lost his countless brilliant orchestral touches of colour, like the *Spinning Song* which opens *Yeomen*, and *When the Night Wind Howls* from *Ruddigore*.