

"PRESERVING HARMONY"

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WHEN ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE A PIECE IN THE 'COMPANY'S' NEWSLETTER, I was forcibly reminded of the message contained in its name. "Preserving Harmony" could be said to be the prerogative of the recording industry. Our aim, it seems to me, is to capture and distil sounds that, when reproduced, will engender pleasure, entertain and enliven the spirit.

The two great pioneers of sound recording – Thomas Edison and Emile Berliner – sought to perfect in their own ways their technology which they discovered some 100 years ago. Edison, through etching sounds onto a cylinder, employed Souza's band inter alia who "often had to play extra loudly so that up to seven separate cylinders could be produced at one recording session". There was no other way of duplicating the cylinders – each had to be produced by hand. Berliner, who discovered the flat disc, engraved the grooves in zinc which could then be turned into a negative image – rather like photography. This allowed replication on a much larger scale.

Both these inventions formed the basis of the entire record industry today. The transition from mechanical recording – activating a stylus to electrical sources – came about in the 1930's to be followed by continuous improvements in technology, slowly leading to the digitally recorded compact disc of today.

From early childhood the gramophone has always fascinated me. From our wind-up machine with a horn I remember the exciting moment when an electrical replay head was introduced and connected to the wireless with leads which looked like brown shoe laces. This gave us improved sound through a loudspeaker.

Little did I imagine at the time when my father brought home another immaculate red label HMV disc that I would be at the head of that catalogue and be associated with all its artists for over 30 years, let alone be privileged in my fortieth year within the industry still to be playing my part in the creation and management of artists and repertoires.

Resulting from our constant visits to concerts and the opera, I was soon conversant with what went on behind stage. Father liked to visit the artists whom, if he liked them, he elegantly persuaded to sign his autograph book. In those days the artists were almost always alone in their rooms following a concert or opera and seemed delighted. Thus I developed a natural rapport with musicians of every kind that has stood me in good stead



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throughout my life. Later, for many years as a practising musician, the artists' entrance and back-stage became more my natural habitat – even today I somehow feel more at home groping my way through a dimly lit stage than out in front of the house. In New Zealand and Australia, there were some very rudimentary theatres and halls where we had to stoop our way into the orchestral pit. More stylishly when playing concerts I found my way on stage towards performing Mahler's 4th Symphony under Otto Klemperer or with Eugene Goossens whose cool chiselled features swept us into Scriabin's "Poem of Ecstasy" with an almost orgiastic panache.

Music was my life but I longed to get to Europe where I felt I could work in a more expansive way. It was thus that England became my destination and my home. A British Council scholarship led me to Davis Street in London where two ironclad ladies, Miss Seymore Whinyates and Miss Knatchbull Hugeson dispensed munificence in the form of cash and good advice and determined that Sir Adrian Boult was to be my mentor. Somewhat bemused by this task Sit Adrian, a kind and upright man, took me along to his rehearsals with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and introduced me into the mysteries of the Kingsway Hall – the premier recording studio of Decca and EMI for well over 30 years. It was always very gentlemanly and the lack of haste which besets large recording sessions today was a marked feature of recording in the 50's.

By some miracle the advent of stereo (binaural in those days) required the record companies to re-record their entire catalogues. My entry into the world of the producer took place in 1954 when I was to embark upon recording Walton's "Facade" with Edith

Sitwell and Peter Pears.

I quote from an extract from John Malcolm Brinnins "Sextet" (Deutsch 1982): "Over a hapless plate of plum duff Edith told me that later that afternoon (in August 1954) she would be setting off to the Decca studios to hear the first playback of her new recording of "Facade"... The performance ended bringing shouts of pleasure from the audience. A photographer who'd been hanging about, camera poised, asked if she would pose for him. 'No', she said. She did not care to be photographed. A few minutes later one of the Decca executives approached her. In a whispered conference he apparently made a second plea. 'If I must,' said Edith, 'I suppose I must.' The Decca executive was me – the photograph I think was never taken – the operative, I believe, had taken fright. However, the recording can still be heard nearly 40 years later on CD and sounds as fresh as when we first produced it.

My years of peregrination as a recording producer led me into a world where, as "nurse, kindly policeman and judge" (as Yehudi Menuhin described me) I was to be associated with almost every artist of note be it in Europe, America or elsewhere. One talked of 'Daniel, Itzak, Placido or Maria' where everyone in the industry knew each other and the artists were part of a fraternity that bound artists, producers and the various companies into a fascinating musical matrix.

The strongest musical influences during my career, other than teachers and a rather sad German répétiteur, who many years ago taught me how to conduct d'Albert's "Tiefeland", were to be Beecham, Klemperer and Karajan. These men certainly had a magic eye both on and off the podium. Beecham read me extracts from his book on Delius at tea in the Connaught, Karajan literally transported me to even greater heights in his helicopter from his home in Salzburg to Munich, Klemperer exhorted me to sign up Ghiaurov in New York for a recording of 'Don Giovanni' where, desperate to catch the morning plane back to London, I waited up half the night at the El Morocco Club whilst our Don was enjoying himself hugely on the dance floor!

Producing records with such musicians has for me set a standard by which hopefully for the rest of my life I will always be able to judge the quality of a performance. My favourite recordings? Listen to Klemperer's 'The Magic Flute', Karajan's Beethoven Triple Concerto with Oistrakh, Richter and Rostropovich as soloists with the Berlin Philharmonic, and Beecham conducting Jack Brymer in the finest ever performance of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto ever heard. You will see what I mean.