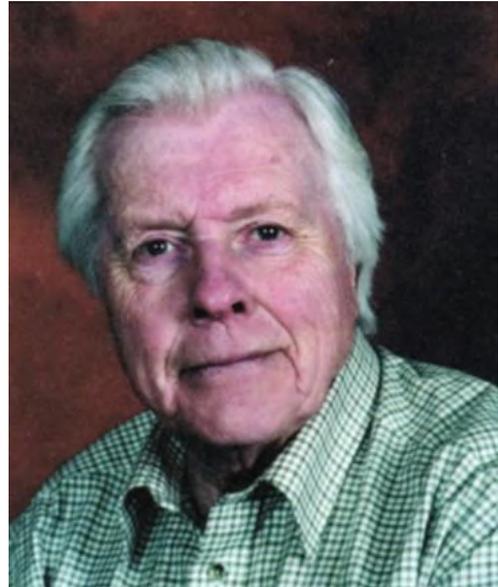


Sir John Manduell (1928-2017)
An obituary by Kenneth Shenton

Nowadays many musicians wear a large number of hats, some by design, others by force of circumstance. Relatively few, however, contrive to discharge their overall responsibilities with equal success and to the satisfaction of all concerned. One who never failed in this respect was the renowned former BBC Music Producer and Executive, Festival Administrator and Founding Principal of the Royal Northern College of Music, Sir John Manduell, who died on 25 October, aged 89, following a long battle with illness.



Born in Johannesburg on 2 March 1928, when aged 10, John Manduell returned to this country where he was educated at Haileybury. In 1947, his prodigious talents won him a place to read Modern Languages at Jesus College, Cambridge. After a period of study at the University of Strasbourg, he returned to South Africa where, as Edward Dunn's assistant, he conducted both the Durban Municipal Orchestra and the Durban Philharmonic Orchestra. A woodwind player himself, in 1954, he was the driving force behind the organisation a festival to celebrate the city's centenary.

Later that year, at the suggestion of his future mother in law, he returned to London as a Performing Rights Scholar at the Royal Academy of Music. There he initially studied composition with William Alwyn before moving to Lennox Berkeley. He also studied conducting with Maurice Miles. For three years, Manduell then worked with the BBC Symphony Orchestra as a music producer, before moving to Birmingham as Head of Music for the Midlands and East. Back in London, he subsequently took responsibility for starting up the BBC Music Programme which replaced the old Third Programme.

Appointed Artistic Director of the Cheltenham International Festival in 1969, over the next 25 years, Manduell commissioned some 250 new works from a wide variety of composers, both British and foreign. The 1983 festival was built around the 80th birthday celebrations of his former mentor, Lennox Berkeley. That year Manduell invited fifteen former pupils to write a variation of not more than one minute each on a theme from *The Reaper's Chorus* in Berkeley's opera, *Ruth*. Adding an introduction while shuffling them into a cohesive whole, resulted in a magical, *Bouquet for Lennox*.

In 1968 Manduell had moved to the University of Lancaster to establish a new music department in this embryonic institution. By now his credentials had also found a ready outlet as a jurist at music competitions worldwide, everything from the Prix Italia to the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition. He went on to serve as a member of UNESCO, The British Council, the Board of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, was a Director of the National Youth Orchestra and Chairman of the Composers' Guild of Great Britain, later replacing Lord Feather as a member of the Arts Council.

In 1970, it was announced that Manduell was to become the first Principal of Manchester's new Northern College of Music, an amalgamation of the of two former independent institutions, the Royal Manchester College of Music and The Northern School of Music. Due to open in 1972, the imposing and impressive new purpose-built complex on Oxford Road, designed by John Bickerdyke, contained a particularly fine opera theatre, seating over six hundred and a concert hall with room for an audience of four hundred and fifty. In the interim, Manduell spent twelve months visiting conservatoires in the Americas, Australasia, Western and Central Europe and the Soviet Union.

Welcoming its first intake of students in 1972, the soon-to-be Royal Northern College of Music was officially opened by the Duchess of Kent on 28th June 1973. The many skills required to overcome such a difficult transitory period and stimulate the creative energies of individuals so that they can flourish amid a collegiate atmosphere are rare. Yet it was exactly these talents, honed amid the labyrinthine power politics of the BBC, that proved their worth for Manduell: *I shall not enjoy it much for the first two years, but after that it will be alright*, he told the Guardian newspaper.

As Head of the School of Composition and Performance, Manduell immediately introduced contemporary British opera into the student repertoire. An offshoot was the enormously successful Music Theatre Project, devoted to contemporary music, much of it by Manchester composers. Manduell's pioneering of four year courses and the division of the college into distinctive schools were later taken up elsewhere within the conservatoire system. Likewise, the college quickly established a formidable international reputation as a training ground for young musicians.

Alongside a C.B.E. in 1982, Manduell was the first recipient of the Leslie Boosey Award for Services to Contemporary Music. Three years later he took fifteen months leave while serving as Director of the British contribution to European Music Year. As a result, links with foreign conservatoires were extended and distinguished composers from abroad were increasingly spending time at the college. However, running such a world-renowned institution remained a tough and demanding job and so it proved as, in 1988, Manduell was forced to take an extended break following a heart attack.

Knighted in 1989, that year the college became an independent institution under the terms of the Education Reform Act. As part of a professional arts centre, with a thriving programme of concerts by visiting performers, the college was now in a unique position to offer a very public venue for student performances. It also remained the only conservatoire in the United Kingdom able to offer all first year students a place in a hall of residence, Hartley Hall. A singular presence, colourful and stimulating, after 25 hugely successful years, Manduell took his leave of the college in 1994.

He had long believed that whilst Britain was well provided for, most European countries did not have adequate facilities for the high level of training young musicians needed to move from being conservatoire alumni to the performance of taxing solo roles in opera. With the particular help of Sir Christopher Audland, a former Deputy Secretary General to the European Commission and, at that time Pro-Chancellor of Lancaster University, Manduell proposed the establishment of a European Opera Centre. Backed by European Union funding, almost miraculously, his vision became a reality.

Despite the long list of administrative tasks Manduell fulfilled over the years, he never allowed such duties to dull his creativity as a composer. Of his major works, *Vistas*, premiered by the Hallé Orchestra in 1997 under Kent Nagano, stands out strongly for its command of large-scale form. Another Nagano commission, this time a Flute Concerto for the Berkeley Orchestra of San Francisco, demonstrates much novel and idiomatic writing for the solo instruments. No less impressive is a *Double Concerto for Chinese Flute and Er-hu*, a BBC commission for the 1985 Cardiff Festival.

Further Cardiff commissions include a challenging *String Quartet* and *Prayers from The Ark* for solo clarinet, originally written for Jack Brymer. When appointed to the University of Lancaster, in lieu of an inaugural lecture, Manduell composed a new work, *Sunderland Point*. Built around three North Lancashire folk tunes it was first performed by the Ulster Orchestra as part of their inaugural UK tour. *Rondo for Nine*, scored for double string quartet and double bass, is Manduell's centennial tribute to Ida Carroll, one of his most trusted aides during the formative years of the RNCM.

Prominent among the early works are the *Belloc Variations for Piano and Orchestra*, composed and first performed by his future wife, the pianist Renna Kellaway. A *Viola Concerto* dates from 1963, as does *Gradi*, a moving memorial to fellow composer, Matyas Seiber, tragically killed in a South African road accident in 1960. *Trois Chansons de la Renaissance* for soprano or tenor and piano, pays homage

to yet another musical hero, French composer, Albert Roussel, while *Diversions*, written for the Orchestre da Camera was intended as a companion piece to a middle period Haydn symphony.

For recorder virtuoso, John Turner, Manduell created a number of works that placed the instrument firmly in the spotlight. *Variations on A Trio Tune* for solo recorder takes as its main theme the opening melody of William Alwyn's 1959 String Trio, while from 2004, *Bell Birds from Nelson*, was a 70th birthday tribute to the composer's colleague, Anthony Gilbert. First heard at the Cheltenham International Festival of 1997 was *Into the Ark*, scored for voice, recorder and guitar, while *Verses from Calvary*, a setting of W.B. Yeats, was written for high voice, recorder, oboe, violin, and cello.

In his prose as in his music Manduell remains a great stylist, never more so than in his definitive contributions on Borodin, Roussel and César Franck which featured in Robert Simpson's twin 1966 volumes on *The Symphony*. As Chairman of the National Curriculum Music Working Group, he authored their somewhat controversial 1990 report. He could prove an implacable opponent as the Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, subsequently found. He was also successful in opposing Lord Gowrie's plan to rationalise London's music provision with a "*super academy*". A founding Trustee and former Chairman of the Lake District Summer Music Festival and President of Kendal Midday Music Club, he also served as President of the Haileybury Society in their centenary year. Counted among that rich tradition of musicians who maintained a lifelong passion for cricket, in 2016, he authored a delightful retrospective entitled *No Bartok Before Breakfast*. If lacking the notoriety of a politician, his fame was perhaps not universal, his popularity and no less the distinction as Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres were such as enjoyed by few musicians.