

Robert Pascall (1944-2018)

Renowned university academic who championed the music of Johannes Brahms



Robert Pascall, universally known as Bob, who died on 9 June, aged 74, enriched the world of music in variety of ways. While a distinguished university academic who helped mould the creative careers of many of the country's most eminent practitioners, he was also one of that select band of British musicologists who rose to international prominence. Noted among that generation of scholars who were intimately associated with every technical aspect of the music of the German composer, Johannes Brahms here, as always, his insights and expertise have long remained unsurpassed.

Born in North Wales on 5 March 1944, the son of a civil servant, Robert John Pascall was educated at Haberdasher's Askes School before, in 1962, following David Pryer as organ scholar at Keble College, Oxford. There he came under the influence of three musical heavyweights, John Caldwell, Sir Jack Westrup and Egon Wellesz. It was they who instilled in him the academic rigour that not only characterized his subsequent career but in the more immediate short term brought him a whole raft of awards, including the Limpus Prize when elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists.

His academic career began in earnest in 1968 when, having completed his doctoral studies, he was appointed an Assistant Lecturer in the Music Department of the University of Nottingham. For ten years between 1988 and 1998, he served as Professor and Head of Music at Nottingham, before moving to the University of Bangor as Professor of Music and Head of the School of Music. Stepping down in 2005, he then went on to hold a Leverhulme Research Fellowship, working part time as a Research Professor at both institutions. He eventually retired in 2011.

Always far more than a mere theoretician, Pascall revelled in the performing opportunities afforded by piano, organ and harpsichord. Musically adventurous, precise and flawless, his virtuoso solo playing rarely failed to make an impact. With an ear for neatly shaded colour he was also an accompanist of great sensitivity. An equally impressive continuo player, his harpsichord realisations rarely failed to make even the most austere music speak with the profoundest truth. He also served as Conductor of the Nottingham Bach Choir, later sharing the responsibility with John Morehen.

In 1989 at the instigation of conductor Sir Roger Norrington, Pascall helped pioneer research into historically informed performances of the music of Johannes Brahms. Further collaborations with Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Thomas Dausgaard, Martin Alsop, Elizabeth Wallfisch and Sir Charles Mackerras soon followed. Indeed, it was Mackerras whose performance of Brahms's First Symphony with the Nottingham University Orchestra helped launch the successful appeal for a new arts centre. Opened in 1994, Pascall's input and expertise proved pivotal in bringing the project to a successful conclusion

As Vice Chairman of the New Brahms Complete Edition, between 1996 and 2013, the fruits of his many years work on the composer's symphonic output appeared in seven newly-published volumes.

Perhaps even more fascinating were the composer's own original arrangements of each of the symphonies for two pianos and four hands and for one piano requiring four hands. Also remaining firmly in the repertoire is his 1972 edition for female voices and organ or orchestra, of the nineteenth century English composer, Stephen Elvey's anthem, *We Wait for Thy Loving Kindness*.

Erudite and persuasive, Pascall proved a fine writer making many definitive contributions to specialist periodicals as well as *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. His programme notes regularly featured at the BBC Henry Wood Promenade Concerts. In the interim, he also contributed to *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms*, the Oxford Composer Companions on Haydn and Brahms, *A Performer's Guide to the Romantic Period* and *Brahms In the Home and Concert Hall*. No less authoritative were his numerous contributions to studies of fellow composer, Arnold Schoenberg.

Increasingly occupying a much more international landscape, travelling throughout Europe and the Americas, in 1978, he founded the International Conference on Nineteenth Century Music. President of the Society for Music Analysis, he also served as Corresponding Director of the American Brahms Society. In 2006, as a founding member of the Journal, Music Analysis, he chaired its Editorial Board from 1989 until 2002. Four years later, he was made an Honorary Member of the Royal Musical Association and Honorary Professor of Music Philology at the University of Cambridge.

Kenneth Shenton