

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SEVENOAKS MUSIC CLUB

The Sevenoaks Music Club was founded in 1933 by Ethel Breathing at a time when British music making was at a pretty low ebb. She came of an old Sevenoaks family and was an accomplished pianist and teacher. She was also a keen train spotter for which she was well placed in her bungalow in Dunton Green! She had been approached by the British Music Society to form a branch in Sevenoaks. This was all set up but the BMS soon folded and so The Sevenoaks Music Club was left on its own. The first concert was given at the Cornwall Hall on 5th April 1933 by the Stratton String Quartet but very soon came the Second World War when everything ground to a halt and the Cornwall Hall became a British Kitchen.

Then in 1943, with the aid of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA - later to become the Arts Council) three concerts were put on as a trial at Walthamstow Hall School - one by Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten - which were a huge success and thus the Club was re-launched and has kept going ever since. Thanks to the co-operation of the School, the Club was able to give regular concerts in the School Dining Room on Saturday afternoons for several years until the Cornwall Hall again became available. The membership rose to about two hundred and the price of a serial ticket was One Guinea (£1.05)

From the outset the organisers tried to engage promising young artists before they became too expensive and as result of this we have accumulated an impressive list of eminent musicians who have visited us over the years.

In November 1944 the Music Club called a Meeting at which the Sevenoaks Symphony Orchestra was formed and they gave their first concert the following May at The Johnson Hall, Sevenoaks School.

In 1958 the Silver Jubilee concert was given by Joan Sutherland accompanied by her husband Richard Bonyngé. The programme included the “Mad Scene” from Donizetti’s “Lucia di Lamamoor”. She was to repeat this a few weeks later at Covent Garden at a performance which made her name

In 1965 the Club was able to collect sufficient funds to buy a Steinway grand piano which was kept by Kathleen Judd in the Drawing Room of her house in Hitchen Hatch Lane. She allowed it to be moved to The Cornwall Hall every time it was needed for a concert – a wonderful contribution to the Club over many years. Eventually it was moved to the Aisher Hall at Sevenoaks School, but with our move to The Ship Theatre it became redundant and in 2008 was sold.

For very many years an important part in the life of the Music Club was the Informal Concerts, held in the houses of members or School Halls or whatever venue was available. The music was provided by the members and might range from solo pieces to a full performance of Mozart’s Requiem in Riverhead Village Hall where the performers outnumbered the audience by about ten to one ! Unfortunately, since the death of John Lloyd in 2001 who organised these concerts for many years, no one else has stepped forward to take his place and they have had to be discontinued - at any rate for the time being.

Over the past seventy-five years we have frequently enjoyed the hospitality of Walthamstow Hall School for our concerts and it is a great pleasure for us to have returned again to their Ship Theatre as our permanent home. To the School and to all those many others who over the years have kept the Club going we all owe a considerable debt of gratitude. Long may the Sevenoaks Music Club continue!

Philip Headley