

## **1989            Centenary year**

The Edinburgh Bach Society was established in 1889, and another article in this series covers that first year. Readers of a mathematical bent will realise that this means that in the 1988/1989 the Society celebrated its first centenary.

The then Secretary, Ron McKune, summed up the centenary year as an “eventful and historic season”. One highlight of the year was the Centenary Dinner on 2 December 1988, held in the Roxburgh Hotel and featuring speeches by Sir Russell Hillhouse (“who proposed a most erudite and witty toast to the Society’s health”), by the Honorary President Jim Sloggie (“who replied most movingly with the benefit of his long and obviously heartfelt experience”), and by your correspondent. A glossy brochure was distributed, prepared by Margaret Berwick and Robert Dempster, containing an excellent short history of the Society’s first 100 years.

The City of Edinburgh District Council honoured the Society with a Civic Reception, and with a fine display of plants: from 28 July to 11 August 1988 the Society’s logo was displayed in the flower bed on the Mound. There was also an exhibition of Society memorabilia in the Upper Gallery of Register House and subsequently in the Music Library.

This was a period of change in the choir’s directors. In autumn 1987 two gentlemen from Sydney Philharmonia sat in (incognito) on one of our rehearsals, held at that time in St George’s West Church. Only a few members of the choir knew that this was in fact director John Grundy’s audition for the post of Principal Conductor of Sydney Philharmonia (based in Sydney Opera House). He got the job!

At this time the choir put on most of its concerts in The Queen’s Hall. John’s departure meant that the November 1987 concert was his last. The concert, which consisted of wall to wall Vivaldi, drew a full house and brought us “as close as we probably ever will do to making a profit”. The concert featured a fine flute solo performed by the Society’s new President, George Gwilt. At John’s farewell party early in 1988 John was presented with bound scores of the B Minor Mass, the St Matthew Passion and the St John Passion, and with a cork-bedecked bushman’s hat. All present were ‘entertained’ by one of the basses, Bill Conacher, on a didgeridoo!

Jeremy Cox was appointed as a Guest Conductor, taking over the rehearsals for the spring 1988 concert (also in The Queen’s Hall) of Mozart’s C Minor Mass. After that triumph, Jeremy directed a programme of Schumann, Brahms and Schubert in Linlithgow then in the Festival Fringe. We had known all along that Jeremy’s appointment would be short term as he was moving from Stirling University to a new job in England.

At the start of the 1988/89 season Philip Rossiter took over as Conductor. The November concert of the centenary year contained two of Bach’s “early and suitably celebratory cantatas”, numbers 119 Preise Jerusalem, den Herrn and 71 Gott ist mein König. The March 1989 concert was the principal centenary concert where the chosen piece was (not surprisingly) the B Minor Mass. The November programme required four (very expensive) trumpets which (despite some sponsorship) may have contributed to the Treasurer’s report for the centenary year where he “drew attention to the dire financial situation.” At the end of its centenary year the Society was down to its last £154.

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