

William Southcombe Lloyd Webber

(1914 – 1982)

A Personal Reflection and Appreciation

by

Peter Hunter with Mrs Jean Lloyd Webber

This essay was commenced after a number of visits to see Jean at the family apartment in Kensington after W S Lloyd Weber's untimely and sad death. It was a great joy and pleasure to spend time with Jean and then continue corresponding with her.

After this, I wrote the draft of this essay and then sent it to Jean for approval and correction. We then continued to discuss Bill's life and music over a considerable period of time. I am ashamed to be only making this essay public now, after many years. Having written the essay, I wanted to be sure it was written in an appropriate manner for the precious memory of William Lloyd Webber, so I decided to study musicology with such authorities as Professors Alan Moore, Sebastian Forbes and John Howard. I also consulted Dr W R Pasfield with whom I studied at the London College of Music. This also resulted in a finite study in the life and works of Robin Milford (1903-1959), an MPhil award, membership of the Milford Trust, and the great pleasure of being involved with Milford's recent and highly successful promotion.

The end of this essay will demonstrate my profound respect for, and admiration of, William Lloyd Webber. To meet Jean and work with her was one of the greatest joys of my life. Jean, a fine and highly-respected professional music teacher in her own right, was a charming, gentle and caring person. It is thus my sincere hope that this essay may bring William Lloyd Webber into further focus and greater public appreciation.

Writing in the *Art Times* during the early 1990s, Barbara Denny referred to the success of Andrew and Julian Lloyd Webber in their respective highly-respected roles of a composer of musicals and solo cellist, and went on to say, "But their contemporary popularity must not be allowed to overshadow another Lloyd Webber, now sadly no longer here to enjoy their success ...". This was, of course, referring to William Southcombe Lloyd Webber, father of Andrew and Julian. Denny went on to describe 'Bill' Lloyd Webber as, "a distinguished organist and academic" and continued, "A sensitive and unassuming

composer, William Lloyd Webber began to feel in the mid-1950s that his music, strongly melodic and in a highly personal harmonic idiom, was out of step with the musical climate of the time”.

For many years now, psychologists have spoken of the profound influence exerted by parents on their children. Such influence, in terms of every exalted attribute a child can inherit, can be seen in William Lloyd Webber and also Jean with their sons, Andrew and Julian. Bill’s mother (Winifred, née Gittins) was one of quite a large family with no real musical talent ever being evident. She, however, supported her only son in all his musical studies and endeavours, as was the case with her only daughter, Margaret. His father, William Charles Henry Webber (the ‘Lloyd’ was added to the family name by Bill), was clearly the main influence in terms of gentle personality, musical interest and ability, church involvement, and principles.

William Charles Henry Weber was a semi-professional musician who made much use of his rather fine tenor voice. He sang in many fashionable London Anglican churches, including All Saints’, Margaret Street, where his son was one day to become a renowned organist and choirmaster. Other professional work included BBC recitals, singing in musicals and performing with the famous George Mitchell Singers. The breadth of stamina, energy, determination and musicianship needed for such a range of musical activity was also present in Charles’ son, Bill.

Bill Lloyd Webber was born in Chelsea in 1914, and soon afterwards the family moved to north Chester where his father took an appointment as lay clerk in the cathedral choir. The young boy attended many services at the cathedral and was, as he acknowledged later in life, profoundly influenced by the sound of the fine Harrison and Harrison organ.

On returning to London and living in Islington, Bill attended primary school, firstly, at Fulham and, later, at King’s Cross. At this time, now aged seven years, Bill became an active musician for the first time by becoming a choirboy in the City Boys’ Choir, and a solo boy at St Mark’s, North Audley Street, W1. This marked the beginning of a long, distinguished, influential and fruitful career in the church and its music.

Bill Lloyd Webber next attended Mercer’s School and there displayed his extraordinary musical talents and musicianship as the organ scholar. At the age of 13 years, he was, quite extraordinarily, appointed sub-organist of St Mary’s, Graham Street (now Bourne Street). This was the first connection of many that Lloyd Webber was to have with

the 'high' church wing of the Church of England. St Mary's was profoundly Anglo-Catholic in its liturgy and music, and demanded extreme standards in both areas. Two years later, however, Bill shocked and dismayed the clergy of St Mary's by accepting the post of organist at the somewhat 'middle-of-the road' Christ Church, Newgate. He remained here for three years (1929-1932).

By this time, Bill Lloyd Webber had left school and was attending the Royal College of Music, entering in 1931, to study composition with Vaughan Williams, harmony and counterpoint with C. H. Kitson, and organ with Henry Ley and Walford Davies. His academic study was profoundly influenced by Kitson, and Lloyd Webber had the greatest regard for Henry Ley. At the early age of 19, Bill gained his FRCO, in 1933.

During the previous year, however, Bill had found the influence and call of the 'high' church too great and in 1932 accepted the post of organist at St Cyprian's, Clarence Gate. During his seven years as organist of this church, Bill gained not only his BMus but also DMus degrees, the latter in 1938.

The year 1939 saw Lloyd Webber's appointment to the highly influential Anglo-Catholic church, All Saints', Margaret Street. Here, he was working in what had been the very cradle of the choral revival in the nineteenth century which did so much to help the renaissance of English church music in the twentieth century.

All Saints, Margaret Street, was to be an influential and rewarding experience for Bill. Firstly, he inherited a fine choir with a choir school, an excellent musical tradition, and the ethos and tradition of the liturgy carefully fostered there. These aspects gave Lloyd Webber great scope for his personal beliefs, churchmanship and musicianship. He thus wrote a quantity of liturgical music for services at All Saints', some of which may still remain unpublished and only available from the church's music library or the present writer. Secondly, All Saints' was to become a 'family' church. Bill's father had sung there some years before, and the Second World War was to bring about another central family connection.

With the outbreak of war and the threat of air raids, life drastically changed in London. The boys from the choir school, along with many other London children, were evacuated and the Margaret Street all-male choir ceased to exist. Now, a classic example of Bill's enterprise and initiative was to be shown through his creation of a highly successful and effective 'wartime' choir in 1939 (Thalben-Ball at the Temple would eventually follow a

similar route). This choir was to alter the composer's family as, within the soprano line, sang a 17-year old Royal College of Music student named Jean Hermione Johnstone. The outcome of this situation was that the choirmaster and Jean became engaged during 1940-1941.

Meantime, however, Bill was called up to the Royal Army Medical Corps because of his poor eyesight but, in fact, he enlisted with the Royal Army Pay Corps, stationed in London. Here, he had a very hectic office life and eventually resented the routine of it all. Jean pointed out that the training here in financial affairs was, in fact, to stand Bill in good stead later in life as Director of the London College of Music.

Jean and Bill were married in 1942 and went to live in a flat at South Kensington. Jean related the tale that the flat later received a direct hit from anti-aircraft, starting with shrapnel which came through the roof. Fortunately, the couple were hiding in a nearby air-raid shelter at the time.

Eventually, the War Office acquired knowledge of Bill's DMus and suggested his seeking a Commission but this was subsequently proved impossible as Bill was neither physically nor mentally equipped for this. A tour of the forces was then suggested with the cellist William Pleeth, giving chamber music recitals. Bill rejected this idea on the grounds that they might play the type of music which the Forces may not wish to hear en masse. Jean explained that Bill was set on being a Private and turned out to be highly efficient at his financial post.

Although Lloyd Webber was extremely resentful of military life with its routine and inevitable disruption to his musical aspirations, Jean felt that, on the whole, he was quite fortunate with his overall wartime life. For example, All Saint's was now being used a great deal for broadcasts to the Forces and this, involved the Organist and Choir.

Jean explained that at one stage, the RAPC was called upon to defend London against enemy air-attacks, and that Bill found himself serving as a temporary Anti-Aircraft Gunner assigned to Hyde Park. During this duty, Jean was often terrified, knowing Bill's lack of physical coordination, lest he should unleash his shells on the Albert Hall or the Dorchester Hotel!

With relief, Bill was demobbed from the Army in 1946 and, for the first time, felt that his true musical career would now be allowed to unfold and develop. Jean explained that he had already managed to recommence composition. Before the war, he had written and

performed some incidental music for the RCM Junior Department. These included *Ivan and the Magic Harp*, *Pinocchio* and *The Three Dancing Princes*. Sadly, these scores appear to be lost.

By the end of the war, Bill was, quite naturally, feeling bitter that his war-service had delayed his career so greatly as a composer (similar to Gordon Phillips). After all, by 1945, Benjamin Britten had already composed *Peter Grimes* through being absent from war-time Britain, while Bill was sitting working out pay-packets.

Now relieved of his Army duties, Bill was determined to fulfil his ambition of becoming a mainstream composer, not only of church music and miniatures but also of larger forms and, in particular, music for the theatre. Thus, in 1948, he decided to resign from All Saint's, Margaret Street, in order to devote more time to composition, a career as a recitalist and, as fate would have it, as an influential music educationalist.

It was, indeed, during the succeeding years that most of William Lloyd Webber compositions were written. The tone poem *Aurora*, for example, was written in and around 1948/1949. The composer went on to write solo and choral songs, music for organ and piano, instrumental music, and much more church music.

As time passed, however, Bill's valuable time which should have been devoted to composition was absorbed in other professional and educational matters. In the years ahead, he became Examiner to the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, Vice-president to the Incorporated Association of Organists, President to the London Association of Organists, a Member of the Council and Treasurer of the Royal College of Organists, Member of the Senate of London University, Director of the London College of Music, Organist of Central Hall at Westminster, Master of the Worshipful Company of Musicians, and Guild Master of the Civic Guild of Old Mercers.

Bill's commitment to musical education commenced in 1946 when he commenced teaching at the RCM. This would lead to a total dedication to the musical education of the young, a fact also demonstrated by his compositions. The success of Bill's teaching at the RCM led to what probably became the largest of all this great man's commitments – his appointment as Director of the LCM in 1964, following the retirement of Dr Reginald Hunt.

Having accepted the LCM post, after certain misgivings, Bill pledged himself to this new job with his typical vigour and determination. The years ahead were to demonstrate

not only his acknowledged degree of musicianship but also his qualities of leadership, administrator and educationalist.

In 1964, the LCM was in need of administrative attention and reform. The new Director's Army Pay Corps training was now to be put to the test and proven to be extremely profitable. In short, through sheer hard work and dedication, Bill steered his College on to the road of success and recognition. He moved the shaky finances to a steady footing thus enabling him to bring in new teachers (many of whom were experienced performers and academics), improve the standard of each syllabus, increase student in-take, improve the requirements of entry, create new courses acceptable to the Department of Education and Science, and improve the Great Marlborough building and its facilities. Jean, however, told the present writer of the considerable consumption of time and energy which the College affairs demanded of her husband. There were many sleepless nights over finance and concern over exactly where the next amount of money was going to be found for the following month's salaries. In spite of this personal cost, there can be little doubt that the LCM in Great Marlborough Street became a superb monument to Bill's fine work and many personal attributes. Clearly, Bill's foresight, gentle but firm manner, and remarkable musicianship were of paramount importance in the successful development and new profile within these years of the LCM.

In terms of composition, however, Bill's output sadly all but dried up after his appointment to the LCM. A few works were produced but, on the whole, the period 1964-1978 was one of little output. Julian has spoken of nights when his father would sit alone listening to the music of Rachmaninov and lamenting his failure to achieve his main ambition in life as a composer. These periods became all the more difficult following the ever-increasing successes of Andrew's musicals – not through any form of jealousy (quite the reverse as Bill was so proud of the musical success of both his sons). Jean also revealed how, in earlier years, her husband was offered the opportunity to compose film music (having composed various miniatures for the BBC) and how, feeling weighed down by professional and family responsibilities, he declined the offer, fearing to move into a freelance lifestyle of mainstream composers. In Jean's own words, "Bill was a creature of habit" ^[1].

During the late 1970s, however, Bill's desire to compose turned into a feeling of despondency and, eventually, acted as a source of depression. 1979, however, saw the

publication of a new work which clearly heralded a new and more 'progressive' style for the composer – the *Missae Sanctae Mariae Magdalene*. This final phase of composition was, of course, sadly never to be fulfilled with Bill's sudden and untimely death on October 29th, 1982, at the age of 68.

In terms of personality, mention has already been made of the composer's delightful temperament. The present writer can well attest to Bill's gentle and kind nature through the story of his audition at the LCM. Arriving at the College for an interview and audition with the Director for entry to the Graduate Course, in a state of what could only be described as a complete 'bundle of nerves', Bill immediately set me at ease through his gentle nature, soft voice, calmness and overall kindness. He was wearing his original double-breasted suit and usual 1940s-styled glasses. The audition organ pieces were Bach's chorale-prelude *In dir ist Freude*, and Franck's *Prelude, Fugue and Variation*. Although these pieces were not played completely without error, Dr Lloyd Webber listened with interest. At the conclusion of the day, with a written and aural examination taken, the Director asked me if I was attending any other interviews. On hearing that I was attending an audition at the RAM and Trinity College the following day and, on offering me a place on the LCM Graduate Course, Dr Lloyd Webber asked me to let him know as soon as possible whether or not I was accepting his LCM offer. While walking down Great Marlborough Street, towards Liberty's, I turned back to the LCM to inform the Director, there and then, that I was accepting his kind offer and not attending any further auditions. Listening to the protest from my old friend Stewart Haslett, a current student at the RAM, I explained that I was so 'taken' with Dr Lloyd Webber, and knew that I would develop within the caring ethos of the LCM as exemplified by its Director. One must also add that the same characteristics were evident again at the present writer's final Graduate Viva Voce Examination, along with the external examiner Dr Bernard Rainbow (the then Director of Music at the College of St Mark and St John, Chelsea, and Dr Lloyd Webber's great friend). In true fashion, at the conclusion of my Viva, Bill subtly let me know that I had passed by saying, "Well Peter, you are going to need your tin hat for returning to Belfast" (he knew that I was returning home because my father was seriously ill). I have never regretted my decision to attend the Great Marlborough Street LCM and am proud to be a Graduate of the original LCM, as directed by Dr W S Lloyd Webber. At this point, I also wish to express my deep gratitude to, and warmest affection for, my LCM teachers, who subsequently became my friends - Dr W S

Pasfield, Gordon Phillips, Joan Kemp-Potter, John Creed, John Chapman, Guy Eldridge, Maureen McAllister and William Prangnell.

Jean spoke to the present writer of a man who really was quiet, unassuming, energetic, prone to depression, and who became annoyed about world events. Jean also explained that Bill had a 'mysterious theory' which involved 'generational development', wherein the off-spring superseded the previous generation, i.e. Andrew and Julian would succeed their father. Jean also felt that Bill's determined ideal was of music being accessible to everyone – now strongly a concern of both sons.

Many people of the time could attest to Bill Lloyd Webber's many splendid characteristics and qualities, both personal and musical. One such person was one of the former Directors of the RCM, Michael Gough Matthews. His memories of Bill are recorded in the following letter, below, to the present writer:



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FROM THE DIRECTOR
MICHAEL GOUGH MATTHEWS
FROM, HONRAM, FRSAM, HONFLCM, HONGSM, ARCO, FRSA

30th August 1990

Dear Dr. Hunter

I apologise for the delay in replying to your letter of 14th July.

Dr. William Lloyd Webber taught me harmony and composition from the time I was 14 when I was studying in the Junior Department at the RCM. In fact WSLW was in the army based in London at that time. He continued to teach me until I completed my studies in 1953 and took a keen interest in my career as a pianist. Both he and Mrs. Lloyd Webber used to attend my recitals and remained good friends until his death.

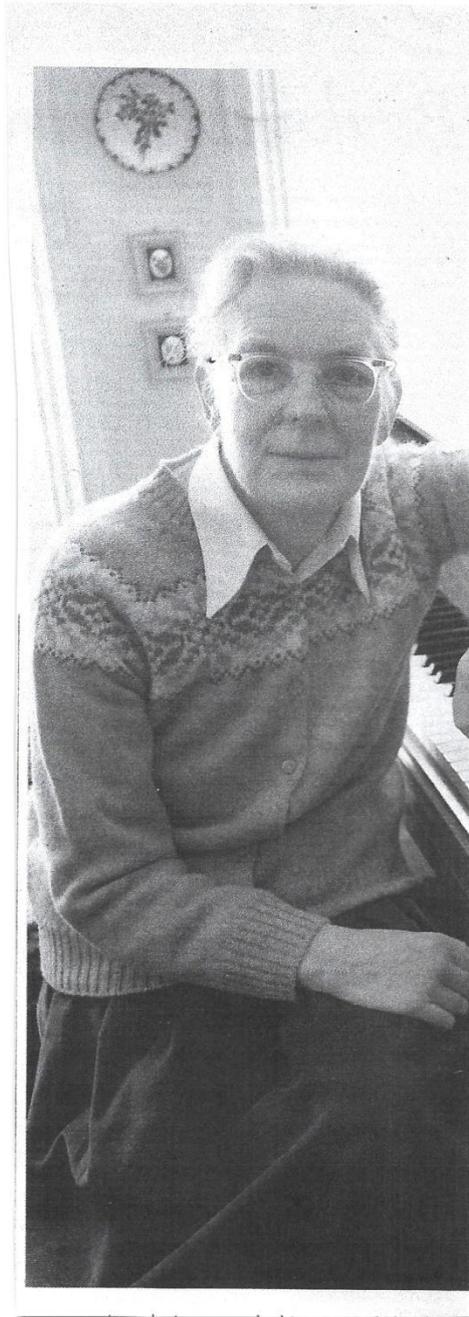
As a teacher and person he was quiet but humorous in manner and a keen supporter of 20th century Romantic music. Lessons were often illustrated by his playing Rachmaninoff on the piano, and we sometimes played organ music together: I playing the pedal part in the bass.

He was a great lover of cats too, and at one time my lessons were enlivened by a small monkey called Mimi which the Webbers possessed. I remember Mimi chewing an entire box of new pencils in the 1940s when they were in very short supply and much needed by Bill for his composing.

His sudden death was a great shock and he will be remembered by many musicians and friends with great affection.

*Yours sincerely,
Michael Gough Matthews.*

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