

Denis Midgley Arnold: An Appreciation

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DENIS Arnold's singular qualities as educator, administrator, performer and pre-eminent scholar, as also his warm, vital and uplifting humanity, make his death a particularly significant loss to national and international musical life. But one proper response to that loss is to celebrate this outstanding man with thankfulness, joy and the affection he so readily inspired. Such mixture of grief and celebration pervaded his Memorial Service in the Chapel of Wadham College, Oxford (13 May 1986) and Memorial Concerts in Nottingham (21 June 1986) and Oxford (30 October 1986).

Denis was born in Sheffield on 15 December 1926 and remained throughout his life proud of his Yorkshire origins. His immediate family was not musical, but he studied the piano from an early age, and his great-uncle, Samuel Midgley, was a pianist, a writer on music, and a pioneer in sponsoring music for ordinary people in Bradford. Denis's conversion to music occurred at a Hallé Concert in May 1942, when a programme including Wagner and Beethoven (Seventh Symphony) was given. After leaving High Storrs Grammar School, he chose to study with Frank Shera at Sheffield University (1944–8), rather than at Cambridge, graduating as BA (in English, Philosophy and Music, 1947), BMus and ARCM (1948). He continued to study piano at university, and performed as soloist, and as conductor of a madrigal group he had founded. His contemporaries included Professors David Brown and Gilbert Reaney, and his future wife Elsie, and he was fond of pointing out the significance of Shera's 'class of '47' for musicology.

His subsequent national service was as an education officer in the RAF, and with characteristic vigour he used his spare time to write a dissertation, 'Thomas Weelkes and the English Tradition' (MA, Sheffield, 1950). He then won an Italian government scholarship which took him to Bologna, and so began his enduring devotion to the culture and life of that country. In 1951 he married, and was appointed lecturer at the Queen's University, Belfast.

His appointment was in the Extra-Mural Department, and Denis gave evening lectures and keyboard recitals throughout the province, building up a large circle of students and friends, developing his formidable lecturing skills and power of enthusing ordinary people. He particularly enjoyed lecturing on Handel and Mozart. He also lectured in the Music Department at Queen's, primarily on Renaissance topics, and founded a performing ensemble of singers and players, 'The Renaissance Group'. He took part as musician in drama

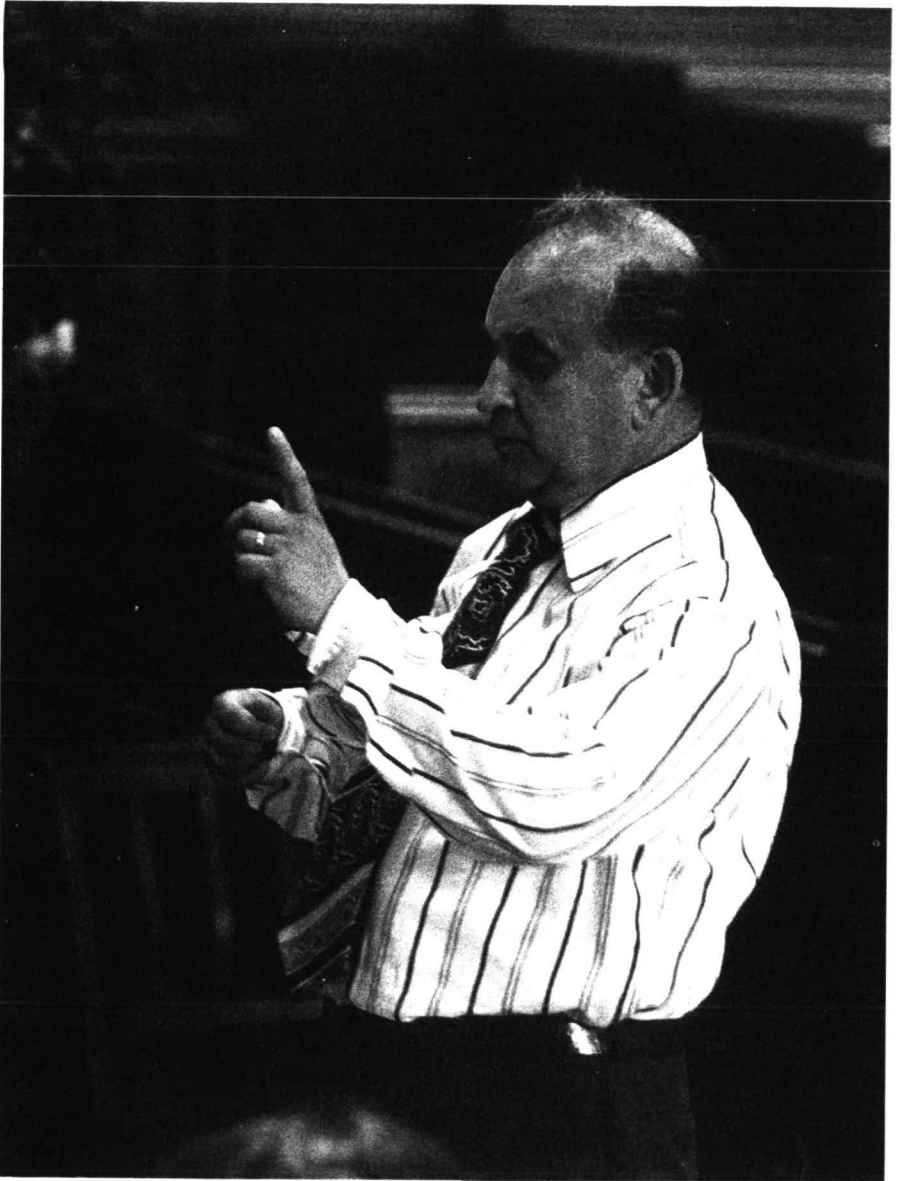


photo: Bruno Schrecker

productions (on occasion in doublet and hose), and was an important figure in the success of the Northern Ireland Grand Opera Society, which mounted performances of Donizetti and Verdi with Italian soloists, local chorus and orchestra. The Arnolds' quite legendary hospitality was already in full swing at Belfast, as was Denis's love of contested debate, including sparring matches with Laurence Lerner.

But there was time for research: he spent his summers (from May

onwards) in Italy, and his work in the Venetian archives was path-breaking for musicology and direction-determining for his own career. During the 1950s he published editions of Giovanni Gabrieli (the first volume of his projected complete edition appearing in 1957, and a further five volumes over the next two decades), Mantuan madrigals, Monteverdi and Purcell, and articles on Weelkes, Croce, Monteverdi, performing practice, the Gabrielis, Gastoldi and Grandi which remain standard; he also wrote on Haydn and Strauss, and began his long association with *MGG*, for which he wrote 46 articles in all. He completed his first book, the *Master Musicians Monteverdi* (London, 1963); this now classic text typically combines fluent, captivating prose aimed at the general reader with penetrative scholarship, stylistic critique with socio-historical context. Also characteristic of Denis is that the book takes a stand (against the then-prevalent view of Monteverdi as revolutionary), and that it is about a composer of vocal music. Denis's whole career in scholarship is based on vocal music; he loved the human voice, and found the expressive qualities of texted music rewarding to explain.

He had been promoted to a readership in 1960, but decided in 1964 to accept appointment as senior lecturer in music at Hull University. He was immediately involved in course revision, and responsible for the expansion of historical studies. Colleagues at Hull remember him as a 'popular lecturer and animator of research, who brought the best out of people'. In summer 1966 he was Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and in the summers of 1967–8 taught at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana, Siena. He continued his concert activity with the Madrigal Group he founded at the University, and with the Hull Bach Choir, performing Tallis (*Spem in alium*), Gabrieli, Monteverdi, Handel (*Belshazzar*) and Haydn (*The Creation*) in Hull and the East Riding. Throughout his life his delight in music-making made him many performing and listening friends. Late in life he described himself as having 'needed' performance, and as convinced of the value of involvement in music-making for musicological study. He sat on the Committee of the Hull Philharmonic Orchestra, and was vigorously involved in a successful campaign to save the orchestra from closure. During the Hull years he wrote articles on Cavalli, Monteverdi, Italian musical institutions and performing practice, and published three further books: *Marenzio* (London, 1965), *Monteverdi Madrigals* (London, 1967) and, with Nigel Fortune, *The Monteverdi Companion* (London, 1968). He edited music by Giovanni and Andrea Gabrieli, Purcell, Monteverdi and Marenzio. Important scholars he encouraged at this time included Drs Jerome Roche and Eleanor Selfridge-Field; and with his close friend and collaborator, Dr Nigel Fortune, he founded the Research Students' Conference (later the RMA Research Students' Conference), which first met at Hull in 1967.

In 1969 he became Professor of Music at Nottingham University, in succession to Ivor Keys. Again he reformed courses, instituting

courses in analysis (despite a professed anti-analytical stance) and creating an MA in Renaissance and Baroque Editing and Performance; this latter he taught in conjunction with two scholars he had brought to Nottingham, Dr Stanley Boorman and Julian Smith. The time was ripe, the national need clear, and the course opened in 1971 with 12 students, including Lionel Sawkins, Layton Ring and Joan Wess. These were lively times at Nottingham, and Denis encouraged his staff with constant interest, enthusiasm and provocation! He, Elsie and their two sons lived on campus, and Arnold parties for students, colleagues, visiting scholars and performers abounded. At this time he and Elsie acquired a country retreat near Sheffield and the first of their houses in the Veneto, which facilitated Denis's continuing vacation research in the Venetian archives. He also continued as an indefatigable and inspiring concert-giver in the university (among notable performances under his baton were Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, Handel's *Semele*, Verdi's *Requiem* and Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, Act III), and in the city as conductor of the Nottingham Bach Society, with which he performed four, sometimes five or six concerts per year (the staple repertory was based on the major choral works of Bach, Handel and Haydn, and the Monteverdi *Vespers*). His scholarly production was also unabated, with articles on Monteverdi, Giovanni Gabrieli, Schütz and Vivaldi; editions of Giovanni and Andrea Gabrieli and Verdi; reviews for *The Gramophone*; a column in *The Listener*; BBC broadcasts; and the books *The Beethoven Companion* (with Nigel Fortune, London, 1971) and *Giovanni Gabrieli* (London, 1974) – this latter the first and briefer of his two books on the composer.

When, in 1975, the call came to Oxford, he was looking forward to many happy years at Nottingham, and the decision to go was hard. As Heather Professor he did not have the immediate, autonomous control of courses and events he had been used to at Nottingham, but he adapted quickly, and, being conscious and respectful of traditions, worked with and through committees. By taking a full part in general university committees, he enhanced the standing of music as a subject within the university, and undergraduate and postgraduate admissions increased markedly during his professorship. Through Faculty committees he instituted compulsory study of twentieth-century music for first-year undergraduates, encouraged flexibility in the teaching and examining of harmony and counterpoint, sought coherent planning of lecture lists, and oversaw in 1980 the move of the Faculty to a proper centre at St Aldate's (he concerned himself closely with the detailed planning of the accommodation). He was always delighted to give undergraduate tutorials; he encouraged the appointment of musicologists to college organistships, and was proud of having expanded the staff at a time when retrenchment at universities was already under way. Under his professorship the Bate Collection was significantly expanded, and he established a Performance Fund within the Faculty. Regular Sunday lunches for undergraduates took place at the Arnolds' house in north Oxford, and his

professorship was, in the words of one colleague, 'the warmest time in the history of the Faculty'.

He found greater performing expertise at Oxford than heretofore, which he relished, conducting concerts with the Oxford Pro Musica (including a concert of Schütz and Venetian music at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London in 1981) and The Heather Professor's Singers (another Arnold foundation). He had previously conducted opera in concert performances, but was now able to perform fully staged opera with the University Opera Club, of which he was a staunch supporter: he gave Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* in 1977, Beethoven's *Leonora* in 1979, Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* in 1981 and Purcell's *The Indian Queen* in 1984. He conducted for the English Bach Festival and in the 'Handel at Oxford' Summer Festivals. He acted as chairman of the music panel of Southern Arts, and fought particularly hard at Oxford for the continuation of the Oxford Playhouse as theatre and repertory company; this battle was lost only after his death.

In 1976 he was elected an FBA, and Honorary Foreign Member of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (Rome), which gave him the title 'Eccellenza'. In 1977 he received the Premio Internazionale Galileo Galilei dei Rotary Italiani (Pisa), and in 1978 became President of the RMA and a member of the Committee of the IMS. In 1980 he was made Hon.DMus at Sheffield and Belfast Universities, and in 1983 was appointed CBE. He also received honours from the RAM (1971) and RCM (1981).

During this last period of his scholarly activity he published articles on performing practice, Cavalli, Lassus, Venetian motets, Corelli, Marenzio, Vivaldi, Anfossi, Galuppi, Stradella, Schütz, Grandi and Andrea Gabrieli; 44 articles in *The New Grove Dictionary* (including major contributions on the Gabrielis, Monteverdi, Venice, and the Mass); editions of Lassus, Venetian motets, Monteverdi and Vivaldi; and six books (a seventh appearing posthumously): *Giovanni Gabrieli and the Music of the Venetian High Renaissance* (London, 1979), *Monteverdi Church Music* (London, 1982), *The New Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford, 1983), *Bach* (Oxford, 1984), *Gesualdo* (London, 1984), *The New Monteverdi Companion* (with Nigel Fortune, London, 1985), and *The Oratorio in Venice* (with Elsie, London, 1986). From 1975 to 1980 he acted as joint editor of *Music and Letters*. He was exercised that *The New Oxford Companion* should be broader in scope than its predecessor by Scholes, overcoming a restriction to 'White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant' perspective. The book on Bach for the Oxford Past Masters series was a result of his own choice of subject, and reflects his latter coming-to-terms with this composer of 'intricate joy', as he put the matter. Important scholars whom he taught or influenced during his Oxford years included Drs Jane Glover, John Whenham and John Milsom.

In a lengthy broadcast interview shortly before his death, he said he was most proud of being a music historian, of finding his way around the Venetian archives, finding the music of Giovanni Gabrieli; and that the most enjoyable aspect of his career was the variety which had

come from conducting, playing, lecturing and researching. He died on 28 April 1986, aged 59, while attending an IMS meeting in Budapest.

Denis's activities as educator, administrator, performer and scholar were coordinated by a fundamental desire to spread and enhance the enjoyment and understanding of music. Thus his achievements as educator were as enthusiastic, engaging communicator, inspirer and director of work, and syllabus reformer. His lectures, as his writings, proceeded primarily from the perspective of the historian, but he was always concerned with the appreciation of musical styles and with the role of music in society. As administrator he surely had the correct view, that administrative success was not to be measured in the number of documents and meetings brought forth, but in the creation of an environment – financial, physical, organizational and purposive – which would nourish musical and scholarly activity. Although at Nottingham, for instance, he prided himself on spending a maximum of an hour per day on administration, this creation of environment was supremely successful, a product, as *The Times* obituary has it, of 'dedicated professionalism'. As performing musician, he was in the earlier part of his life primarily a pianist and harpsichordist, and he played his own Hodsdon spinet around Northern Ireland and Italy. Though conducting later took over as his main practical activity, he continued to love playing. He conducted from his own undergraduate days on, founding his own small choirs wherever he worked, conducting choral societies, orchestras, and ultimately an opera company. His conducting encouraged emotional, committed performance, and where his performers were local amateurs, he always gave a priority to musicality and projection over technical polish.

But it is of course as scholar and writer that his contribution to national and international life will be chiefly remembered. The centre of his scholarly concern was Venetian music of the Baroque, and his work, particularly on Monteverdi, Giovanni Gabrieli and the Venetian oratorio, will remain standard essential material far into the future. His archival research and historical, social and style-critical interpretations were blended into a rounded, essentially humanist perspective on the music under consideration, which he presented in attractive, accessible prose. But his interests and enthusiasms were much wider than this scholarly centre, and he contributed significantly to the literature on many other composers. It was surely this breadth of interest which led him to accept the task of writing *The New Oxford Companion*; while he commissioned other contributors, he wrote much of the two huge volumes himself, including essays on important eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers. Throughout his scholarly life he was tirelessly supported by Elsie, herself a research musicologist, and it is particularly pleasing that she appears as co-author of Denis's last book.

Denis's extrovert and warm humanity was evident in all his personal dealings. His concern for others and his generous and most hospitable nature made him an inspiring force for good, his infectious

sense of fun, provocation and enthusiasm, a force for real happiness. The RMA proudly offers this collection of studies by some of his former students and colleagues as a heartfelt, thankful tribute to the memory of this great man.

University of Nottingham

I am most grateful to the following, who have given generous and invaluable help in the preparation of this Appreciation: Elsie Arnold, Dr John Caldwell, Anthony Ford, Dr Nigel Fortune, Professor Robert Marchant, Dr John Milsom, Professor Raymond Warren and Dr Susan Wollenberg.

A list of Denis Arnold's writings will appear in volume 22 (1989) of the *Research Chronicle*.